

# Hundreds protest proposed border wall in Mission, Texas

Trévon Austin  
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Hundreds of protesters marched Saturday in Mission, Texas against the construction of the border wall proposed by President Donald Trump.

The demonstration crossed the section of the Rio Grande levee where one of the first sections of the wall is being planned, a half mile or more inland from the US-Mexico border. The government has proposed to erect 60 miles of wall through the region, creating a no man's land in the areas between the wall and the Rio Grande, which comprises the legal border between the two countries.

Saturday's march was the first major protest against the proposed wall and is expected to be the prelude to further protests in southern Texas against Trump's xenophobic immigration and border policy.

The organizers of the weekend's protest aimed to bring national attention to the deep local opposition to the new border wall. It was reported that 40 groups—from environmentalists to landowners' rights groups to immigrant advocates—took part in the protest.

According to the *Austin American-Statesman*, local officials and landowners near the river report that government contractors have already been taking soil samples along the Rio Grande levees and have begun to examine property ownership records for the land condemnation lawsuits a border wall would likely require.

A map released by CBP shows tentative plans to build 28 miles of wall on the levee in Hidalgo County, the most populous county of the Rio Grande valley. The remaining 32 miles would cut through sections farther west, in Starr County, separating border towns from the Rio Grande.

The portion of the wall passing through Mission would seal La Lomita Chapel, a religious shrine and historic site, on the southern side of the levee. The wall

would also cut through the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, a lush sanctuary for 400 species of birds and nearly half of the butterfly species found in North America.

The reckless nature of the Trump administration's efforts to physically divide the working class in the United States and Mexico is revealed in a report released earlier this week showing concerns about the environmental impact. Plans for building a physical barrier were scrapped nearly half a decade ago due to flooding concerns.

In January 2010, the US Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, which regulates water flows in the Rio Grande along with its Mexican counterparts, concluded that the barriers could cause "substantial increases" in floodwaters and denied approval for the border wall project in the county. Just one year later, though, the commission reversed course, reportedly under pressure from Homeland Security Department officials who made it clear that the project needed its support "as soon as possible."

Environmentalists continue to stress the danger posed by placing a physical barrier in the region. In 2012, Sierra Club Borderlands co-chair Scott Nicol spoke out against plans for a border wall being formulated by the Obama administration, warning "property will be damaged and people may drown on both sides of the river if these walls are built."

Last month, the US House passed a \$790 billion spending bill with \$1.6 billion allocated towards constructing a wall along 74 miles of the US-Mexico border. While passage of the bill seems uncertain in the Senate, efforts are already under way to shore up the hundreds of miles of barriers erected along the border by successive Republican and Democratic administrations.

George W. Bush signed the Secure Fences Act in 2006, which authorized the construction of 700 miles of fencing along the southern border of the US, including through the Rio Grande valley. Then Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, current Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer and 23 other Democrats voted for the bill.

The current US Customs and Border Protection budget includes funding for gates which would fill in gaps of the valley's existing border fences built by the Obama administration.

For the 2017-19 fiscal years, the Texas State Legislature is expected to spend \$800 million on state border security efforts for policing the 1,200-mile border shared with Mexico. The increase in funding will go towards more personnel and equipment on the border, aimed at terrorizing immigrants and paving the way for mass deportation. In 2015, the funding for border security was increased from \$550 million to the current \$800 million.



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