

# BORDER COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

## About BCA

### Our Mission

BCA is about bridging the border and fostering community through education, collaboration and cultural exchange. We do this in the Nogales region of Southern Arizona/Sonora Mexico.

We are a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization. We have no religious or political affiliations. We depend on donations and grants for funding. Incorporated in the state of Arizona, our board members reside in southern Arizona. Our advisory board consists of people from across the globe. We are based in Tubac, Arizona, a community forty miles south of Tucson and twenty miles north of the US/Mexico border.

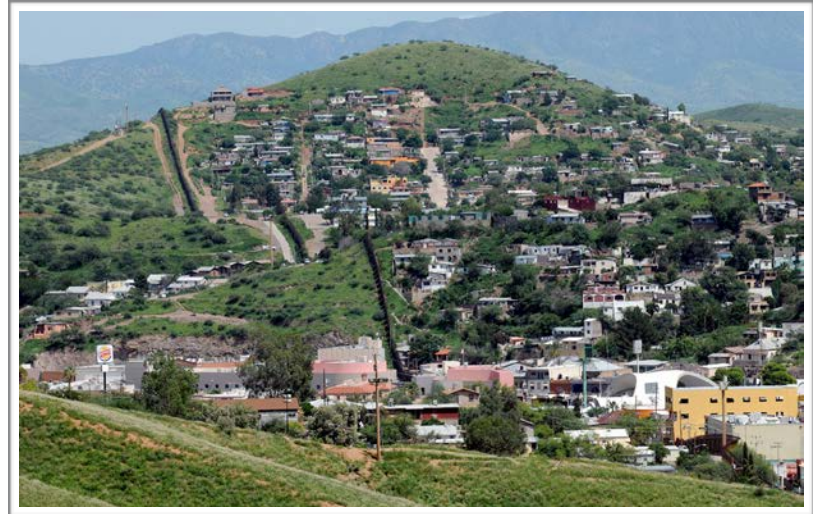
### Values

We believe in social investment, not charity. We seek to listen and learn from each other, rather than presume we know it all.

We respect the cultures and traditions of both Mexico and the US.

We value working together with like-minded organizations and individuals on both sides of the border.

We welcome participation in our programs regardless of one's viewpoint of immigration.



## Introduction to the Borderlands

by Jerry Haas

Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora (Mexico) form a fascinating, rich and complex area often referred to as “the





Alma Cota Yanez, FESAC &  
Jerry Haas, BCA Executive Director

## Join Us!

**Membership** in the Border Community Alliance signals your support for our mission to “bridge the border and foster community” in the Ambos Nogales region. Membership has certain benefits: a discount on Cross Border Tours and other BCA gatherings, e-newsletter communication and a tax-deduction.

**Volunteering** for BCA can be a very rewarding experience! Volunteer positions are carefully managed so that no one is left with more than they can handle and what you do makes a difference.

We recommend taking the Introductory **Cross Border Tour** as the single best way to see what the border is like and to become involved in the borderlands. BCA leaders have guided these tours since 2010, with consistently excellent evaluations from the participants. The purpose of the tours is to raise cross border awareness and offer you an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico

Borderlands”. Traveling south on Interstate 19 from Tucson, one senses immediately a different world. The interstate is marked in kilometers rather than miles, the only interstate in the country so tagged. The Santa Cruz River Valley narrows at Tubac right after the Border Patrol checkpoint located 25 miles from the US-Mexico border. Continuing south on the freeway towards Nogales, the Tumacacori Mission is on the left, a National Historical Site that was founded in 1691. Rio Rico (“Rich River”) is next. Well before one arrives at the border, one has arrived in the Borderlands with all of its charm, challenges and cultural uniqueness.

Here are a few historic and contemporary facts that may trigger your curiosity:

- Historically speaking, in most of the United States the migration flow was from the East to the West; the first



“Elegant Trogon,” popular in the Southeastern Arizona borderlands region.

