



The purpose of the Department of the Interior (DOI) U.S.-Mexico Border Field Coordinating Committee (FCC) Newsletter is to communicate relevant developments and other information that may be useful as we manage, protect, inventory, and monitor natural and cultural resources along our international border with Mexico.

The Alamo Fire: International Firefighting Effort by the Republic of Mexico and the United States (Coronado National Forest)

Aniceto (Cheto) Olias, National Park Service and Deputy Incident Commander for the Eastern Arizona IMT



On April 18, 2008, the Eastern Arizona IMT (EAIMT) was assigned incident command responsibilities for the Alamo wildland fire on the Nogales Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest (CNF). The fire was located one half mile north of the United States border with the Republic of Mexico, and seven miles west of the city of Nogales, Arizona. This human-caused fire quickly spread north and south eventually crossing over into the Republic of Mexico.

Early coordination with Mexican firefighting entities and with the local US Border Patrol (USBP) Station in Nogales, provided the incident management team (under the command of IC Pruet Small), the ability to communicate directly with Mexican firefighting resources as well as to establish

protocols with the USBP Agent-in-Charge (PAIC) of the Nogales Station.

The language barrier with our counterparts in Mexico provided some challenges to the team. The ability to utilize local personnel from the forest district office who spoke Spanish and thus provide the link between the wildland fire entities in Mexico and the team proved to be essential. Forest District fire personnel had successfully been able to communicate on a regular basis with their counterparts CONAFOR (Commission Nacional Forestal) which is equivalent to our National Forest Service agency. Over the years, several smaller fire incidents had been managed and coordinated by telephone and on-site communication with these two firefighting partners.

Once initial contact was made with both the area and regional directors of CONAFOR, they indicated that there was a contingent of Mexican firefighters (nine firefighters, a cook and a driver) on the southern perimeter of the Alamo fire. This was also confirmed by aerial resources assigned to the fire during the first operational period of the IMT assigned. CONAFOR supervisors contacted their consulate offices and other border entities informing them that the Alamo fire was burning on both sides of the border and that firefighting resources (both air and ground) were being deployed across international boundaries.

An agreement signed in May, 2006 by both the Departments of Agriculture and Interior with SEMARNAT and CONAFOR, allows for cross border travel up to 10 miles either side of the international boundary, to combat wildland fires or other emergency response(s). Coordination with the local CNF Fire Dispatch Center (Tucson Dispatch Center) respective to resources entering Mexican jurisdiction were relayed to appropriate offices indicated on the international agreement. Representatives from CONAFOR attended several planning meetings during the six day incident. Unlike a true unified command structure, CONAFOR did participate with some of the planning efforts and agreed with our strategies. Additional resources from Mexico were also offered during the incident but denied later in the incident.

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Southern perimeter of Alamo Fire (note white international boundary marker on lower middle section of photo)

Once the communication and notification link with the CONAFOR representatives had been established, the real challenge was the coordination between line resources on both sides of the boundary. Division Supervisor, Dave Raney who was assigned the southern leg of the Alamo fire which included fire perimeter in Mexico, located the Mexican firefighting squad via an aerial reconnaissance. Later he met up with them on the fireline. A story he passed on to several of his teammates when he met with the Mexicans somewhere south of the international line provide us with some true firefighter cooperation. He was a bit apprehensive, not only about crossing the international boundary, but about being able to communicate and coordinate effectively with these rugged, somewhat older firefighters who carried old worn out McLeod's, wore only nomex shirts, blue jeans, and tennis shoes.

DIVS Raney approached the one older firefighter who seemed like the one in charge. The older firefighter looked directly at Raney with a stern face and a mean look, who then proceeded to state in perfect English "You must be David?" To his surprise, DIVS Raney was stunned not only with the older firefighters command of the English language, but that out here in the middle of nowhere, he knew his birth given first name. After a few seconds had passed for DIVS Raney to gather his composure, he asked the older firefighter "How do you know my name? To which the older man replied "Your name is on your hardhat."

