

The Establishment of Big Bend National Park and U.S.— Mexico Transborder Governance

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Abstract: Big Bend National Park, located in the southwestern part of Texas, USA, is the largest national park in the state. The park, known for its long history, natural resources, and stunning landscapes, shares a border with Mexico, separated only by a river, with the centerline of the river serving as the boundary between the two countries. From its inception, Big Bend National Park has been valued as a common asset of the American people, receiving continuous protection and maintenance from the U.S. government. The park plays a significant role in preserving the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of Texas and serves as a window for other countries to understand the magnificent landscapes and cultural history of the southern United States. During the governance of Big Bend, the United States and Mexico have cooperated closely, sharing management experiences and jointly promoting the construction of the national park. Both countries have faced numerous intractable ecological issues in cross-border governance, such as pollution, smuggling, drug trafficking, and have encountered substantial resistance from political and economic interest groups. The journey from the initial establishment of Big Bend National Park to the formation of a U.S.-Mexico transborder park system spanned over seventy years. This paper aims to explore the transnational environmental governance of both countries around the establishment of Big Bend National Park, showcasing the interplay of various forces in the park's creation and contributing to the development of transnational environmental governance theory.

The Big Bend National Park in the United States, situated along the north bank of the Rio Grande at the Texas-Mexico border, boasts a wealth of natural landscapes and historical heritage. The park, adjacent to the U.S. southern border, faces the Chihuahua state of Mexico across the river. The river is known as the Rio Grande in the United States and the Rio Bravo del Norte in Mexico. The park gets its name due to the river making a 90-degree turn in this area. Since 1872, the United States has established 63 national parks, encompassing 344,000 square kilometers of public land under protection, and these parks are also a crucial part of the U.S. nature reserve system. The governance issues along the U.S.-Mexico border are complex, such as the fragile ecosystem in the Big Bend area, vulnerable to human damage, and the significant differences in politics, economy, and culture between the two countries, with prominent issues of drugs, smuggling, and refugees. While there has been some research in the academic field on cross-border governance of national parks, most studies focus on a single park within one country and are influenced by national stances, values, and national sentiments, with few offering cross-national analysis and interpretation of environmental governance

in national parks. This paper attempts to provide a detailed examination of the establishment process of Big Bend National Park and the U.S.-Mexico transnational environmental governance, exploring how to effectively implement cross-border governance under the complex conditions of border areas.

1. The Tortuous Establishment of Big Bend National Park

In 1836, oppressed by the Mexican dictatorship, the people of Texas declared the establishment of the "Republic of Lone Star" in Austin, and officially joined the United States in 1845, which led to a large-scale armed conflict between the United States and Mexico. [1] However, just as the Mexican independence movement had little impact on the villages and fortresses along the Rio Grande, the advance of the U.S. Army in California, Texas, and New Mexico during the Mexican-American War hardly affected the daily lives of the native inhabitants. [2] The war ended in 1848 with Mexico's defeat, and both sides signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, with the Big Bend area coming under U.S. jurisdiction. [3] The local government claimed to know little about the Big Bend area and needed substantial support from the central government in terms of national defense technology and economic development, leading the United States to begin exploring and developing the Big Bend. By the beginning of the 20th century, with the completion of the second industrial revolution in North America, the United States emerged as a true economic powerhouse and a strong nation. [4] The Big Bend underwent tremendous changes, and explorers from both the United States and Mexico traveled westward along the riverbanks. Despite the area no longer being uninhabited as the early Spanish colonizers believed, they were convinced that they had reached the "last frontier" of the North American continent. [5]

In the spring of 1933, Congressman Robert Wagstaff, who had experienced the majestic scenery of the Big Bend, approached Everett Townsend, known as the "Father of Big Bend National Park," with a proposal. He suggested that the Texas government follow the example of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, established the previous year on the US-Canada border, to create a national park on the US-Mexico border, centered around the Big Bend. The idea was to extend the wilderness reserve into Mexico, creating an unprecedented cross-border international peace park for more effective environmental governance. [6] Townsend immediately agreed to this suggestion. On March 3, 1933, the day before the presidential turnover, Townsend signed House Bill No. 771, establishing the "Texas State Park," laying the foundation for the Big Bend National Park. By the end of that year, Townsend assisted the local government in conducting field surveys to determine the new park's boundaries, marking the first step towards creating the Big Bend National Park. [7]

