

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 28, 2010

Mr. Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Wildland fires started by illegal immigrants and smugglers threaten the safety and livelihoods of those living along the United States-Mexico border. In some cases, these fires are started through carelessness, such as cooking or heating fires that escape. In other cases, they are started on purpose, for instance when immigrants needing assistance start fires so that firefighters will come or when smugglers start fires to divert law enforcement attention. Regardless of cause, fires started by illegal immigrants and smugglers have cost millions of dollars to suppress and have damaged important natural resources—including grasslands and forests that are important to local economies, as well as habitat for endangered species. For more than a decade, the U.S. Border Patrol has emphasized curtailing illegal border traffic in urban areas, an emphasis that increases the chances that the Border Patrol will be successful in interdicting illegal traffic, but has also caused illegal traffic to shift from urban areas to more remote areas, including lands within Arizona.

In light of these facts, we are requesting GAO to examine wildland fires caused by illegal immigrants and smugglers occurring within 100 miles of Arizona's border with Mexico over the last 5 years. In particular, we would like GAO to determine:

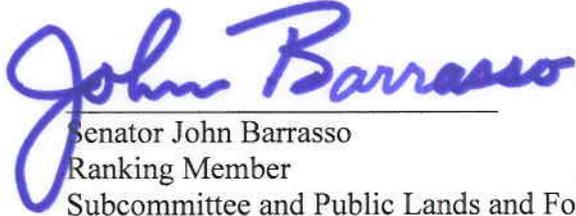
1. The number, location, size, duration, and cost of suppressing wildland fires caused by illegal border crossers.
2. The damage those fires have caused to federal, tribal, state, and private property, and the impact they have had on the economy and environment of the borderlands region in Arizona.
3. The effect that the presence of illegal immigrants and smugglers have had on firefighting efforts.
4. To the extent practicable, the intended purpose of each fire as determined by investigators.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Questions concerning this request should be directed to Nick Matiella at (202) 224-2238 in Senator McCain's office and Lucy Murfitt at (202) 224-6092 in Senator Kyl's office.

Sincerely,



Senator Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources



Senator John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Subcommittee and Public Lands and Forests



Senator John McCain



Senator Jon Kyl