At this point everyone started laughing and the perceived tension and apprehension was longer present. They both collaborated in completing a critical piece of handline and burn out that was essential to the containment of the Alamo Fire.



Bomberos (firefighters) from CONAFOR, Mexico and two firefighters from the CNF – Alamo Fire at the international boundary

Public information responsibilities within the team required the recruitment of Spanish speaking information officers who knew the area, contacts, and protocols associated with international media interest. The assistance from several local fire departments who provided support was essential in getting the flow of information out to both the US and Mexican population.

The area in and around the Alamo Fire has historically been used as a primary drug and human trafficking area. Coordinating with the local USBP station allowed the team to acquire quick response to trafficking activities during the incident. Several USBP shift supervisors attended the IMT planning meetings in the early stages of the incident. Eventually, a dedicated liaison supervisor was assigned as the main contact for all IMT requests. Numerous apprehensions of illegal border crossers and seizures of illegal contraband were coordinated between the IMT and USBP during this incident. Past relationships between IMT personnel and USBP proved to be advantageous.

Border protocols for incident personnel were communicated aggressively throughout the incident. Border protocols (International Border Watchouts) which had already been developed by



the CNF for all employees working in the field were mentioned at each morning briefing. In addition, law enforcement/security elements associated with the IMT were critical for the safeguard of incident personnel, coordination of road closures and checkpoints, spike camp security, and overall coordination with law enforcement entities.

We will continue to see an increase of large fires along the international boundary with Mexico. The increase of illegal human traffic along the Southwest border not only brings impacts of a criminal nature, but also those of environmental concern. Fires are built for cooking and to keep warm by these travelers. Unattended and/or intentionally set fires are a growing concern for firefighters along the international boundary. A second fire, the Beehive, was also intentionally set soon after the Alamo Fire was contained.

The Alamo fire was ultimately contained at 5,070 acres on April 23, 2008. Approximately, 400 acres burned into the Republic of Mexico. Attributes to success on the international spectrum were current relationships of the CNF Nogales District office, quick communication link with Mexican firefighting resources, initiative and determination for an effective partnership with the USBP, and the ability for effective Spanish communication amongst the members of the IMT.

INTERNATIONAL BORDER WATCHOUTS

Watch out for:

1. No communication link with others, dispatch and/or law enforcement
2. Working in a Law Enforcement Area of Concern
3. Armed confrontations either by law enforcement and/or illegal entrants
4. Small or large groups of people being transported either on foot or in a vehicle
5. Accidental witnessing of (large) quantities of drug deals and drug transportation
6. High-speed driving and law enforcement pursuits in your work areas
7. Aircraft trying to avoid detection and frequent law enforcement aircraft operations due to these illegal activities
8. Historical, administrative, and cultural sites that have been vandalized
9. Locks and fences deliberately knocked down or cut
10. Large numbers of footprints – these may be headed to your work area
11. Abandoned vehicles either intact or set on fire
12. Wildfires caused by abandoned warming and cooking fires
13. Individuals that appear ill
14. Trash and high concentrations of human fecal material in heavily used
Illegal entrants staging areas and routes
15. Methamphetamine labs either occupied or abandoned.
Chemical dumping
16. Marijuana fields protected by growers
17. Working alone and/or working at night
18. Leaving your vehicle unattended



Masked Bobwhite Bi-National Recovery Collaboration

Robert Mesta, US. Fish and Wildlife Service,
Sonoran Joint Venture

Early settlers to the southwest fueled the rumors of the existence of a strikingly handsome quail with a black throat and bright cinnamon breast. This secretive and little known bird, the masked bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus ridwayi*), was not identified and named until the late 1880's. Sadly, shortly after its discovery, the destruction of its grassland habitat by cattle grazing eliminated this quail from southern Arizona by the early 1900's. Fortunately, masked bobwhites survived in the Mexican state of Sonora.