To make the national park a reality required the long-term, hard work of many individuals. Stimulated by the foreign policies of both governments during the Great Depression, the idea of establishing a national park along the Rio Grande in the Big Bend began to gain widespread attention from people on both sides of the border. [8] Both the US and Mexico recognized the Big Bend's spectacular scenery and historical relics as a shared heritage, not belonging exclusively to either side. They advocated setting aside differences for reconciliation and jointly protecting the natural environment of the Big Bend. [9] Soon after, the public first learned about the proposed Big Bend National Park in the national publication "Forests" magazine, which included a photo from February 1936 of the members of the International Parks Commission from the US and Mexico during their journey. [10] During the trip, both parties learned many facts about the past, coinciding with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas's reform movement. When senior officials from both sides discussed cooperation plans, the atmosphere was optimistic, and suggestions for building the national park emerged like bamboo shoots after a rain, laying a good foundation of public opinion for the birth of the Big Bend Park.

On June 6, 1944, a contract encompassing 700,000 acres of land was submitted to the federal

government, and on June 12, following a congressional act signed by Roosevelt, Big Bend National Park was officially established and opened to the public on July 1. The park became an important testament to the friendly neighborly relations between the US and Mexico in the 20th century. In October, Roosevelt informed Mexican leader Manuel Camacho in a letter of the US government's authorization of the Big Bend National Park in June, outlining his vision for the park after its opening to the public, and stated:

In the United States, we think of Big Bend in terms of its international significance and hope that the Mexican people will view the establishment of a national park adjacent to both countries in the same spirit. This reflects intellectual and cultural progress and stimulates mutual interest in recreation, science, and related industries. The Big Bend initiative will eventually be completed, forming a great international park along the entire region of the Rio Grande. This marks the start of a joint national park development plan and will benefit the peoples and future generations of both countries.

In November of the same year, Camacho replied to Roosevelt, agreeing with his views and stating that he had instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture to cooperate as much as possible with the relevant inspectors from the US National Park Service. On January 30, 1945, the US State Department requested the US Embassy in Mexico to inquire about specific plans and implementation measures for establishing an international peace park with the Mexican authorities, in order to carry out President Camacho's special instructions for establishing a Mexican national park adjacent to the Big Bend.

The creation of the Big Bend National Park was complex and tortuous. Some federal officials believed that local residents lacked expertise in environmental governance and did not provide much practical help in the construction of the park. The local residents were also dissatisfied with the policies implemented by the government officials, even publicly calling on Latino residents not to execute the laws issued by the US government. The contradictions between the two sides intensified due to ideological differences. Despite these contradictions and disputes, the turbulent international context of the 1930s meant that ideals of inclusivity and cooperation overshadowed the conflicts between them. This meant that federal officials could unimpededly carry out the Big Bend Park's conservation agenda and implement broader projects to protect natural resources. In fact, the US government has always advocated the belief that public lands managed by the federal government must adhere to a set of detailed regulations and policies, which is the most effective means to prevent exploitation. This established the initial management laws and regulations for the park, reducing resistance for later environmental governance.

2. Issues of the Big Bend National Park

2.1 Environmental pollution

Due to its location at the US-Mexico border, the Big Bend area faces a complex array of issues that pose significant challenges to governance. Firstly, environmental pollution caused by human activities has worsened, impacting the area's unique and fragile ecosystem, with little chance of natural dilution. Many border communities heavily reliant on the river for survival face severe health problems due to pollution and poverty, such as gastroenteritis, dysentery, and cholera, putting residents' health and lives at risk. With both countries' capitals and economic centers far from the Big Bend, the region's medical technology and facilities are underdeveloped, leading to a lower average life expectancy and fostering various corrupt practices in healthcare, adversely affecting social stability.

2.2 Social Issues

After the end of World War II, the US economy experienced rapid development, and technological advances quickly changed the American way of life. Some people who could not adapt to the changing times turned to decadence and rebellion, giving rise to the "hippie" culture. Drug use became a major characteristic of this culture, with young people using drugs as a counter-cultural "medium" to express their dissatisfaction with society, significantly increasing the demand for drugs. The scale of drug trafficking at the US-Mexico border continued to expand, with a large number of traffickers crossing the border and flooding drugs into various states, leading to internal conflicts and affecting cities in southern Texas. Many traffickers became representatives of Mexican drug cartels operating in the US, controlling the drug trafficking network in most areas of the country and posing serious threats to border security.

