



## FACT SHEET: Border Security Measures on the Tohono O'odham Nation

The Tohono O'odham Nation strongly supports border security measures to protect its communities and the U.S. homeland. The Nation's reservation in Southern Arizona is very large at 2.8 million acres (about the size of Connecticut) and shares a 62-mile border with Mexico. The Nation spends millions of dollars each year on border security and has been providing this support to protect the border for decades.

The Nation has maintained a longstanding relationship with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The Tohono O'odham Nation's Police Department works with CBP every day. The border security coordination measures the Nation has implemented on its reservation to assist CBP include:

- **CBP Forward Operating Bases on reservation land:** Agreements with CBP approving two forward operating bases that are staffed 24/7, as well as multiple opportunities for operating camps on the Nation.
- **Long-term lease for an on-reservation ICE office:** Since 1974, the Nation has authorized a long-term lease for an on-reservation ICE office.
- **Vehicle barriers on reservation land:** CBP constructed extensive vehicle barriers that run the entire length of the Nation's border with Mexico, as well as a patrol road that parallels it.
- **CBP checkpoints on reservation land:** The Nation has authorized CBP checkpoints on the Nation's major east-west highway to Tucson and the northern highway to Casa Grande.
- **Leases for CBP Integrated Fixed Surveillance towers:** The Nation approved a lease of its lands to allow CBP to build an Integrated Fixed Tower system that includes surveillance and sensor towers with associated access roads on to detect and help interdict illegal entries.
- **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Task Force:** A multiagency anti-drug smuggling task force staffed by Tohono O'odham Police Department detectives, ICE special agents, Border Patrol agents, and the FBI. This is the only tribally led task force of its kind in the United States.
- **Shadow Wolves (all Native tracking unit on the reservation):** One of the Nation's most successful border security measures is the Shadow Wolves program. An ICE tactical unit, the Shadow Wolves use traditional tracking and other measures to interdict drugs and human smuggling on the reservation. A bill to strengthen the program is currently before Congress.
- **Additional surveillance technology:** The Nation is working with CBP on the potential implementation of additional technology, such as the Linear Ground Detection System (LGDS) and Automated Surveillance Towers with overlapping camera coverage.

The Nation authorized this extensive coordination with CBP and other agencies in part with the understanding that it would be an alternative to a border wall that separates their communities. These measures have proven to be effective tools that have helped reduce migrant crossings, drug trafficking and human smuggling, and other border-related crime. Thanks to this dynamic, robust approach, unlawful border crossings on the Nation's lands have decreased more than 95% in the past two years.

Verlon M. Jose  
Chairman

Carla L. Johnson  
Vice Chairwoman

## Border Security Timeline: How Did We Get Here?

**June 1854** – Gadsden Purchase finalized, establishing a boundary designation between the U.S. and Mexico, dividing the Tohono O’odham Nation’s ancestral lands

**1974** – Tohono O’odham Nation authorized a long-term lease for an on-reservation office of then-U.S. Customs Service (now ICE)

**1985** – Native American U.S. Customs Patrol Officers on the Nation organized into “Shadow Wolves” tracking unit (now under ICE)

**October 1994** – Operation Gatekeeper launched by Border Patrol funneled migrants and drug traffickers onto the Tohono O’odham Nation’s lands

**February 2007** – Cooperative agreement between the Tohono O’odham Nation and Customs and Border Protection led to the Vehicle Barrier Fence Project

**October 2007** – Tohono O’odham Nation authorized Customs and Border Protection checkpoint on major north-south highway through the reservation. (Another checkpoint is established on east-west Highway 86 just east of the Nation’s reservation.)

**2013** – Tohono O’odham Nation formed multi-agency anti-drug smuggling N.A.T.I.V.E. HIDTA task force staffed with Tohono O’odham Police Department detectives, ICE special agents, Border Patrol agents, and the FBI

**March 2019** – Tohono O’odham Nation approved a lease of its lands to allow Customs and Border Protection to build an Integrated Fixed Tower (IFT) system to include surveillance and sensor towers

**February 2020** – Customs and Border Protection border wall construction destroyed the Tohono O’odham Nation’s sacred sites and burial grounds at Monument Hill and damaged sacred Quitobaquito Springs

**April 2025** – President Donald Trump issued a Memorandum excluding Federal Indian Reservations from any border wall construction plans

**February 2026** – Customs and Border Protection updated their Smart Wall map of planned barrier construction to include the Tohono O’odham Nation’s land

**April 2026** – Border wall construction crews damaged Las Playas Intaglio, a sacred 1,000-year-old geoglyph that had been flagged for protection by tribal monitors

**June 16, 2026** – Tohono O’odham Nation filed suit against the United States government

