

Ranchers question Border Patrol's effect



AP Photo: Border Patrol agents talk with an illegal immigrant after she was caught crossing the Mexican...

By LYNN BREZOSKY, Associated Press Writer
Mon May 29, 2:15 PM ET

HEBBRONVILLE, Texas - The Border Patrol is bigger than ever, but ranch manager Bill Hellen says he is seeing more illegal immigrants than ever.

When the Border Patrol put up a new checkpoint on a highway near Hebbbronville, about 50 miles from the border, illegal immigrants simply went around it, slashing his fences and sneaking through his ranch, he said.

He doesn't see that changing any time soon, even with [President Bush](#)'s promise of 6,000 new agents along the border.

"All the ranchers surrounding the checkpoint say the same thing," he said. "It's just a constant strain of illegal aliens on our pastures."

The Border Patrol doubled in size from 1995 and 2005, reaching 11,500 agents, but many experts and critics agree with Hellen that the buildup hasn't done much good.

"What we find pretty consistently is that the number of agents just does not seem to be related to the number of apprehensions that they make," said Linda Roberge, a senior research fellow at the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University who studies immigration. "The flood, it may go up and it may go down, but there's always more that get through than get caught."

Press officers for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which encompasses the Border Patrol, didn't return several calls seeking comment.

"Ultimately, I suppose if they spend enough money they can build a wall, station a Border Patrol agent every hundred yards for 2,000 miles, that might do it. But what would that achieve?" said Doug Massey, a sociologist at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Government.

Massey said Border Patrol buildups gum up a cyclical migration among mostly Mexican men who usually stay a year or two and then return home. The buildups make them stay in the U.S. for fear they won't be able to return, and then have their families smuggled in to join them, he said.

U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes ([news](#), [bio](#), [voting record](#)), D-Texas, who was chief of two Border Patrol sectors and architect of an immigrant crackdown at El Paso in 1994, said additional agents must be combined with penalties for employers who hire immigrants.

ADVERTISEMENT

There's a safe way to dig in your yard. Call first.

Xcel Energy

Slideshow: [Immigration reform debate](#)

NEWS ALERTS

Get an alert when there are new stories about:

- President Bush
- Rep. Silvestre Reyes

Add Selected Alerts

[» More Alerts](#)

ELSEWHERE ON THE WEB

CNN.COM
Prosecutor: FBI calling off Hoffa search

ABC NEWS
ABC News Poll: Many Young Adults Would Consider Adoption

USATODAY.COM
Jury finds Muhammad guilty in sniper trial



KEVIN SITES IN THE HOT ZONE



Death of innocents

Children are the latest casualties of Kashmir's conflict.



"It's all smoke and mirrors," he said. "If the job is there, (the immigrants) will find a way to come."

A bill passed by the Senate on Thursday calls for holding employers accountable with maximum fines of \$20,000 for each illegal worker hired and possible jail time for repeat offenders.

John Keeley, spokesman for the Center for Immigration Studies, wondered why there was no call to dramatically increase the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel at job sites in the interior United States.

"Border resources can't be the exclusive focus of Congress or the administration," he said. "The magnet for illegal immigration in the United States is the widespread availability of jobs."

ICE's enforcement staff for the entire nation outside the border areas is only about 200, he said, and Bush's 2007 budget calls for 200 more.

Nathan Selzer, an immigration activist in Harlingen, said the increased Border Patrol presence so far has meant the deaths of more immigrants who avoid capture by moving to deadlier routes, such as through the Arizona desert or in stifling railroad freight cars.

In recent years he and others have observed Mexico's annual Day of the Dead holiday in November by reading a list of the year's recorded border fatalities, many of them listed only as "male, unknown."

The Border Patrol reported 473 deaths for fiscal year 2005 and 210 so far for fiscal year 2006.

Land owners say the problem worsens each year, and that when they do call Border Patrol the immigrants are gone by the time agents come.

That frustration helped lead to groups like the Minuteman Project and, before it, Ranch Rescue.

Joe Sutton moved to Hebronville because he was tired of all the immigrants crossing his place near the border in the Rio Grande Valley.

Then came the immigrants avoiding the new highway checkpoint. Frustrated with the broken fences, debris, and soap left in cattle troughs by bathing immigrants, he invited the Arizona-based Ranch Rescue to patrol his ranch.

Casey Nethercott, founder of the group, pistol-whipped a Salvadoran immigrant during one patrol. Nethercott lost his Arizona ranch in a lawsuit brought by the immigrants and Sutton paid a \$100,000 settlement.

Sutton has given up on the ranch and left town, said his attorney, Marvin Rader.

"It's a sad story," Rader said. "The landowners don't have any property rights any more."

[Email Story](#)

[IM Story](#)

[Discuss](#)

[Printable View](#)

RECOMMEND THIS STORY

Recommend It:

Average (107 votes)



[» Recommended Stories](#)