In the context of Mexico's economic decline, border area traffickers found more opportunities. Simultaneously, police efforts against drug trafficking proved insufficient, with many local police either turning a blind eye to or even condoning drug trafficking, allowing criminal networks to gradually infiltrate society. Geographically, Mexico is adjacent to the US, with a long border between the two countries, making the border area a significant channel for drug smugglers. With the flourishing drug trade, organized and large-scale drug cartels emerged in Mexico. These groups were well-organized, financially strong, and well-equipped, even daring to openly confront the government. In addition to the "grouping" of drug trafficking, the routes also showed a trend of diversification. Drug cartels spared no expense in building dozens of illegal tunnels along the border. Mexico's poverty issues also fueled drug cultivation and smuggling, with the significant wealth disparity between the US and Mexico leading many Mexicans to pursue the "American Dream" of overnight wealth, illegally crossing the border or even joining drug trafficking organizations. After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, Mexican agriculture suffered a huge blow from American goods. With the country quickly facing a financial crisis and rising unemployment rates, participating in drug trafficking became an increasingly preferred survival method for many lower-class citizens. The escalating drug war posed significant obstacles to environmental governance in the Big Bend area, with many environmental laws hindered by external factors and public funds diverted to fight drug lords, contributing to the slow progress of international park construction in the 1980s.

2.3 Illegal immigration

In addition, apart from the drug problem, the continuous influx of immigrants into the US is also a major challenge for environmental governance in the Big Bend area. The issue of illegal immigration from Latin America has long been a problem, with unresolved high land concentration issues in many Latin American countries and hidden "Caudillo" groups widespread in Mexico and other Latin American countries, leading to widespread rural poverty. After WWII, urbanization in border cities between the US and Mexico accelerated, but high unemployment rates, overcrowding, and uncontrolled urban life led to high crime rates. Unable to achieve economic independence through legitimate economic participation, many young people opted to join criminal gangs or engage in various illegal activities, leaving the populace unable to live normal lives, with many hoping to escape their countries in search of better opportunities. The harsh reality of life drove Mexican border residents to gather through social media platforms and travel to the US-Mexico border on foot or by hitchhiking. Intense conflicts erupted between immigrants and natives, with high unemployment rates among immigrants forcing some to resort to poaching to survive, further threatening the fragile ecosystem of the Big Bend Park.

2.4 The economic and social impact of migration

In the fields of agriculture, industry, and services, numerous challenging, low-paying, low-tech jobs deter most native-born Americans, while Mexican immigrants who have come a long way fill these vacancies. Immigrants take up jobs closely related to residents' daily lives, such as picking, catering, gardening, and domestic work. With the continued growth in the scale of immigration and the expansion of their scope of work, Mexican immigrants are playing an increasingly important role in promoting US economic development. On the other hand, in areas such as environmental governance and healthcare, the large number of immigrants has added a burden to the US economy. The influx of Mexican immigrants has impacted various aspects of American society, including housing, healthcare, and social welfare. Consequently, the US government has been forced to increase public spending. Despite the US government's announcement of support for a series of plans initiated by Mexico and Central American countries to promote economic development and stability in southern Mexico and Central America, the reality is that it is difficult to achieve this goal in the short term. Long-term social unrest and the deep-seated problems of drug trafficking and gang violence in the complex border environment require the government to develop and implement more comprehensive and reasonable cross-border governance solutions.

3. Cross-Border Governance and Lessons between the US and Mexico

After the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in April 1945, his successor, President Harry Truman, resumed the US-Mexico talks on the creation of the Big Bend International Peace Park, which had been halted during World War II. To counter the emerging socialist nations, Truman increased economic aid to Latin American countries like Mexico, intending to expand the protected area of Big Bend and fully leverage US influence. The aim was to incorporate the wilderness on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande into the national park, creating a vast international park system centered around Big Bend National Park. This represented a shift from the old concept of single-nation environmental governance to a more efficient cross-border governance model. However, the significant threat from the Cold War with the Soviet Union meant that subsequent US leaders were less enthusiastic about national park construction. The rapid rise of the USSR made the US feel a severe external threat, and the international situation worsened day by day. The two superpowers embarked on a decades-long arms race, significantly reducing the funds originally allocated for park management and diverting them to national defense, thus shelving the plans for creating an international peace park. Government officials then focused mainly on economic development and national security, and talks between the two countries on creating an international peace park were once again interrupted and fell into a thirty-year stalemate.

