



Save Our Heritage Organisation

Protecting San Diego's architectural and cultural heritage since 1969

July 19, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
MS 0525
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20528-0525

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

Save Our Heritage Organisation, San Diego County's leading historic preservation group, strongly urges you to halt all border remediation projects at Friendship Park in San Diego, California, on the border with Tijuana, Mexico. This urgent request joins that of our Congressman, Juan Vargas, and many others to emphasize that the addition of a 30-foot wall will disturb, if not destroy, significant historical, cultural, and environmental assets at this beloved, 51-year-old binational park, within Border Field State Park.

We urge you to responsibly consider the walls' already untold damage, or destruction, of significant archaeological and historic sites and a landscape settled and traversed for thousands of years by Indigenous people. Massive construction of earlier border walls has erased trails across this place made by Portolá's 1769 Spanish expedition with Catholic missionaries. Remnants of centuries-old ranches are also vulnerable or gone. The site still contains World War II gun control bunkers that played a strategic role in our coastal defenses.

And, the 1850s marble obelisk that was the first in a series to mark the border from here through Texas is now fenced in like a caged animal—a deplorable state for a freestanding monument listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places.

Friendship Park—once a celebrated, hugely popular meeting place with a thriving Binational Garden—has become a forbidding no man's land. For prior generations, this important binational park fostered international good will and countless family reunions. Today, friends and families unable to cross the border to be together still meet here, but their contact is now severely curtailed by steel fences and limited public hours. Where not long ago relatives could touch finger tips through the perforated metal fence, visitors are now so restricted that they can only see each other from a distance and talk by phone.

This inhumane, destructive situation will only be exacerbated by the addition of 30-foot-tall bollards. We can also expect further irreversible damage to a multimillion-dollar, sensitive coastal environment that

is home to hundreds of bird, animal, and plant species, some of which are endangered. And irreplaceable historic and cultural artifacts and sites that tell our human story over centuries will be further disregarded, disrespected, and probably ground into dirt.

Save Our Heritage Organisation implores you to cease all work on the border at Friendship Park and to consult with San Diegans to consider better options. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Coons", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bruce Coons
Executive Director