

Arizona

Bureau of Land Management

Southern Arizona Project to Mitigate Environmental Damages Resulting From Illegal Immigration



Fiscal Year 2011 Report



Southern Arizona Project

Fiscal Year 2011 – Summary Report

Introduction

The Southern Arizona Project (SAP) is an on-going effort by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and our partners to address the impacts of illegal immigration and drug smuggling within Arizona's borderlands. Cleanup and mitigation projects funded through the SAP are managed by the BLM, cooperating governmental agencies, and nonprofit groups. This report summarizes SAP accomplishments and highlights from Fiscal Year (FY) 2011.

Fiscal Year 2011 marked a major shift in the emphasis and approach of the BLM toward the management of border issues through the expansion of Operation ROAM (Restore Our Arizona Monuments).

The BLM initiated Operation ROAM in June of 2010 to deter and address smuggling and other illegal activities within the Sonoran Desert and Ironwood Forest National Monuments. The resource protection and restoration goals of Operation ROAM align with both the SAP and the BLM Border Strategy through: 1) providing a safe and secure environment for the public and BLM employees; 2) enhancing the protection of natural and cultural resources on public lands; and 3) improving coordination and cooperation with border law enforcement and land management partners. The BLM Law Enforcement Rangers from throughout the western United States were assigned to work with BLM Arizona Rangers and other partner law enforcement officers for two-week periods as part of law enforcement "surges". A phenomenal amount of resource and law enforcement work was completed in a short time frame. Operation ROAM partners include the US Border Patrol, the Alliance to Combat Trans-National Threats, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Arizona Department of Transportation, and the Pinal and Maricopa County Sheriff's Departments.

In partnership with ROAM surges, FY 2011 SAP activities moved from reactive clean up and restoration operations to proactive tactics. The BLM and our partners concentrated on "taking and "holding" ground through a combination of intense law enforcement operations and preemptive resource protection actions which included trash clean up, removal of abandoned vehicles, repair of fences, and the decommissioning of illegal smuggling routes.

The cleanup and remediation projects were focused in the area within 100 miles of the United States border with Mexico. It is within this boundary where the highest volume of illegal activity and landscape degradation occurs. Major impacts of smuggling and undocumented immigration include the accumulation of trash along smuggling corridors, the creation of illegal roads and trails and look out points throughout the border landscape. Disturbances to the natural and cultural landscape fragment wildlife habitat, damage archaeological and sacred sites, cause erosion, and increase the presence of invasive plant species. Through SAP/ROAM, the effects of this have begun to be reversed as trash is removed, and unauthorized trails and roads are restored to their natural state and replanted with native species. The installation and maintenance of fencing and other barriers has helped to minimize illegal travel cross-country and on unauthorized routes.

The SAP is coordinated by the BLM Arizona State Office, and project funds are distributed to the BLM Tucson, Safford, Lower Sonoran, and Yuma Field Offices, as well as other borderlands partners. Partners in FY 2011 included: Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge.

SAP projects provided numerous seasonal jobs for America's youth. Over 50 temporary jobs were created by the program in FY 2011. This included the hiring of student interns and youth work crews.

Operation ROAM included 10 weeks of law enforcement high-intensity surge patrols in conjunction with focused SAP efforts using student work crews, fire crews, and BLM and cooperating agency staff. SAP funding supported the cleanup and restoration efforts conducted under Operation ROAM.

Since the initiation 2003, the SAP has provided approximately \$8.4 million dollars to fund cleanup and remediation projects by BLM and partner organizations, purchase needed supplies and safety equipment, and hire student interns and youth crews. In FY 2011 program funding totaled \$965,000 thousand dollars.

This report documents accomplishments of the SAP during FY 2011. Summaries of accomplishments and partnerships are included for each BLM field office that received SAP funding. Annual reports from past years (2003 to 2010) are available at:

http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/info/newsroom/undocumented_aliens.html.

