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document.getElementById('elastomer2296').style.display = get_style2296(); }
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By EARL WATT • Daily Leader Eighty miles north of the border separating Arizona from Mexico runs Interstate 8, a major roadway that runs through the middle of the Sonoran Desert National Monument. According to eight new signs that have been posted recently and have been circulated heavily across the Internet, visitors to the national park are advised to avoid camping south of Interstate 8 to avoid drug and human smuggling activity. The signs go on to say, "Visitors may encounter armed criminals and smuggling vehicles traveling at a high rate of speed." Most may believe the signs were placed by an anti-immigration organization, or were an Internet hoax.

According to Dennis Godfrey, a public information specialist for the Bureau of Land Management in the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, the signs were placed by the federal government.

And they were put there to provide more detail than the previous signs that cautioned travelers, "Smuggling and illegal immigration may be encountered in this area."

Arizona's state population is 40 percent Hispanic. Recent USD No. 480 student data has indicated that the district's student population in Liberal is 70 percent Hispanic. However, the district does not inquire whether a student is legal or not.

In an effort to curb the crime in southern Arizona, the state passed an immigration law that mirrored that of the federal government in an effort to re-establish law. But the federal government has filed a lawsuit to invalidate Arizona's state law, claiming the responsibility for immigration enforcement is the role of the federal government.

Eighty miles north of the Mexican border, federal employees have opted to warn visitors to stay clear of the criminal behavior.

"We have the authority and responsibility to manage the monument area," Godfrey said. "That includes public safety, managing the resources, wildlife and natural resources. But our first responsibility is to protect law abiding citizens."

The national park takes up 478,000 acres inside Arizona with 200,000 acres south of Interstate 8. But according to the signs, the rampant crime taking place in that region is too dangerous for hikers and campers.

There are national rangers, according to Godfrey, but he could not confirm whether or not they were enforcing federal immigration policy.

“I’m not sure,” he said. “We have law enforcement rangers, and we work closely with border patrol and state law enforcement. We all work cooperatively to help each other. But I can’t say whether rangers would enforce immigration law, but they can apprehend people.”

While the Arizona immigration law has re-opened the national discussion on immigration policy, the national park 80 miles away from the Mexican border follows federal regulations, and according to their own signs, have basically indicated a lawless state south of Interstate 8.

Godfrey confirmed that the issues facing the national park were related to illegal immigration.

“Yes, smuggling occurs from across the border,” he said.

Another BLM source confirmed that there has been issues with drug smuggling and human trafficking in the region for years.

Arizona and the federal government will go to court to determine who has authority to enforce immigration policy.

Meanwhile, the southern portion of Arizona has become the spillover for Mexican drug cartels and human trafficking.

The solution, according to the federal government, is to simply avoid the area.

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