



## [Protecting endangered species interfering with border security: U.S. Republicans](#)

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A group of Republican lawmakers says policies aimed at protecting the grizzly bear and other cross-boundary species along the U.S.-Canada border are putting wildlife conservation ahead of national security on America's northern frontier.

In a statement released this week warning that "the national security threat from the North is real," the Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives committee on natural resources alleged that agents with the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Border Patrol "are frequently unable to effectively monitor this land due to environmental regulations."

They added: "These protections have enabled criminals to target the areas for illegal and other dangerous activities. This remote Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture land can be targeted by drug smugglers, human traffickers and potential terrorists."

The Republican committee members, led by Utah congressman Rob Bishop, are insisting that border agents be permitted unfettered use of trucks or all-terrain vehicles along the Washington-British Columbia border, where some areas are currently deemed off-limits to protect grizzlies moving between the two countries.

"The most basic function of the Department of Homeland Security is to protect the United States from threat against those who seek to disrupt the American way of life," Bishop states. "Unfortunately, restrictive policies created and enforced by the Interior Department and federal land managers are preventing the U.S. Border Patrol from providing the maximum amount of security on some of our most vulnerable border areas located on federal lands.

"Until these policies are reversed, the safety and security of this country remain in jeopardy."

The Republican lawmakers specifically cite a letter they received from Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano in which she highlights some of the challenges facing border guards in the forested lands along the Washington-B.C. border.

"Government biologists claim agents in vehicles on some roads are detrimental to bears," states a document enclosed in Napolitano's letter.

While the U.S. Border Patrol is "most willing to work in a creative and careful manner" in patrolling environmentally-sensitive borderlands, the agency "must occasionally have some motorized presence in those areas," the document notes.

But Bishop and the other Republican representatives say border agents should be given unambiguous authority to patrol wild areas, with security concerns trumping conservation goals.

They have also argued that fully empowering security officials to monitor wild borderlands would actually improve environmental protection in some areas. Pointing to the U.S.-Mexico border, the Republicans say destroyed vegetation, discarded garbage and other environmental damage inflicted by smugglers and illegal aliens on places such as the Coronado National Memorial in southern Arizona would be curbed if border agents could move more freely within the park's boundaries.

Last month, Bishop introduced a House resolution seeking to bar other federal agencies from enforcing any rule that "may impede, prohibit, or restrict" the Department of Homeland Security from achieving "operational control" of public lands along the southern and northern U.S. borders.

The Republicans say the border between the two countries is frequently "delineated by no more than a ditch or clear-cut through a forest."

Along the northern border, "helicopters and small planes are a common means of entering and exiting the U.S. illegally. Public lands are generally isolated and make ideal taking-off and landing areas for criminals."

In their statement, the Republican committee members cited two cases to emphasize their concerns about the U.S.-Canada border.

"Abu Mezer, who was charged in 1997 with plotting to bomb the New York City subway, had earlier been caught crossing the northern border through the North Cascades National Park in Washington state," they noted.

And they referred to a 120-metre-long drug-smuggling tunnel — discovered running under the Washington-B.C. border in 2005 — as a disturbing symbol of the security threat.

"While not on federal land," the Republicans state, "this illustrates how drug smugglers are attempting to enter the U.S. from Canada."

The Republicans' call for security considerations to override wildlife concerns marks the second time this month that animals have factored into a northern border issue in the U.S.

Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy has urged Napolitano to abandon a \$5-million plan to expropriate a dairy farm along the Vermont-Quebec boundary to expand and modernize a little-used rural border post.

Instead, the Democratic senator has argued, the Morses Line outpost should be closed.

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