SOUTHERN ARIZONA PROJECT Fiscal Year 2011 Totals		
PROJECT	OUTCOME	COMMENTS
TRASH REMOVAL	540 tons (1,080,887pounds) of trash removed	Total of BLM and partner cleanup projects
ABANDONED VEHICLE REMOVAL	90 vehicles removed	BLM/Border Patrol cooperative effort, south of Interstate 8
TIRE REMOVAL	7 tons (14,131pounds) removed	412 tires removed and transferred to county collection centers.
BICYCLE REMOVAL	455 bicycles removed	Bikes are in remote locations and are difficult to reach and remove.
LAND RESTORATION	35,494 acres	Acres reclaimed on roads, lay up sites, illegal smuggling routes.
UNAUTHORIZED ROAD AND TRAIL RECLAMATIOM	28.8 miles	Unauthorized roads and trails restored to natural condition.
TRAILS AND ROADS MAINTAINED	80.3 miles	Vekol Road and Smith Road fully maintained.
VEHICLE INCURSION BARRIERS ERECTED	8.5 miles	Operation ROAM; stops smuggling vehicles from entering Table Top Wilderness Area.
SIGNS AND POST INSTALLATION	357 signs installed or replaced	Completed by youth crews and BLM staff (SDNM and Yuma Field Office)
WELL SITE OPERATIONS	3 wells maintained	Wells operated for endangered Sonoran Pronghorn. Damage from smugglers repaired.
FENCE CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR	30,096 feet	New fencing protects natural resources.
FENCE REMOVAL	7,920 feet	Removal of damaged fences

Lower Sonoran Field Office:

The Lower Sonoran Field Office, Phoenix District is located almost entirely within the 100 miles of Arizona borderlands. The Sonoran Desert National Monument (SDNM) and the “Ajo” Block receive impacts from border crossers and smuggling operations. The SDNM border efforts are managed as part of Project ROAM and have undergone intense law enforcement surges with accompanying cleanup crews. A tremendous amount of both recent and “legacy” trash and damage has been cleaned up and restored as a result of the ROAM focus.

Sonoran Desert National Monument:

Through a joint effort of staff and Southwest Conservation Corps and Valley of the Sun youth work crew, 23.5 tons of trash was removed, 194 acres of degraded lands directly restored, 7.3 miles of smuggling road decommissioned and reclaimed, and over 1.3 miles of vehicle barriers were installed in two areas. Additionally, over 46,400-acres of SDNM land was secondarily restored through landscape-wide trash sweeps along 103 miles of roads and washes.

Principal projects undertaken in FY 2011 included (1) installation of a 1.3 mile long Normandy style Vehicle Incursion Barrier at the southeast corner of the Table Top Wilderness; (2) Trash sweeps east and west of Smith Road, in the Antelope Peak area, throughout Vekol Valley, and along the east and northern parts of Sand Tank Wash/Javelina Mountains; (3) decommissioning smuggling roads and trails in the SDNM’s Table Top and South Maricopa Wilderness areas, Vekol Valley and Antelope Peak locales; (4) maintaining Vekol Road, Bates Well Road, and SDNM foot trails critical for law enforcement and restoration crew access; and (5) Pilot Project Daylight – the removal of dense brush and obscuring vegetation within the I-8 right-of-way, in areas where illegal immigrants and smugglers lay up while waiting for transportation. This increases the public safety by eliminating these areas as sources of smuggling points and increased vehicle pullouts into highway traffic.