For a long time after the war, the Big Bend population's focus on environmental protection and healthcare was overshadowed by drug trade and refugee issues. From the end of WWII to the early 1980s, the most frequently mentioned issues affecting border residents were legal labor exchange or illegal immigration, smuggling, and border tourism. However, as pollution worsened, concerns about natural resource development, environmental protection, and residents' health in the Big Bend began to attract widespread attention. Pollution, drugs, smuggling, and immigration plagued the Big Bend. With limited government funding for national parks and weak public environmental awareness, how to effectively protect the natural environment of Big Bend in a complex and dangerous situation while not jeopardizing the quality of life of local residents posed a severe challenge for park administrators. As the Cold War between the US and USSR wound down in the 1980s, external threats diminished, and US leaders began to focus on strengthening diplomatic relations with Mexico. Environmental governance issues like air pollution, water resource allocation, toxic substance control, and ecosystem fragmentation became the focus of bilateral talks, laying the groundwork for cooperation and

gradually trying to improve diplomatic relations and intensify cross-border governance.

From 1981 to 1986, Gil Lusk, the superintendent of Big Bend National Park, implemented a long-term plan for grassroots friendship and exchange between the park and the Mexican border area. This program allowed Mexican park administrators to receive systematic and theoretical training in Big Bend, aiming to change the outdated governance concepts of Mexicans. In 1983, to ease internal conflicts and further strengthen international cooperation, President Ronald Reagan met with Mexican President Miguel Hurtado in Washington, rebooting the stalled bilateral talks of thirty years, focusing on environmental governance and the establishment of an international peace park. Besides jointly combating drug trafficking organizations, the two sides also made more detailed regulations on border governance. In August of that year, the two countries signed the renowned La Paz Agreement in La Paz, Baja California, to protect and improve the environment in the border area. The agreement aimed to curb the increasingly severe environmental problems, specifying the responsibilities of the US and Mexico in preventing and controlling air, water, and land pollution in the border area. The agreement required both countries to jointly take responsibility for the environment in the border area and have the right to make suggestions when environmental issues in one country spread to the other. The two countries had a responsibility to coordinate in areas such as technology, education, environmental monitoring and assessment, and regularly exchange information and data on pollution sources within their respective territories. Due to its wide-ranging content and scientifically proposed governance plans, the La Paz Agreement is considered a cornerstone agreement for bilateral environmental protection cooperation in the US-Mexico border area.

The goal of the La Paz Agreement was to lay the foundation for cooperation on protecting, improving, and maintaining the environment. It was a written agreement based on equality, mutual benefit, and reciprocity, covering necessary measures to prevent and control pollution in the border area and combat drug trafficking, providing a framework for a new environmental governance system. The agreement also established a specialized technical working group, which for the first time attempted to address sensitive cross-border issues such as water quality, air quality, natural resources, and solid and hazardous waste, providing legal document support for better cooperation and management of environmental disputes between the two countries. To ensure the long-term implementation of the La Paz Agreement, environmental protection organizations made outstanding contributions to improving the border ecosystem. In the Big Bend area of Chihuahua, natural resource managers, scientists, and researchers have been conducting effective cross-border governance projects in desert restoration, ecotourism, wildlife management, geospatial data development, and river conservation, striving to minimize pollution. During the La Paz talks, the Mexican delegation agreed to the US request to establish a national park on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, focusing on improving the ecological environment along the river and cooperating with the US to build a US-Mexico international peace park.

To address the large number of immigrants in the Big Bend and other border areas, the federal government gradually strengthened border patrols to prevent smuggling from border areas. The U.S. government invested substantial resources in border security, including at ports of entry and airports along the U.S.-Mexico border. The purpose of the Immigration Act passed by Congress was to manage illegal immigration, including employer sanctions, legalization of illegal immigrants, and strengthening border enforcement. The Act allocated funds to build fences along the U.S.-Mexico border, imposed heavier fines on smugglers, undocumented workers, and those overstaying their visas, and authorized an increase in enforcement personnel to strengthen border enforcement and curb illegal immigration. Arrests usually occurred as immigrants attempted to enter or had just entered the country. In October 2006, the U.S. Congress enacted the Secure Fence Act of 2006, mandating the construction of a double-layer fence stretching 1100 kilometers along the U.S.-Mexico border,