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Using quail from Mexico the USFWS initiated a breeding and reintroduction project on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) in 1985. After years of releases, BANWR was not able to establish a wild population on the refuge and releases were terminated. It appears that vegetative changes on the refuge have rendered it unsuitable for masked bobwhites.

Unfortunately, overgrazing, buffelgrass invasion, and continuing drought conditions in Sonora have had a devastating impact on the grassland habitats supporting masked bobwhites. Comprehensive surveys conducted in 2007 throughout its range in Arizona and Sonora resulted in no detections in the Arizona and only 6 detections in Sonora. To date, 2008 masked bobwhite surveys have not resulted in any detections. Experts believe that at best there are only a few individuals left in the wild and at worst that the masked bobwhite could be extirpated in the wild.

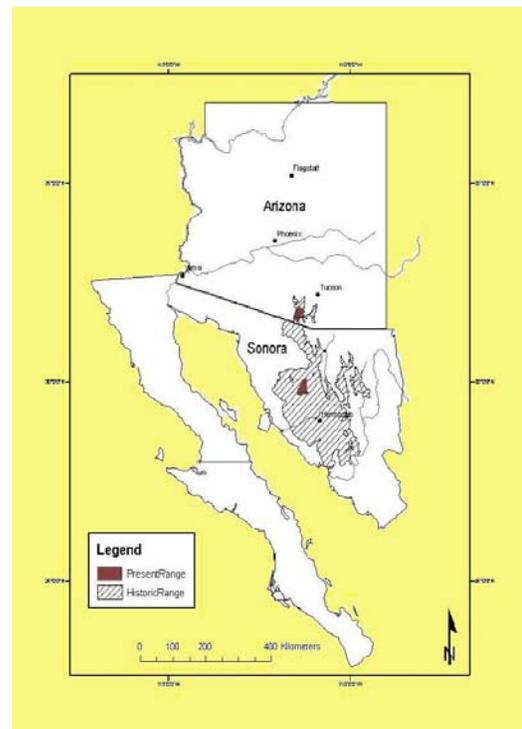
The masked bobwhite is arguably the most endangered bird in North America and possibly on the brink of extinction in the wild.

At this time the strategy for saving the masked bobwhite is to protect the best remaining habitat in Sonora. In order to do this, the USFWS has entered into land management agreements with two Sonoran ranches; Rancho El Carrizo and Rancho San Dario owned by the Canou family. The Canous have been collaborating with the BANWR on a variety of projects to conserve the

masked bobwhite. They were more than willing participants as they recognize the dire status of the masked bobwhite. These two ranches have the best remaining masked bobwhite habitat in Sonora and the most recent survey observations of masked bobwhite quail. Each ranch has agreed to remove and fence out cattle from pastures with the best masked bobwhite habitat, implement habitat improvement actions, and facilitate masked bobwhite surveys on their respective ranches. In return, the USFWS will provide monetary compensation for lost grazing revenues for two years.

Preserving these valuable pastures will provide the recovery effort with two important possibilities; if masked bobwhites are found to continue to exist on the ranches, they will be protected from further habitat degradation. If no masked bobwhites are found, we will still have quality habitat available for the release of captive-reared masked bobwhite.

Immediate recovery efforts for the masked bobwhite will be focused south of the border and bi-national collaborations with landowners like the Canous will be a key to our success.



Historic and Present Range of Masked Bobwhite.



Las Californias Binational Conservation Initiative-- a biodiversity hotspot

Kathy Viatella, The Nature Conservancy,
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Along the western frontier of the U.S.-Mexico border—where California and Baja California meet—is a place of unique natural beauty and cultural richness. The center of a global biodiversity hotspot, this region named *Las Californias* harbors ecosystems and species that occur nowhere else on Earth. Today this environment accommodates a growing metropolis that is home to more than 5 million people. Burgeoning population growth on both sides of the border increasingly strains the natural resources that residents in Mexico, the United States, and First Nation neighbors alike depend upon for their well-being.

