

The U.S.-Mexican Border Environment: Needs, Risks, and Costs

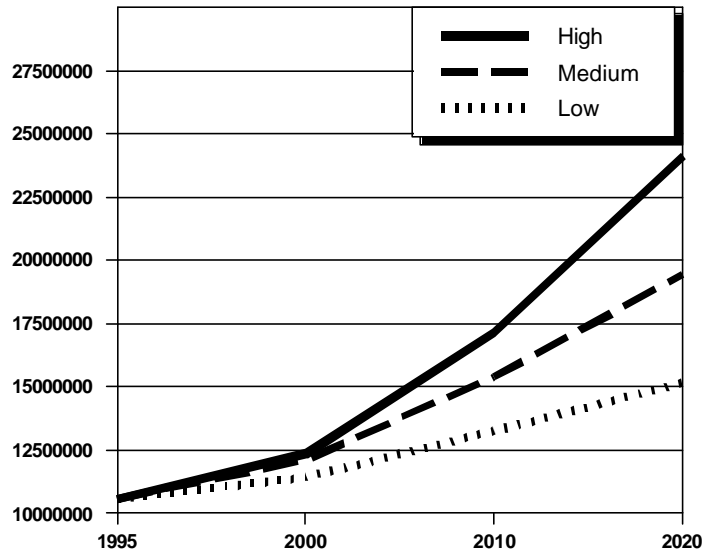
Air and water pollution, public health issues, and hazardous materials and waste illustrate the broad range of environmental issues facing the U.S.- Mexican border region. Further complicating matters is the fact that all of this is occurring in a region that is experiencing rapid demographic growth: **the population along the 2,000-mile border is expected to double by 2020 to approximately 24 million.**

Expanding industrialization and growing populations without the corresponding improvements in infrastructure have led, and will continue to lead, to ever-increasing stress on the region's communities, natural resources, and ecosystems. As

environmental issues become more complex and severe each year and influence the economic, political, and social agendas of both countries, **a concerted, interdisciplinary and binational response** to the border region's environmental problems must be undertaken. The border region must be viewed as an integrated and dynamic system, taking into account its political, social, economic, and natural components.

Specifically, what is at stake in the region? There are **tangible and significant economic costs for human populations** because of this accelerated environmental degradation. Every year, it is estimated that greater than \$1 billion are accrued in health costs due to air pollution. In addition, almost \$1 billion is lost due to water contamination, which leads to a probable loss of almost \$1 billion due to decreased recreational and leisure use of water. And unknown billions are lost in biodiversity due to habitat destruction. For example, 450 endemic species and 700 migratory species are found in the border area. Thirty-one percent of the species listed as threatened or endangered by the Department of the Interior (DOI) are found in the borderlands; the rates of endangerment are the highest for those species found along the international boundary. On the Mexican side of the border, 85 species of plants and animals are in danger of extinction. In addition, the border region's many parks and refuges need protection from encroachment by urban sprawl. All of this adds up to serious problems for the region's "bottom line:" **if left unaddressed, these multiple environmental stresses will ultimately have dire consequences for the region's economic health.**

Population Projections for Border Counties and Municipios



Peach, James and James Williams. "Population Dynamics on the U.S.- Mexican Border: Past, Present, and Future." *The U.S.-Mexican Border Environment: A Road Map to a Sustainable 2020*. Paul Ganster, ed. Southwest Center for Environmental Research and Policy (SCERP), Monograph Series, No. 1, 50.