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ADEQ to Conduct Cleanups of Migrant Trash from Border Crossings in Santa Cruz County

PHOENIX (Jan. 24, 2008) - Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Director Steve Owens announced today that ADEQ will participate in three cleanups on Saturday, Jan. 26 in Santa Cruz County to remove waste discarded during border crossings by undocumented migrants along trails in Santa Cruz County in the riparian area of the Santa Cruz River.

ADEQ is participating in the cleanups as part of its Undocumented Migrant (UDM) Waste Project, through the department's Office of Border Environmental Protection. In addition to providing logistical support, cleaning equipment and volunteers for the cleanups, ADEQ has worked with Santa Cruz County officials to acquire containers to store the trash during the cleanups. An estimated 10,000 pounds of water bottles, food containers and other waste are expected to be cleaned up and moved to the Rio Rico Landfill.

"The trashing of the desert by border crossers is a huge problem," Director Owens said. "We have been working with officials at the federal and local levels, as well as community groups, to develop a strategy for addressing this enormous issue and organizing cleanups of waste that has been left in the desert."

The three cleanups along the Santa Cruz River in which ADEQ is participating are:

- Rancho Esperanza, a 300-acre property just south of Tubac managed by the Tucson Audubon Chapter. The ranch has a "conservation easement," which means the owners have agreed to protect the environment. The Audubon Society has helped organize the cleanup.
- The community of Tubac, for a cleanup planned by students from the Rio Rico High School Interact Club, and assisted by volunteers from the Friends of the Santa Cruz River, the Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona, local developers and residents.
- The Tumacacori National Historic Park, where despite recent cleanups significant waste has accumulated along the Santa Cruz River. Rangers and park volunteers are helping organize and implement the cleanup.

In addition to its UDM Waste Project, ADEQ has a broader, ongoing effort to address the overall problem of illegal dumping throughout Arizona. The agency has established a program to work with local officials to prevent illegal dumping and clean up illegal dump sites across the state.

Santa Cruz Cleanups

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“Dealing with the problem of illegal dumping is a priority,” Owens said. “Illegal dumping poses a serious threat to public health and the environment, as well as to the well-being of communities. We are committed to working with local leaders to address this major problem in our state.”

ADEQ’s UDM Waste Project is funded partly by a grant from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency and the Border Environment Cooperation Commission through the U.S.-Mexico Border 2012 Environmental Program.