Las Californias supports a dramatic landscape spanning southern San Diego County and northern Baja California. From the Pacific Ocean, coastal mesas rise to rolling foothills that dip into vast fertile valleys, giving way to the rugged mountains of the Peninsular Ranges. This range of features, combined with varied rainfall and temperatures, has shaped the plants and animals that have evolved here, including signature species like the federally-listed California gnatcatcher, Quino checkerspot butterfly, arroyo toad, and Peninsular bighorn sheep.

Under Threat

But this biodiversity is at risk. Encroaching development along both sides of the border threatens to sever the two Californias. Over the next few years, land use planning decisions, on both sides of the border, will define the character of the landscape and people's future. Historically, planning decisions have overlooked the shared resources and opportunities for trans-boundary collaboration. Natural landscapes and their associated ecological processes provide environmental services, such as the protection of water supplies and water quality, prevention of flooding and erosion, as well as recreation and scenic vistas. These processes function across large areas. Conserving a network of large, intact and connected landscapes will allow ecological

and evolutionary processes to keep pace with climate change and other human-induced impacts.

A Vision for Binational Habitat Conservation

Four non-profit conservation organizations—Conservation Biology Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Pronatura, and Terra Peninsular—have come together to create a science-based vision for acquisition and management strategies that address a range of conservation targets including large intact wildlands, wildlife corridors that span the border, and natural lands in urban areas that provide quality of life benefits as well as the last vestiges of habitat for severely threatened species.

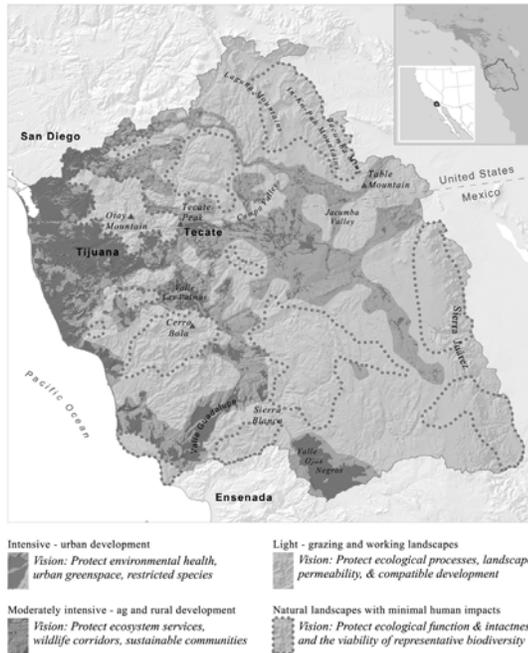
To date, approximately 3,500 acres in San Diego County have been conserved, including a recent purchase by The Nature Conservancy totaling 1100 acres just south of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Acquisition of this property is the first step in an effort to conserve a Park-to-Parque transboundary linkage that would connect Palomar Mountain, Cuyamaca Rancho and Anza-Borrego Desert State Parks to Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857, a national park located in the Sierra Juárez in Northern Baja California.

Conservation of these additional 3500 acres bolsters the efforts of other conservation partners such as the Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks, Otoy-Sweetwater National Wildlife Refuge, and the East County Multiple Species Conservation Program. *Las Californias* conservation priorities have been included in several agency planning documents, and these efforts have increased the awareness of landowners and elected officials in the border region. In Baja California, new legal tools that allow land owners to voluntarily restrict the type and amount of development to protect natural resources are being tried. For example, in 2003 Pronatura signed a conservation easement with Fundación La Puerta, a private landowner, to conserve 2,000 acres of native habitat at the base of Tecate Peak, and Terra Peninsular purchased a conservation easement in the Sierra Juárez, near Parque Nacional Constitución de 1857.

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Las Californias
Binational Conservation Initiative



Las Californias represents a unique opportunity for governments, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector to work binationally on a pioneering effort that will protect and enrich the health, economy and standard of living for all border residents.



