

"Protecting our borders and our environment are not mutually exclusive "

WASHINGTON—Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05) fought attacks to repeal laws that provide for environmental protections of public border land, while still maintaining our ability to defend and guard our nation's borders, during a hearing about whether those efforts limit law enforcement's ability to protect the border.

**“Protecting our borders and our environment are not mutually exclusive,” said Quigley. “The opposition to conservation is not about concern for our national security, but a concerted effort to undermine our ability to protect our world.”**

A Government Office of Accountability study released late last year found that border security is not affected by land-management laws, but rather the remoteness and ruggedness of the terrain.

The land in question includes the Coronado Forest, which is home to 25 endangered species. Additional land in the border area tells the same story of environmental biodiversity: the Organ Pipe National Monument and Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge account for a combined 438,000 acres of protected land on or near the Mexican border.

The hearing occurred in the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations, and was a combined hearing with the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands.

Quigley's complete opening statement is included below.

I thank Chairman Chaffetz for convening this important hearing, and the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands for joining us here today. Home to the highest number of threatened, endangered and sensitive species of any National Forest in the continental U.S., the Coronado National Forest is an important parcel of land in the debate

on mutual exclusivity of environmental conservation versus national security.

The Coronado National Forest is home to 25 listed threatened or endangered species and 162 sensitive species. Along with high numbers of environmentally sensitive and diverse organisms, the Forest is where a large majority of the tens of thousands of people, entering illegally each year on federal lands in the Border Patrol's Tucson Sector, are apprehended.

The story's the same for the 330,000-acre Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument southwest of Tucson. As well as the 118,000-acre Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. Humans have done damage as they've attempted to cross the border, leaving trash behind, crashing and crunching their way through to the U.S.

It's the environmental damage that prompted the 2006 memorandum of understanding that still effectively guides us today and has proven, through multiple reports by GAO and others, to be strong tools in our efforts to secure our border. These guidelines protect our lands—they also make us safer. It isn't an either or.

If you don't believe me, you don't care much for our National Forests, our National Monuments or our National Wildlife Refuges that lie across the border, that's okay too. But, the Government Accountability Office, charged with being the "*investigative arm of Congress*" has told us that, and I quote: "Overall security status ... is not affected by land-management laws. Instead, factors such as the remoteness and ruggedness of the terrain have the greatest effect on their (the CBP) ability to achieve operational control."

Folks, we can't change the terrain of our border, nor should we try – but we can enforce laws that seek to protect our nation's best interest. But, be honest in your opposition here today. The opposition is wrought of stuff other than a concern over access to patrol our border, and stripping laws that seek to maintain the integrity of our earth is patently unjust.

I will fight against any and all attempts to eliminate important statutes like the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wilderness Act, or the Endangered Species Act. And I know that I have science on my side.