Tucson Field Office:

Working with BLM staff, partners and volunteers removed more than 65 tons of trash within the Tucson Field Office, Gila District, restored 20 acres of damaged land and removed five abandoned vehicles. The Tucson Field Office also lies within the 100 miles of borderland and border related impacts are a common issue on several nationally designated areas, including the Ironwood Forest National Monument and the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Ironwood Forest National Monument

BLM staff and Student Conservation Association interns worked closely with several organizations that provided significant service hours to remediate the impacts caused by smugglers and illegal immigrants on public lands. Supplies and equipment were provided for a Border Patrol Auxiliary group cleanup effort in the Sawtooth Mountains; known lay-up sites and illegally created roads were documented and mapped, signage was installed and maintained and regular patrols of the monument were conducted in front and back country areas. Other volunteer efforts included cleanup projects with Southwest Conservation Corps, Friends of the Ironwood National Forest, Humane Borders, Silverbell Estates Community, Red Hills Community, and the US Border Patrol.

San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area:

Student Conservation Association interns assisted with the cleanup of trash left behind at stop over sites for illegal immigrants, including backpacks, blankets, food remains, water containers and personal items. Approximately 3.7 miles of fencing broken by smugglers and immigrants were also repaired.

Safford Field Office:

The Safford Field Office, Gila District, while outside of the major operations for ROAM, does continue to see the effects of illegal activities related to border violations. With the help of the Sky Island Alliance, BLM removed legacy 7-strand barbed wire border fence which no longer served a purpose in preventing livestock from crossing the border and when coupled with the new border fence, posed an increase barrier for wildlife movement. Approximately 1.5 miles of fence was removed and 200 pounds of trash was picked up. Combined with work from the past two years, BLM with partners, have removed 16 miles of old fence and picked up garbage along the international border. Partners included the Sky Island Alliance, local ranchers, Seeds for Success and the US Border Patrol.

Yuma Field Office:

The Yuma Field Office, Colorado River District, manages borderlands that also include the Colorado River as part of the international border. BLM staff, student interns from Student Conservation Association and Chicago Botanic Garden, Arizona Department of Corrections, the Cocopah Tribe, AZ Game and Fish Department and the Regional Center for Border Health and other local partners and volunteers removed more than 418 tons of trash, 22 tires, five abandoned vehicles, and piles of dead vegetation that provided a cover for illegal activities along the international border south of Yuma. The SAP has made a significant contribution to improving border security and mitigating illegal border activities in the Yuma Area. Coordination for this project is proceeding with heightened support from the Border Patrol and other law enforcement entities.

BLM Partners:

Tohono O'odham Nation

With 75 miles of remote international border, the Tohono O'odham Nation (Nation) is the location of one of the busiest illegal immigration and smuggling corridors in America. The Nation, along with its partners, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has greatly increased its commitment to illegal immigrant and smuggler waste clean-up in the over 2.8 million acres of Sonoran Desert. A total of 47 sites were cleaned up in FY 11, using a newly created permanent crew of four laborer positions dedicated to this effort. In preparation for FY 2012, much needed equipment was purchased to further enhance the success of SAP. In addition to clean up efforts, the Nation also worked with BLM to identify areas of fencing between the nations that require repair or replacement. Cut fences allow easier vehicle access and also permit livestock to wander freely between lands. Ninety-seven vehicles were located and marked for future removal and over 26,000 pounds of trash were collected.

Pascua Yaqui

The Pascua Yaqui Tribe continued to monitor 10 heavily used Undocumented Migrant sites that are regularly used on tribal lands. The Western Electric Power Line trail was cleaned up along with the levee area and the four corners, totaling 8.22 miles of restoration.

AZ Game and Fish Department

The AZ Game and Fish Department oversaw six projects throughout the FY, enlisting many volunteers to accomplish much needed efforts. Through the use of aerial scouting, the Department was able to locate and identify key areas requiring clean-up. As a result over 43 tons of trash was collected from dozens of small lay-up areas and 4.35 miles of land was cleaned up under trees and along streambeds. Partners in clean up included Hunters Who Care, Safari Club International, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Boy Scouts of America, Pima County Natural Resources Parks and Recreation, Arizona Department of Corrections and a host of other volunteers.

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)

Partners and volunteers were able to restore 20 miles of illegal roads and trails, remove 12.5 tons of trash, 200 tires, 50 abandoned vehicles and 300 bicycles. This was all accomplished due in part to partnerships with many cooperating agencies such as the State of Arizona and local tribes.

