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Testimony

Before the Committee on Resources

United States House of Representatives

The Importance of Border Security on Federal Lands

August 5, 2006

Gulf South Research Corporation (GSRC) is an environmental consulting firm located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. We have been in operation under our current ownership for 13 years. GSRC provides environmental planning services, primarily for the Federal Government, throughout the Nation. GSRC has provided these services, including protected species surveys, wetland delineations, cultural resources surveys, environmental restoration, and impact analyses, to the Border Patrol for 8 years. These services have been provided to every Border Patrol Sector along the entire southwest border and in several northern border Sectors. Personally, I have been involved in planning Border Patrol projects for over 15 years.

I served as GSRC's Project Manager for the completion of the San Diego 14-mile Border Infrastructure System (BIS). GSRC was first contracted to participate in this project in May 2000 and we continue to be involved in the planning aspects, even though Secretary Chertoff signed an environmental waiver last year. GSRC was initially contracted to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the completion of the BIS. However, that scope quickly expanded to include additional protected species surveys, wetland delineations, over 24 agency coordination and public meetings, permit assistance, and mitigation planning and implementation. Regarding the latter issue, we currently have mitigation programs on-going at Arnie's Point and Spring Canyon, west of Cactus Road. The mitigation at Arnie's Point is a 23-acre vernal pool restoration site. The Spring Canyon mitigation is a 16-acre site, which is being used to offset wetland impacts at Spring Canyon, Deadman's Creek, and Johnny Wolf Creek. The Spring Canyon mitigation program is in its infancy. However, the Arnie's Point mitigation program is in its 3rd year and has proven to be very successful, to the point that we have additional protected species which had not been reported at Arnie's Point and surrounding areas for many years.

While admittedly, the completion of the BIS would result in significant impacts, as indicated in the EIS, the BIS has been designed and will be constructed in a manner to minimize these effects. Although the mitigation proposed in the EIS is no longer viable or valid due to the waiver, I still believe that in the long-term, the BIS will provide substantial benefits to the area north of the BIS, particularly the Tijuana River Valley and estuary. The numerous illegal foot trails that cut across Lichty Mesa, Spooner's Mesa and the estuary will be eliminated and these trails will be revegetate naturally. Trash and illegal fires will also be reduced or eliminated. And, finally, the erosion and sedimentation that currently exits along the border roads in these areas will be ameliorated.

There were many lessons learned during this project and most of these lessons have been transferred to other OBP Sectors that are planning similar tactical infrastructure. With proper planning and coordination, such infrastructure can be constructed to minimize short-term adverse impacts and provide long-term benefits to the environment.