equipped with barbed wire. Congress also approved the installation of various lighting equipment, traffic barriers, additional border checkpoints, and advanced surveillance equipment such as sensors, cameras, satellites, and even drones. Former Mexican President Vicente Fox angrily declared the U.S.-Mexico border wall to be the "Berlin Wall of the 21st Century." The Big Bend desert, representative of the U.S.-Mexico border region, is scarcely populated and occasionally visited by wild animals, making smuggling exceptionally difficult. Due to the increased difficulty, danger, and cost of crossing the border, many illegal immigrants from Mexico who successfully enter the U.S. choose to stay, leading to an increasing number of illegal Mexican immigrants becoming permanent residents. The longer stay of immigrants in the U.S. and the increasing number of permanent settlers have become a significant force in the border area, adding to the government's difficulty in managing the Big Bend region.

To thoroughly address the severe drug problem in the border area, the U.S. government proposed the "Merida Initiative" and the "Southwest Border Security Initiative," highlighting its anti-drug resolve. After Republican candidate Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the plan to combat drug smuggling along the U.S.-Mexico border was re-agendaed, with Reagan asserting that marijuana could be the most dangerous drug in the U.S. In January 1982, Reagan established the South Florida Drug Task Force to combat drug trafficking organizations. This agency, led by Vice President George Bush and incorporating military forces, was aimed at combating drug-related crimes along the U.S.-Mexico border. During his second term, Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, allocating \$1.7 billion specifically to combat drug trafficking organizations and setting minimum prison sentences for specific drug-related offenses. The frequency of border patrols and checkpoints was increased, military anti-drug and anti-terrorism training was strengthened, and related laws and regulations were improved. Harsh measures were taken against illegal immigrants involved in drug trafficking in the border area to maintain stability.

Reagan's administration's view on drug trade was that "cutting off the source of drugs can solve America's drug problem. Reducing drug supply forces drug prices up, which can lower or reduce drug abuse and prevalence." This view led to "drug diplomacy" with Mexico, managing the environment along the border while combating drug trade. In the late 1980s, the U.S. and Mexico established a specialized cooperation agency, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), as a foundation for anti-drug cooperation. The DEA played an active role in subsequent drug enforcement operations in the border region. In addition, the U.S. and Mexico provided policy bases for regional anti-drug cooperation in the form of cooperation agreements and signed agreements for a joint national information exchange system. Signatory nations committed to taking robust actions against drug smuggling, including controlling money laundering and chemical smuggling, gradually eliminating drug trafficking forces in the border area. Under the severe situation of drug enforcement, previously difficult-to-enforce government decrees were implemented, and inefficiencies and bureaucratic wrangling among officials were improved. The government increased funding for the construction of the Big Bend International Park and strengthened the supervision of national parks. The introduction of new environmental protection policies indirectly provided favorable conditions for the establishment of the Big Bend International Park system.

In summary, the anti-drug cooperation initiated by the U.S. and Mexico had clear objectives and strong implementability. The two sides also signed specific targeted plans based on different areas and aspects of anti-drug cooperation. The anti-drug operations covered all aspects of the drug trade. The specific anti-drug actions jointly implemented by both sides included controlling chemicals, coordinating water, land, and air forces to block drug entry, combating money laundering, eradicating drug plants and promoting alternative development, jointly capturing drug lords, intercepting and seizing drugs, spraying herbicides, and implementing extraditions. The scale of anti-drug assistance was large and broad, with advanced equipment and a wide range of assistance, including extradition

and other mutual judicial assistance, large amounts of aid, and increasing year by year. The U.S. government also introduced auditing measures to ensure the correct use and implementation of assistance, and the drug enforcement contact mechanisms between the two countries were robust with timely and close communication. The U.S. and Mexico signed various anti-drug agreements, actively held meetings at various levels, conducted leader visits and consultations, and established numerous specialized anti-drug contact agencies. They unified anti-drug policies and shared intelligence to coordinate actions, avoiding uncoordinated and individualistic efforts.