SAP provided the ADEQ with funding to assist in the continued development of web-based and GIS management tools for the collection, standardization, and sharing of data between the many stakeholders affected by waste issues along the international border. The website, www.azbordertrash.gov, was updated to include a calendar that features clean up events and allows users to volunteer for them via a fillable form. Several partners have been actively testing the site and providing user input to improve and enhance the tool.

Northern Arizona University

BLM partnered with NAU to implement a pilot study of the use of digital imagery to reveal measurable changes on the ground from the proactive SAP/ROAM efforts. Analysis detected significant improvement in the SDNM landscape north of a 1.3 mile vehicle barrier that was installed. Illegal routes and foot trails grew faint or disappeared altogether. The efforts will be continued in FY 2012 and will also include the Ironwood Forest National Monument (IFNM).

Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge

In partnership with volunteers, the Refuge continued efforts in FY 11 to mitigate damage to the refuge by illegal border crossers. Trash clean-up and removal of abandoned vehicles was completed over several sessions by various groups including No Mas Muertes, Border Samaritans, and Humane Borders. Approximately 5,500 pounds of trash was collected and 5 vehicles were removed.

Photos:

Tohono O'odham Nation



Before and After Mile Post 102 State Route 86



Gila District Office - Arizona Game and Fish Department



Approximately 1.35 miles of stream bed were highly polluted with a wide-range of containers, clothing, backpacks, plastic wrappers, and used hygiene products



“Broken Window” Trash Removal Projects - SDNM



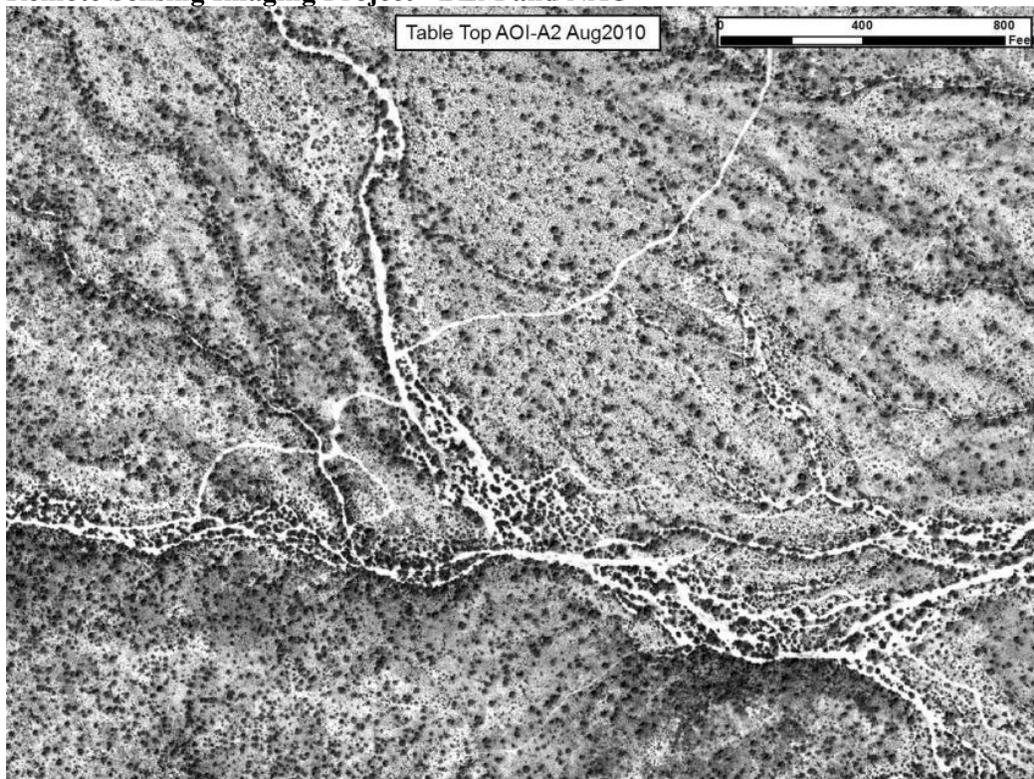
Southwest Youth Corps with Morning Trash Collection – Public Land Blocks East of Smith Road