Europeans arrived as pioneers and settlers by covered wagon across the Appalachians and the prairies to build homes and establish farms. In the Borderlands, Europeans arrived from

the South, from Mexico City, coming first to construct mission outposts and later to hunt, ranch, mine and farm. Spanish influences continue to this day.

- For thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, indigenous groups roamed freely back and forth across the Borderlands; there was no border as we know it today. There is no natural geographic or topographic boundary separating southern Arizona from northern Mexico. The first border separating Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora was not established until after the Gadsden Purchase (1854) and even then it was only occasionally marked by sporadic monuments. This is the newest part of the lower 48 states
- The Santa Cruz River begins in Arizona, fed by the Santa Rita Mountains to the east of I-19. The river flows south, entering Mexico and then takes a hard-right turn 180 degrees to head *north*, back across the border towards Tucson. The river is a border crosser! As one can imagine, its flow and aquifer are precious water resources for both Northern Sonora and Southern Arizona. Fortunately the two states have been working cooperatively for years to manage this resource.
- Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora share a common habitat for birds and wildlife that is unique to the United States. A Mexican jaguar finds his home in the Santa Rita Mountains, the only one of its kind in the US. Birds travel to the region from Central America and beyond. A glance at a map in a bird book illustrates that many species are found only in this region and nowhere else in the US.
- The people of the Borderlands are often interrelated across “la linea” (“the line” – the border). Families go back generations, often with little distinction as to their origins, whether from “this side” or “el otro lado” (“the other side”). Many people know both Spanish and English and while they may prefer to speak one language, they understand both. A hybrid version “Spanglish/el espanglés” has its own vocabulary.
- The economies of the Borderlands are interdependent. Mexicans come to the US to shop. Estimates are that Mexican shoppers spend over two *billion* dollars a year in Arizona. Mexico is America’s third leading trade partner, behind China and Canada (over \$500 billion in 2015). Produce grown in Mexico is transported through Nogales daily; up to 1700 semi-trucks a day during the winter months. Over 90 US companies have built assembly plants (maquiladoras or “maquilas”) in Nogales.





- Many, many Mexicans come to the US legally to shop, to work, to visit family and friends, to travel as tourists. Many, many US citizens go to Mexico to buy pharmaceuticals, to have dental work done, to visit family and friends, to travel as tourists.

- People who come to the US without documents most often come from central or southern Mexico or from Central America or the Caribbean where there are few jobs.

Undocumented individuals risk their lives when they attempt to cross the Sonoran desert, and in fact more than 2000 bodies have been found in the last fifteen years (the actual number of people who have died in the desert is no doubt much higher than this). Migrants are often not welcome in either country, it seems.



They are the poorest of the poor and desperate. Fortunately there are humanitarian organizations on both sides of the border that attempt to help them not only with food, water and shelter but also with information about less risky and legal alternatives.

- Nogales Mexico is a surprisingly safe city to travel in. The violence of the drug cartel wars (usually gangs fighting each other) appears to be a thing of the past. While caution is advised as with any major city (Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Tucson, etc.), US visitors who join BCA tours are surprised by the clean streets and ordinary traffic they experience as they travel in the city.

The uniqueness, the interdependence and the geographic isolation of the Borderlands has led some to propose that this region is neither Mexican nor American but a kind of “third nation.” (See for example *Michael Dear, Why Walls Won’t Work: Repairing the US-Mexico Divide* (Oxford Press, 2015). (Available for purchase on our website.) That may be a bit too strong. Yet with Mexico City more than 2000 kilometers away and with Washington DC more than 2000 miles away, the point is well made.

As you can see, the Borderlands is a fascinating place to visit and to live. Be sure to experience *all* of it or as much as you can. There is something here for everyone!

To learn more about BCA and the Borderlands, visit our website, [BorderCommunityAlliance.org](http://BorderCommunityAlliance.org) or contact us at:

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