Indigenous People at the US-Mexico Borderland: Challenges for Ecological Restoration, Governance, and Environmental Justice

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About Tohono O’odham Community College (TOCC)

Founded in 1998, TOCC is an accredited and land grant institution. TOCC’s mission is to enhance the unique Tohono O’odham Himdag (Our way of life) by strengthening individuals, families, and communities through holistic, quality higher education services.

New Program: Studies in Indigenous Borderlands, Fall 2016
About Native Nations Institute

The University of Arizona
NATIVE NATIONS INSTITUTE
Founded by the Udall Foundation & the University of Arizona

Strengthening Indigenous Governance
Background

Where we started

- Environmental effects of the border on tribes

- Environmental impacts of the border wall
  - Indigenous Peoples and the US-Mexico Border wall
With ongoing concerns over climate change, environmental protection, and environmental health, many policy statements are being made, and programs are being implemented at many levels (particularly federal) to address the unique issues that arise at the US-Mexico border region.

One framework for addressing concerns is through the lens of environmental justice, which posits that socioeconomic minorities are disproportionately harmed from environmental hazards, many of which are caused by environmental change.
Common Definitions of Environmental Justice

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (EPA).

Communities of color, which are often poor, are routinely targeted to host facilities that have negative environmental impacts (NRDC).

The natural and human environment should be restored to the benefit of all people and for other living things, and their future generations, and no community should bear disproportionate risks of harm because of their demographic characteristics or economic condition (Sierra Club).
Is environmental justice relevant?

- The analysis of harm to socioeconomic minorities caused by environmental factors is fairly well established, and is in use in the border region.
- What about Indigenous peoples? Should they be subsumed in the category of “minorities”?

How is this different for Indigenous peoples?

- Land and culture intimately linked
- Sovereignty and identity are not explicitly addressed

How is this different on the US-Mexico border?

- International economic and political inequalities affecting policy and actions on environmental issues.
- Policy implementation and binational collaborative efforts doesn't take in account Indigenous sovereignty and cultural identity as part of the discussion.

How do we link the DATA measurements for environmental justice across the border? How do we put it in Indigenous hands?
Inequalities affect environmental policy and DATA qualities

US:
National level data collected through agencies influenced by tribal consultation policies. Tribal leaders in border regions have expressed that consultation is inadequate.

MEXICO:
Bureaucracies and protocols absent or different. IRBs are not well established in Mexico.

INDIGENOUS DATA:
How do we standardize data across the border?
- Language
- Different environmental effects and regulations.
- Different political and economic conditions.
- What connections and institutions have survived all these conditions?
National Differences in Indigenous Policy

UNITED STATES
Native nations are sovereign, governing entities. Native nations approach border policy as sovereign governments.

MEXICO
Indigenous communities lack formal recognition and rights within the Mexican government system to make and implement policy.

In any negotiation with the federal government or with a state, Native nations come to the table as governments, not merely as minority or interest groups.

Indigenous governmental capacities are limited by structures that provide little more than consultative rights to participate in policymaking for border policy.
Example: Border Water Policy

Environmental justice measures: disparities in access to clean water.

The border makes it more complicated

- Institutional mismatch between water agencies in Mexico and the United States. In order to discuss border water issues, a Mexican federal agency must negotiate with an US state agency.
- Concentration standards for contaminants in Mexico and the United States differ, and enforcement of regulations is not as strict or consistent in Mexico, as it is in the United States.
- Different economic priorities of the two countries result in different perceptions of water.
- Federally recognized tribes in the US enjoy water rights. In Mexico, as a consequence of no formal recognition as sovereign nations, indigenous communities follow water regulations established for ejidos.
- Enforcement in the United States is stronger.
Indigenizing environmental justice.
Applying Indigenous environmental justice at the borderlands.
Involve TOCC students in the conversation.
Edited volume on Indigenous environmental issues at the borderlands.
We Need Your Help

More ideas for further work?

Resources?

Scholars?

Funding?
Agnese Nelms Haury
Program in Environment and Social Justice

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