Abandoned and Stolen Vehicle Removal – SDNM

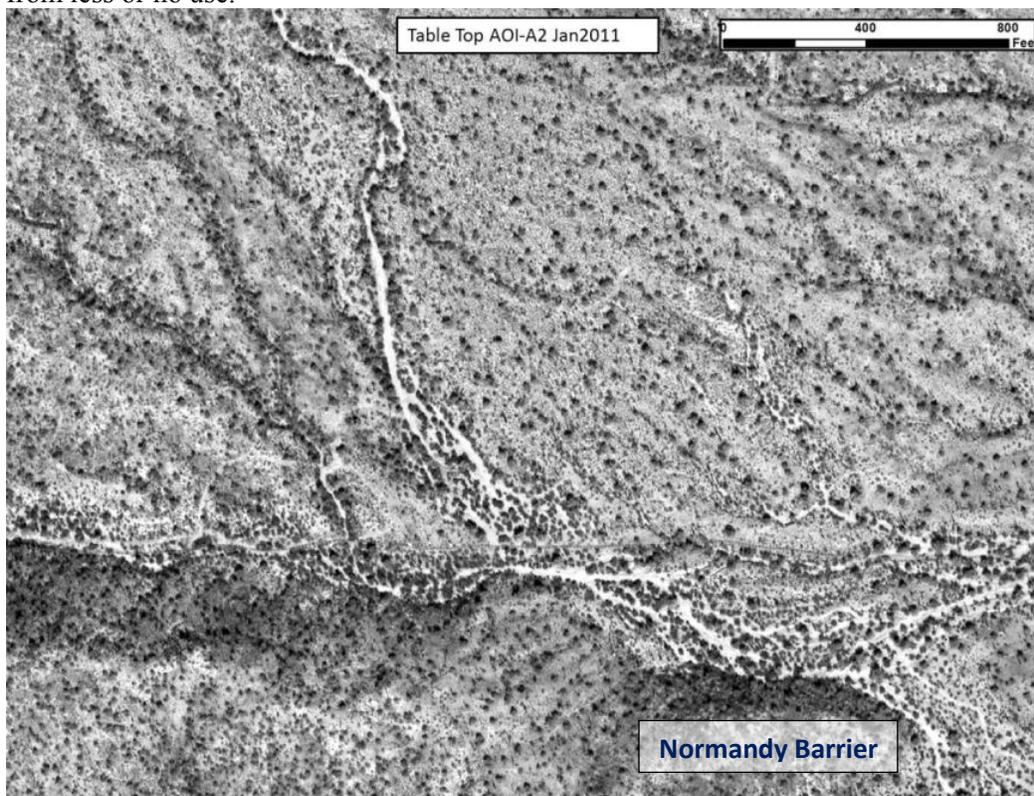


One of 30 Abandoned and Customarily Stolen Vehicles Removed in FY 2011

Remote Sensing Imaging Project - BLM and NAU



Two months after Normandy barrier installation and accomplishing both direct and indirect road and trail reclamation projects, vehicle routes and foot trails have disappeared due to active reclamation or faded from less or no use.





The rusty Normandy barrier installed in FY 2011 blends into the rugged landscape of the Table Top wilderness, protecting the area from harmful smuggler roads, their trash and their vehicles.

Landscape Restoration Projects - Restoring Smuggler Damaged Landscapes



During: Damaged Landscape - November 2010 SCC Youth Corps Starts Restoration Work



After: Same Landscape View with Restoration Complete - December 2010