

## Ex-border agent will fight fence 'tooth and nail'

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Quemado, Texas, rancher Charles "Dob" Cunningham has collected a pile of inner tubes, which illegal aliens and drug traffickers have used to try to cross the canal on his 800-acre cattle ranch. Mr. Cunningham, a former U.S. Border Patrol agent, says each inner tube has been "shot through and through" by him "so they won't be used again." (Barbara L. Salisbury/The Washington Times)

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QUEMADO, Texas — Charles "Dob" Cunningham patrolled the rugged shoreline of the Rio Grande here for more than 30 years as a U.S. Border Patrol agent. Now retired, he operates an 800-acre cattle ranch along two miles of the river that has been in his family for more than a half century.

Illegal aliens and drug smugglers moving across his property have cut down his fences, created well-worn paths over his sprawling pastures, stolen ranch equipment and slaughtered and rustled his cattle. A pile of inner tubes used by those crossing the river sits near the corner of one his storage buildings, each shot "through and though" by the 74-year-old retired agent "so they won't be used again."

Mr. Cunningham, who served as port director in nearby Eagle Pass and Del Rio during his government career, often tracks down the intruders himself, with help from his aptly-named dog "Little Runt," whom he described as "quite successful in finding people hiding in the brush."

One might assume that he would embrace a \$1.2 billion government plan to build 370 miles of fence on the U.S.-Mexico border, including 65 miles stretching from the neighboring towns of Eagle Pass to the south and Del Rio on the north that would put a 15-foot high metal barrier along the river on his property.

One might, but one would be wrong.

"We don't need a fence here," Mr. Cunningham said, showing a wide smile under his dusty cowboy hat. "It might make some folks in Washington happy, but it would do little more here than to cut off our access to the river, to water — not just for our cattle but for the abundance of migrating wildlife that can be found all along this river.

"I'm against this fence and I will fight it tooth and nail," he said. "And while a country has a right to secure its borders and fences do work in some places where there is nothing but sand and a straight line of sight, they won't work here. The politicians in Washington ought to know that."

Instead of building a fence along the river in this remote and rugged area of south Texas, Mr. Cunningham thinks the government ought to be putting more "boots on the ground," demanding aggressive patrols and making better use of technology, including sensors and security cameras.

Mr. Cunningham, who has lived on this stretch of the border all his life, said there is "ample evidence" that increasing the number of law-enforcement personnel on the border deters illegal entry and does so more effectively than a fence. After the recent addition of 280 new Border Patrol agents in the Del Rio-Eagle Pass area, he said the number of apprehensions of illegal aliens dropped by about 30 percent.

Mr. Cunningham, who retired in 1990, said the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Border Patrol, has set out to beef up the agency to increase its size from 12,000 to 18,000 by the end of this year, but that it should consider hiring more agents "instead of spending a billion dollars on a fence that just won't work.

"The border is not a nice place and you often have to deal with very mean people," he said. "But the idea of this fence has put fear into all of us. We are becoming more afraid of our government than we are of the dope dealers who come through here."