Over several years of cooperation, by the end of George H. W. Bush's term, the U.S.-Mexico border anti-drug efforts yielded significant results, including the eradication of vast areas of coca, marijuana, and poppy cultivation. These areas were transformed into tree plantations, aiding in the restoration of the ecological system in the Big Bend and other border states. The production of drugs like cocaine, heroin, and opium was reduced, with large quantities of raw drug plants and finished products seized. Enhanced supervision in uninhabited areas like Big Bend reduced environmental pollution. Additionally, numerous drug traffickers and related criminals were arrested, and key leaders of drug trafficking groups were extradited. Drug labs were destroyed, and the spread of chemicals produced in these labs was strictly controlled, eliminating channels for smuggling drugs and arms in the border area. In fact, the stable border situation created by drug enforcement efforts greatly facilitated the construction of national parks. As early as October 1988, the U.S. National Park Service signed a new agreement with the government of Coahuila, Mexico, to strengthen deeper cooperation in environmental research and protection and share border governance information.

Manufacturing, trade policies, and stable economic growth in North America in the 1990s changed the economic situation in the Big Bend area. After the Cold War, the secondary and tertiary industries in the U.S.-Mexico border area continued to develop. The population growth and changes in consumption patterns in Big Bend led to enhanced adaptability of border communities. In 1990, responding to a call from the Mexican central government, the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila near Big Bend initiated long-delayed construction plans for a Mexican border national park. After extensive preliminary work and meetings with local representatives, the states established the Maderas del Carmen and Cañón de Santa Elena nature reserves in 1994. Together with Big Bend National Park across the Rio Grande, they formed a vast national park system in the Big Bend area, the U.S.-Mexico International Peace Park system. The vision of an international peace park system, conceived by Roosevelt and Cárdenas fifty years earlier, was finally realized. The newly established parks covered a vast area in southern Texas and northern Chihuahua, serving as a model for other cross-border international parks. By the early 21st century, the U.S.-Mexico border parks attracted over 500,000 visitors annually, becoming a top travel destination in Texas.

Through relentless efforts from both governments, U.S.-Mexico diplomatic relations gradually improved in the 1990s. The U.S. focused on strengthening dialogue with Mexico as a strategy to address border pollution issues. In August 1999, Dr. Michael Welsh, a U.S. National Park historian well-versed in Big Bend National Park research, delivered a speech at the Rotary Club of Carlsbad, New Mexico, praising the efforts of the U.S. and Mexico in establishing national parks over the past seventy years. He also made predictions about the development of national parks in the new century, noting the role of the U.S.-Mexico International Park in fostering cross-border peace. In November of that year, members of the Big Bend International Peace Park Committee, along with nearly 60 conservationists, biologists, government officials, and landowners from the U.S. and Mexico, discussed joint resource management models for the Texas-Mexico border conservation area in the new century. The meeting produced several innovative management models for the Big Bend area, some of which were later adopted by the federal government. This meeting improved the previously unmanaged situation of the newly established Big Bend International Peace Park and achieved Mexico's goals of maintaining national dignity and protecting Mexican immigrants in the U.S. It

reduced environmentally harmful activities by immigrants in the Big Bend area, positively contributing to the park's environmental protection.

The entire process from the creation of Big Bend National Park in Roosevelt's era to the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico Big Bend International Peace Park system in Clinton's period demonstrates three trends in U.S.-Mexico border environmental governance. First, both governments began to decentralize power, emphasizing a "bottom-up" environmental strategy to cultivate local governments' capability in handling environmental affairs. Second, they abandoned the "short-sighted" governance mindset of the pre-World War II era, emphasizing long-term environmental protection strategies and incorporating sustainable development, significantly reducing economic development's impact on the border environment. Lastly, they recognized the complexity of environmental affairs, valued and guided public participation, and increased transparency in executing border plans between the two countries, bringing hope for better cooperation and resolution of environmental disputes. Thus, the cross-border governance model developed by the U.S. and Mexico serves as a positive reference for neighboring nations with significant socio-economic, political, and cultural differences but mutual dependence.

In the early 20th century, both the U.S. and Mexico attributed the population growth, corporate manufacturing, and environmental pollution in the border area to changes in government border policies, leading to significant environmental disparities between adjacent borders. Moreover, the two countries had various differences in environmental governance concepts and protection measures. The emergence of national parks fostered an independent ecosystem in the region, with both sides strengthening regional cooperation by jointly addressing environmental challenges. If parks are subjected to large-scale, uncontrolled development, road construction, and light pollution, the unspoiled beauty of Big Bend could only be appreciated in photographs. To protect the wilderness of Big Bend, park administrators from both countries engaged in comprehensive and deep exchanges and cooperation on environmental issues, involving search and rescue, control of invasive species, research on wildlife conservation, and restoration of natural flora and fauna. The impact of such deep cooperation on the present and future generations is immeasurable.

