

Expedited border wall construction jeopardizes church, environment

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [January 27, 2021](#) issue



The original 18-foot fence at the US-Mexico border and the new 30-foot wall.
(Courtesy photo)

In its final weeks, the Trump administration rushed efforts to build wall structures along the US-Mexico border—a project the Biden administration is expected to cancel. According to NPR, contractors at 29 construction sites added shifts and began working through the night in order to meet Trump’s personal goal of completing 450 miles of the wall before the end of his term.

Among these locations was Friendship Park, a binational park between San Diego and Tijuana. In a statement to the *Century*, John Fanestil, pastor and founder of the Border Church/La Iglesia Fronteriza—a binational church in the park where people from the US and Mexico have met since 2008 to share communion—said the US Border Patrol gave church leaders notice in December that they should expect the construction of a new structure that would obstruct the view of the meeting place.

“Border Patrol officials also gave notice that restrictions on the number of people allowed access to the US side of the park would continue to be strictly enforced, including for people wishing to participate in Border Church worship services,” he said.

Observers are also concerned about the potentially irreversible environmental damage the accelerated construction might cause in the borderlands. Mountainsides have been blown up. Local ecosystems have been disrupted by all-night lights. Undammed rivers have been sealed off.

In November, *National Geographic* reported that, in addition to 800,000 tons of concrete, wall construction had already placed enough steel to build ten Empire State Buildings—almost all of it in wildlife habitats.

Just what the wall’s long-term impact will be is unclear; to make way for the project, the Department of Homeland Security waived a variety of environmental laws that would have required research of the likely effects. But the new, beefed-up structures will certainly prevent animals from traveling, which will set off a chain of ecosystem disruptions.

According to the most recent Pew Research Center polling, 58 percent of people in the US are opposed to substantially expanding the border wall.