

RIO GRANDE VALLEY

USGS launches border environmental health Web site

BY KEVIN GARCIA
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Environmental border data is now readily available at a Web site launched Wednesday by the U.S. Geological Survey.

The USGS held a presentation at the ITEC Campus of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College to promote the agency's Web site on U.S.-Mexico's environmental health along the border.

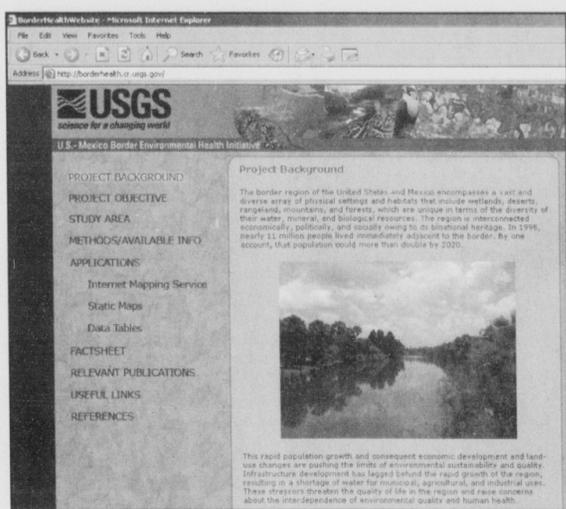
"The border is an area of rapid growth both economically and population-wise," said USGS biologist Denny Buckler. "The area is also unique in that it is an area that is on the fringe of several animal ranges from both sides of the border. It is also very important to migration routes."

The USGS tracks human, animal, plant, pollution and geological data because they are all connected, Buckler said.

The Web site — <http://borderhealth.cr.usgs.gov/> — makes that data readily available and easily accessible by providing a single resource to governmental, educational and private interests. Such extensive data previously required expensive equipment and extensive prior knowledge.

"From a public health standpoint it will help us identify clusters of disease or environmental trends that affect diseases," said Joe Hinojosa, environmental manager for Brownsville, who attended the seminar. "We can access data at a moment's notice to better inform the public."

He added that the binational nature of the information will help agencies coordinate across county, state and coun-



SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

A screenshot of the USGS Web site is shown in an undated photo. The Web site is intended to promote awareness of issues like U.S.-Mexico's environmental health.

More information

► U.S.-Mexico Border Environmental Health Initiative
On the Web:
<http://borderhealth.cr.usgs.gov/>

try lines.

This was what attracted Alfonso Martinez Muñoz, delegate for the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), a Mexican government agency that tracks pollution and natural resources.

"Environmental factors don't recognize political boundaries," Martinez said. "If we don't take care of the natural resources available to the people, we could have prob-

'Environmental factors don't recognize political boundaries.'

Alfonso Martinez Muñoz, delegate for the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources

lems."

He added that the new USGS Web site could be a powerful tool to make that happen.

"All of this information is very important in order to make better decisions," Martinez said.

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DA: DWI charge dismissed against Commissioners Court counsel

BY SERGIO CHAPA
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

A judge on Wednesday dismissed DWI and unlawful carrying a weapon charges against Cameron County Commissioners Court Counsel Doug Wright, according to the county district attorney's office.

According to court records, South Padre Island police arrested Wright in the early morning hours of Nov. 20 after he hit a street sign at the foot of the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway.

Wright was charged with driving while intoxicated, duty upon striking a fixed object and unlawful carrying a weapon after police found a handgun inside his vehicle.

Wright pleaded no contest to all three charges before County Court 3 Judge Dan Robles on Wednesday. But Robles dismissed the DWI

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*Armando Villalobos
Cameron County district attorney*

and unlawful carrying a weapon charges, said District Attorney Armando Villalobos, adding his office will appeal the decision.

Villalobos said Wright's no contest plea to all three charges is the legal equivalent to a guilty plea.

"Our office was extremely surprised by the outcome of the offense," Villalobos said. "We will be appealing."

"We respect Judge Robles and any decision he makes, but disagree that he would find a person not guilty after

he pleaded guilty."

Robles gave Wright six months of deferred adjudication for the duty upon striking a fixed object charge. If Wright successfully completes the deferred adjudication, the conviction would not appear on his record.

Robles is the same judge who dismissed a DWI charge against state District Judge Rudy Delgado in February.

Villalobos said Wright's Wednesday appearance in court caught his office by surprise.

"We don't know how this got on the docket," he said.

Villalobos said the appeal could take months to appear in court.

Neither Robles nor Wright could be reached for comment Wednesday night.

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Man charged with sexual assault

THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Police arrested a man on Tuesday after he allegedly raped an undocumented immigrant that he helped illegally bring into the United States.

According to a probable cause affidavit, Joel Issac Vela, 30, helped a woman illegally enter the United States on Dec. 28. Vela gave the 31-year-old woman a ride to room 215 at the Palace Inn at 3575 Alton Gloor Blvd.

The woman told police that she was dirty from a long journey and crossing the Rio Grande.

Vela told her that she could take a shower, but when she got out he made unwanted advances to her, according to the affidavit.

Vela allegedly hit the woman's head against the wall, showed her a gun under the waistline of his pants and sexually assaulted her on the hotel bed.

According to Brownsville Municipal Court records, the woman made a statement to police on Jan. 11 and a warrant for Vela's arrest was issued Feb. 3.

Police on Tuesday tracked Vela to an apartment at 55 Glenbrook Drive through interviews and a traffic ticket he had received earlier in the year.

Vela was charged with aggravated sexual assault and was released Wednesday after he posted a \$30,000 bond.

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