In reality, the approach to planning Big Bend was not an overnight success but originated from the 1930s, post the Great Depression, during a time when democratic activities expanded. This meant that national parks were defined as symbols of inclusivity and compromise, rather than isolated wilderness fortresses, setting them as special areas for natural restoration, landscape protection, and local livelihoods. Indeed, the parks proved popular among all classes, from city workers to foreign tourists. The proximity of parks to the border demonstrated their broad utility, complementing their environmental ethos. The creation of national parks spurred the federalization of natural resources across the nation, improving park management efficiency. In reshaping the border, national parks brought both radical and inclusive implications to Big Bend. When immigrants entered Big Bend, officials faced a series of complex social issues. Local governments struggled with this, using tactics like enhanced legislation, building separation walls, and forced repatriation, but with limited success. Federal policy adjustments for border construction were partly to reshape the image of a peaceful and orderly border. This new image served as a symbol for national actors in the U.S. to demonstrate vigilance towards Mexico. Cross-border governance effectively protected the nation from the assumed threats posed by foreign immigrants. In other words, policy shifts regarding the U.S.-Mexico border were driven not only by economic issues but also political ones, with the relationship between the state and its citizens playing a key role. While U.S.-Mexico immigration brought a series of complex social issues, it also severely damaged the ecological environment of the Big Bend area. The construction of national parks aimed to replace past unilateral exploitation and destruction, symbolizing a peaceful and bright future, much like the Revolutionary War overturned old political systems.

The birth of national parks represented a significant ideological revolution and paradigm shift in human history, redefining nature and the self. By 2002, U.S. national parks annually welcomed over 200 million visitors. The concept and model of Big Bend National Park, its global dissemination, acceptance, and impact, represent a major contribution and brilliant innovation of the U.S. in environmental conservation. The American national identity is an extension of wilderness on U.S. soil, and the prominent natural landscapes in national parks symbolize the spirit of freedom cherished by the U.S. Therefore, national parks effectively garner attention, alleviate work-related stress, and guide proper values. Big Bend National Park's management unashamedly emphasizes the park's role in "cultivating future citizens and leaders," inspiring patriotism. They also actively promote park programs involving schools and teachers, attracting numerous student volunteers annually, helping them broaden horizons and learn public engagement. Through contact with natural and cultural heritage, they shape the self-identity and pioneering spirit of young people, forming an intangible wealth that is an essential part of Texas's cultural soft power, profoundly influencing the spiritual world of local people.

The concept of Big Bend National Park originated from the collision of different cultures along the U.S.-Mexico border. The exchange and cooperation between the two sides redefined the concept of national parks, with governments viewing them as part of grand social plans for political integration and cultural assimilation. The park's construction symbolized not the plundering of local resources by neocolonialism but a representation of society's future direction. Rooted in industrialization and modernization, the governance of national parks went through "why protect," "for whom to protect," and "how to protect" phases. During the creation process, governments faced numerous difficult issues like pollution, drugs, and immigration. These complex and long-standing issues, exacerbated by cultural and historical differences, negatively impacted subsequent environmental governance. Nevertheless, to maintain border stability and establish a harmonious border order, the U.S. and Mexico conducted dialogues and cooperation several times, developing practical governance plans, implementing information sharing, and gradually improving the natural environment of areas like Big Bend. These efforts saved numerous endangered species, effectively protected the wilderness, and reduced human impacts on ecosystems through various laws, serving as a model for cross-border governance in other countries.

The construction and development of Big Bend National Park is a victory for democracy, representing not only a struggle between government and people but also a negotiation among social interest groups and collective will. "Who is in power," "for whom to fight," and "how to protect rights" are central questions faced in the construction and development of national parks, with many transcending their class stance to fight for broader human and natural interests. Visitors to Big Bend can not only enjoy its beautiful scenery but also experience diverse border cultures. These initiatives have significantly enhanced the attractiveness of national parks. Big Bend has provided valuable lessons for other countries in resource conservation, public interest maintenance, and legal system development. Actively promoted and carefully maintained by both governments, Big Bend has become a window for U.S.-Mexico exchange, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations.

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