

May 23, 2016

The Honorable John McCain
US Senate
218 Russell
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Flake
US Senate
413 Russell
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Urgent Repairs to the Nogales Wash under the DeConcini Port of Entry

Dear Senator McCain and Senator Flake,

On behalf of the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County I write to ask for your intervention on an issue of great urgency for Nogales. There are portions of the Nogales Wash, which flows directly under the DeConcini port of entry in the downtown area of Nogales, is in serious jeopardy of collapsing, meaning that parts of the federal inspection facilities and the lanes that provide vehicular access could fall as much as 8 to 10 feet underground.

Earlier this month, the US International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) hosted a meeting that included several federal agencies, including Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Department of State, Army Corps of Engineers, General Services Administration (GSA) and the US Geological Survey (USGS) to reaffirm the urgency of the situation. In addition, Representatives from your offices were present in the meeting, along with representatives of the office of Congressman Grijalva and the City of Nogales. We are very appreciative to the IBWC and the other agencies for scheduling this meeting and tour of the facilities – a significant and essential step in addressing the situation.

Two things became clear during the meeting. First, that all agencies present recognize the threat and urgency of the situation. Second, that not one single agency is directly responsible for the coordination of all efforts and for identifying and implementing a solution.

The topography of the region means that storm waters flow from Nogales, Sonora into Nogales Arizona through the Nogales Wash. While there are two underground tunnels or channels, the one that is designated Grand Wash flows directly under the port of entry. As you can see from the pictures there is tremendous amounts of sediments and during the major storms, they have found cars, furniture and other large pieces of debris flowing through this channel. The channel is not lined on the bottom on the Mexican side, which allows sediment to build up over time.



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In the next picture you can see one of the two columns that need shoring up as they are old and are also subject to tremendous water pressures against them when storm waters and debris are flowing. While the columns need immediate attention it is imperative to point out that there remain a number of short- and long-term issues that require attention.

It is our understanding that the US federal agencies are coordinating the exchange of a diplomatic note with Mexico but we believe that the situation is urgent and demands a combined immediate attention from both Mexico and the United States.



Our concerns are many. Should the columns buckle under the port of entry, it can put the safety of our CBP officers and that of the traveling public in jeopardy. Furthermore, should the flow of the storm water channel be impeded during a major Monsoon storm it would mean that the storm water would be forced to flow above ground and cause severe damage throughout the downtown areas of both Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona. Finally, should the channel cave in, it is certain that the port of entry would be closed for an indefinite period of time and the economic repercussions for Nogales and the region would simply be devastating.

The Port Authority stands ready to work with you, your colleagues in the Senate and the House, as well as with the principal federal stakeholder agencies from Mexico and the United States on addressing this short term urgent situation and remain committed to helping find a long-term solution to all the challenges of the Nogales Wash.

Respectfully,

Guillermo Valencia
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Raul Grijalva, US House of Representatives
The Honorable John Doyle, Mayor, City of Nogales
Commissioner Ed Drusina, International Boundary and Water Commission