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NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPUBLICANS

[Drug Cartel Activity Threatens Texas Water Supplies, Lawmaker Says](#)

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Joshua Rhett Miller

Drug cartel activity along the Mexican border presents serious security threats to the area's water supply system, particularly on federally-owned lands in southern Texas, a U.S. lawmaker says.

Members of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a hearing Thursday on H.R. 4719, a bill that would create a Southwest Border Region Water Task Force to monitor and assess the water supply needs of the area.

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., ranking member of the House subcommittee, told FoxNews.com that the situation needs immediate attention, particularly in light of reports that a Mexican drug cartel -- the Los Zetas -- unsuccessfully plotted to blow up the Falcon Dam along the Rio Grande last month.

"If the plot against Falcon Dam had succeeded, it would have affected more than 4 million residential customers," McClintock said Monday. "We need to focus our attention on securing these border water systems from attack by Mexican drug cartels, but also their use as a conduit for the illegal importation of drugs and people."

McClintock said he will seek to amend H.R. 4719 to alter its focus toward border security issues. As it currently stands, the legislation would establish a task force that would submit a report on the region's water supplies to Congress and would be comprised of representatives from the Department of Agriculture, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Southwest Border Regional Commission and others.

According to the [Houston Chronicle](#), Mexican and U.S. authorities were "secretly scrambling" last month to thwart a plot by the Zeta cartel to blow up Falcon Dam and unleash billions of gallons of water.

The Zeta cartel planned the attack to get back at its rival, the Gulf cartel, which controls smuggling routes from the Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico, Sigifredo Gonzalez, sheriff of Texas' Zapata County, told the newspaper.

Although the Gulf Cartel was the alleged target, about 4 million residents and massive amounts of agricultural land would have been affected in the resulting massive flood, the paper reported.

Sources told the Chronicle that U.S. officials learned of the plot through "serious and

reliable sources," the seizure of small amounts of dynamite near the dam and the discovery of an alert from the Zeta cartel warning Mexican residents to evacuate the area ahead of the blast.

The Mexican military then stepped up its presence in the area based in part on the U.S. intelligence, sources told the Chronicle.

McClintock said escalating violence along the Mexican border is a result of restricted access by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents to federal lands due to environmental regulations enforced by the Department of Interior.

"It certainly has the potential to be a serious security risk," McClintock said. "The plot by the Zeta drug cartel to blow up the Falcon Dam appeared to be quite credible. And as we have found over the years, before there is a successful attack, it is preceded by several unsuccessful attempts that clearly indicate intent. It would be utterly foolish to ignore." The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to requests for comment regarding last week's hearing.

Joan Neuhaus Schaan, fellow for homeland security and terrorism at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, told the panel that the water flow and system of dams operated by the International Boundary & Water Commission (IBWC) are critically important to Texas agriculture along the Rio Grande.

"Water rights along the border have been the basis for contentious and sometimes violent disagreements for centuries, though for the last 60 years the IBWC has provided a framework for management," Schaan said in prepared remarks. "This critical water infrastructure, however, is vulnerable to attack."

Schaan also cited reports of the alleged plot targeting the 5-mile-long Falcon Dam. "Destroying a dam requires access, means, knowledge and motivation," Schaan's testimony continued. "Organized crime in the region has demonstrated a facility for the first three elements. The question remains as to whether these same organizations might be motivated to carry out an attack. The scenario is not inconceivable."

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House Natural Resources Committee Republican Press Office

Contact: [Jill Strait](#) or [Spencer Pederson](#)

202-226-2311

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