Las Californias. Copyright, Richard Herrmann, courtesy The Nature Conservancy

The California Biodiversity Council (CBC) has embraced *Las Californias* and established a border work group, comprised of agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from both sides of the border, which is collaborating on implementing natural resources protection actions.

BORDER NOTES AND NEWS

U.S.-Mexico Border Mapping Update

Jean Parcher, U.S. Geological Survey; for more information on mapping: jwparcher@usgs.gov

The U.S. Geological Survey and the National Geography and Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) are collaborating on an improved seamless elevation model for the border region and all of Mexico. The USGS is applying specific algorithms to the USGS National Elevation Dataset and Mexico's Continuo de Elevaciones Mexicano both along the border and within Mexico to build an improved harmonized seamless 30-meter resolution digital elevation dataset. The data will be publicly available both from USGS and INEGI Websites (<http://seamless.usgs.gov> and <http://www.inegi.org.mx> by October 1, 2008. Since water availability and water quality are critical issues for the U.S.-Mexico border region, the USGS and INEGI are collaborating together to harmonize watershed boundaries and build a connected hydrographic network of surface-water features for the border region.



In May of 2008, binational working meetings were held at the Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (International Boundary and Water Commission – Mexico) in Ciudad Juarez to work out the technical details of harmonizing these datasets along the border. The new improved digital elevation model along the border will be a critical data source to delineate watershed boundaries and to develop a networked hydrology layer for the border region using 1:24,000-scale data for the United States and at the 1:50,000-scale data for Mexico. In addition, to assess water-quality trends, the USGS in collaboration with the International Boundary and Water Commission and the Mexican Comisión Nacional del Agua (National Water Commission) are building a digital warehouse database of water-quality data for the border region.

On July 16th, 2008, the Mexican Congress enacted into law the autonomy for INEGI. Previously INEGI was under the Secretary of Finance. INEGI now will be governed by a five member council appointed by the Mexican Congress with full autonomy for funding and technical issues. The three main focus areas of INEGI will now be: Demographics and Society, Economy, and Geography and the Environment. INEGI's new Web site address is now www.inegi.org.mx. All email addresses will also change from @inegi.gov.mx to @inegi.org.mx.

Native Fish Reintroduction a Historic Step

Diane Drobka, Bureau of Land Management

An important step in the restoration of the endangered desert pupfish was taken on July 1, 2008 when nearly 250 fish were placed in a pond southeast of Safford, Arizona. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Safford Field Office fishery biologist Heidi Blasius led cooperative efforts with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) that placed the native fish into Howard Well in the San Simon Valley. The well is about 100 miles north of the Sonora, Mexico. AGFD had captured the fish earlier that day and transported them from Boyce Thompson Arboretum near Superior and from The Nature Conservancy's San Pedro Preserve near Dudleyville. Future pupfish supplements will be made to bring the total number of fish to at least 500. If the introduced fish survive and reproduce, they will be one of the only wild populations of the species in Arizona.



[Above left] BLM fishery biologist Heidi Blasius and Ross Timmons with Tony Robinson from the AGFD prepare the pupfish for release by blending water from Howard Well into the transport containers to gradually adjust temperature and pH. [Above right] Heidi Blasius allows the desert pupfish to gradually swim into the pond at Howard Well as other biologists in background prepare to release more fish.



Good Neighbor Environmental Board

<http://www.epa.gov/ocem/gneb/>

The Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) is currently reviewing case studies that document effective programs that resulted in the reduction of environmental pollution along the U.S.-Mexico Border. Rick Schutz, the current Department of the Interior (DOI) representative to the board, reports that the GNEB will select 6 to 8 of these cases and include as part of its upcoming report.

