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TUCSON WEST SECTOR VIRTUAL BORDER FENCE RECEIVES ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT CLEARANCE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed Endangered Species Act review of the Customs and Border Protection's Secure Border Initiative (SBI*net*) Tucson West Tower Project and has issued a final Biological Opinion.

The CBP proposes constructing or retrofitting, operating, and maintaining 56 communication and sensor towers; construct 29 new road segments and repair 19 roads; use mobile surveillance systems; and deploy unattended ground sensors. The SBI*net* Tucson West Project will use technology-based solutions to decrease illegal cross-border activities and deter and prevent illegal entries along the U.S. border from the Baboquivari to the Huachuca Mountains.

The Service determined that the construction and operation of towers and tower access roads would not jeopardize the threatened Chiricahua leopard frog or Mexican spotted owl nor the endangered Pima pineapple cactus, lesser long-nosed bat or jaguar. The CBP incorporated conservation management practices to minimize or off-set project effects to threatened and endangered species. The incidental (unintentional) take of up to two Chiricahua leopard frogs annually and 10 lesser long-nosed bats has been exempted through the Biological Opinion.

The Service's Biological Opinion is posted at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona>

In a separate but related compliance process, the Service is evaluating the compatibility of the proposed construction of five of the towers on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. Since those towers are proposed to be constructed on lands set aside for wildlife, they undergo a compatibility determination process unique to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge is currently accepting public comments on the draft Compatibility Determination through Sept. 12.

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