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Gene Guyant: Wilderness: Another view from along the border

By Gene Guyant / For the Sun-News
Posted: 10/12/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

Las Cruces— As a former Immigration & Naturalization Service officer who spent most of a 26- year career enforcing Immigration laws, I have concluded that the comments published on Sept. 19 in a Las Cruces Sun-News op-ed by former Border Patrol Deputy Chief Ron Colburn must be rebutted.

First, a couple of questions: Why would Mr. Colburn, a resident of the neighboring state of Arizona, where public lands along the border have been devastated and rendered virtually unusable because of wilderness and other designations, speak so eloquently about legislation that would inevitable result in the same situation in New Mexico? Federal agencies in charge of these public lands in Arizona have now been forced to abandon large portions of these designated public lands, including the posting of warnings signs concerning dangers, and virtually abandoning them to Mexican drug cartels and related lawless enterprises.

What would motivate a successful, third-generation member of the Border Patrol to abandon the long standing priorities of his former agency in order to support special interest, environmental and open border proponents as opposed to a safe and defensible border?

Agents who devoted their entire lives to protecting the United States and its citizens would be stunned to learn of his apparent abandonment of long held priorities of the Border Patrol. A coalition of more than 800 distinguished businesses, private citizens and institutions in Doña Ana County also

believe he is wrong. If Mr. Colburn is correct in his insistence that the Border Patrol has unrestricted entry into border areas designated as wilderness, why was it necessary for legislation such as H.R. 5016 to be introduced in the 111th Congress? Its title speaks for itself: "To prohibit the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture from taking action on public lands which impede border security on such lands, and for other purposes." It is currently co-sponsored by 72 legislators, representing 26 states. Its design, title and purpose could not be clearer. If Mr. Colburn is correct, then it appears that all 72 congressional co-sponsors are mistaken.

Mr. Colburn's claim that Border Patrol will have unrestricted access for enforcement purposes in wilderness designated areas is without merit, and directly contradicts the language of the Wilderness Act of 1964. That federal statute clearly prohibits the entry of any kind of motorized or mechanical vehicles or

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equipment, including bicycles. This, of course includes motorized or mechanical vehicles and equipment critical to success of the Border Patrol mission.

Gene Guyant, Las Cruces resident, is a former Immigration & Naturalization Service regional attache for South America, Panama and Trinidad Tobago, and is a former U.S. Border Patrol sector chief.

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