International Migratory Bird Day Draws Visitors to San Pedro 20th Anniversary of San Pedro Riparian Conservation Area

Diane Drobka, Bureau of Land Management, Diane_Drobka@blm.gov

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and its partners recognized International Migratory Bird Day and celebrated the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area's 20th anniversary on May 10. Partners celebrating--Sonoran Joint Venture, Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO) and Coronado National Forest -- joined the BLM Gila District for a festive day of commemoration, education, and family fun. The event took place at the BLM's San Pedro House about seven miles east of Sierra Vista, Arizona, near the banks of the San Pedro River, where willows and cottonwoods typify this riparian corridor in the desert.

International Migratory Bird Day at the San Pedro was sponsored by the Sonoran Joint Venture (SJV). SJV coordinator Robert Mesta was on hand to read and sign his new children's book, *Condor: Spirit of the Canyon*. SJV education and outreach coordinator Jennie Duberstein and BLM wildlife biologist Heather Swanson presented a talk about bird migration.

SABO volunteers captured, measured and banded hummingbirds while educating the audience about hummingbird biology and behavior. Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) volunteers and BLM and Forest Service biologists led walks along the river to look for birds and beavers. The Gray Hawk Nature Center brought live critters to view and a few to hold. A seminar by Wild Bird Unlimited gave landscaping tips on how to attract birds and butterflies to backyards. FSPR dedicated their new San Pedro House xeriscape garden and conducted a workshop on water harvesting and desert landscaping. Music, carriage and donkey rides, and a variety of activities made it a fun day for the whole family.

The celebration honored many who recognized the importance of protecting the culture and habitat of the San Pedro, as well as those who continue to maintain the RNCA for future generations. A number of managers and Congressmen (who had foresight to set aside the area) were recognized including Erick Campbell and Bill Childress (SPRNCA managers), Congressman Morris K. Udall and Jim Kolbe, Arizona Senator Dennis DeConcini, and the BLM's Henri Bisson and Dean Bibles (retired). Also recognized were the Friends of the San Pedro who have donated thousands of hours to interpretation and educational program highlighting the natural and cultural resources of the area.

Through land exchanges and other efforts, the 40-mile riparian corridor along the San Pedro River north of the Sonoran border was placed under BLM management in 1986. Signed into existence in November 1988 by President Ronald Reagan, 2008 marked 20 years as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area's (SPRNCA) designation by Congress. The San Pedro is now one of the crown jewels of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System. It contains about 58,000 acres of public land that provides habitat for more than 350 species of birds -- including the gray hawk, Mississippi kite, green kingfisher and yellow-billed cuckoo -- 80 species of mammals, more than 40 species of amphibians and reptiles, and two native species and several introduced species of fish. http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/ncarea/sprnca.html

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Individuals involved in the acquisition and management of the San Pedro RNCA gather around the plaque created to mark its 20th anniversary. From left to right: Gila District Manager Tom Dabbs, Arizona Resource Advisory Council Chair Frances Werner, Arizona Associate State Director Helen Hankins, Sierra Vista Mayor Bob Strain, Constituent Services Supervisor Shay Saucedo representing Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) President Ed Mouras, former Arizona State Director Dean Bibles, former San Pedro RNCA Manager Erick Campbell, longtime FSPR volunteer Jane Chambers, and BLM Deputy Director Henri Bisson. [Below]



NEWS FROM THE FCC

Webpage for resources, maps and border links:

<http://www.cerc.usgs.gov/FCC/index.htm>

Next FCC Meeting: October 21-23, 2008 Yuma, Arizona at the Shiloh Inn

For more information, please contact:

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FACES OF THE FCC---April 2008 Field Visit to El Paso Borderlands

FCC members enjoy their tour of the border at border monument #1, the Rio Colorado, and the Socorro and San Elizario historic missions. Photos by Roger Durall.



If you would like to submit an article for the FCC Newsletter or to announce the availability of a publication or future meeting relevant to the U.S.-Mexico border region, please contact or send your contribution to Shela McFarlin (Tucson) at 520-624-0560, or Shela_McFarlin@blm.gov