

Proposal

for

A Firearms Trafficking Group, Criminal Enforcement In Support of Project Gunrunner Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives El Paso, Texas

March 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The El Paso Field Office (EPFO), Dallas Field Division, is charged with the criminal enforcement activities dedicated to reducing violent crime and protecting the public throughout the Southwestern part of Texas. Currently the El Paso Field Office covers the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Reeves, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio, Brewster and Terrell, approximately 31,469 square miles of territory. Within the El Paso area of responsibility (AOR) there are two major cities in Mexico that are located directly on the U. S. Mexico Border, Juarez (El Paso) and Ojinaga (Presidio). The City of Juarez is the largest Mexican city along the U.S./Mexico border, supporting a joint population of approximately 2.2 million, many of whom cross both ways daily. Between El Paso/Juarez and Presidio/Ojinaga there are 7 controlled Ports of Entry (POE) into the U.S. In addition, the Santa Teresa, New Mexico POE is located approximately 16 miles from the City of El Paso.

El Paso County houses Fort Bliss and Biggs Airfield. Both are growing and troops are being relocated to this area. By 2013, the expansion will increase the population by an additional 100,000 people through troops and their dependants. This does not include the natural population growth throughout the area. An increase in gang activity and other violent crime is anticipated.

At this time the EPFO is staffed with [ATF] agents and 1 RAC and ATF Industry Operations has [ATF] Is assigned to the El Paso Satellite IO Office. Due to the proximity of the border, and the increased violence along the border, the EPFO has directed its primary focus to firearms trafficking. Firearms trafficking investigations are manpower intensive, require long term commitments and require a variety of investigative techniques and resources; thus requiring a full time commitment from all agents in the EPFO. As a result, the EPFO has been unavailable to respond to and support all the communities within its AOR.

In order to provide an adequate level of criminal enforcement to the El Paso AOR, and to ensure a proper span of control between supervisor and agent, the Dallas Field Division proposes the creation of a second criminal enforcement group (El Paso II) to be dedicated to support Project Gunrunner firearms trafficking investigations. In addition, we request approval of a new Resident Agent in Charge, an Investigative Assistant, the reassignment of Special Agents already assigned to the EPFO, strictly on a volunteer basis, and ATF additional agents to fully support both offices.

BUDGET

Resource estimates for a new field office include one GS-14 supervisor, ATF special agents and an investigative assistant. A request for one permanent change of station (PCS) would be necessary for the GS-14 supervisor and up to ATF for special agents.

The EPFO is currently in the process of obtaining new office space. The site survey has been completed and GSA is in negotiations with the lessor. At this time the location under consideration has ample space to accommodate both criminal enforcement offices and the industry satellite office. To facilitate the transition to the two groups it would be in the best interest of the Bureau to include the additional required space in the current space project. The anticipated completion date for the project is October 2008. The lease at present expires in June 2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Dallas Field Division recognizes the current state of budgetary resources throughout ATF, we feel that in order to significantly impact violent crime, firearms trafficking to Mexico, and to maintain ATF's status, the additional resources are needed. We recommend the following courses of action:

- Implement a new organizational code for El Paso II
- Acquire office space for ATF agents, 1 RAC, 1 IA and ATF TFO's
- Approve one PCS move of a GS-14 supervisor to El Paso II
- Approve up to ATF PCS moves of GS-12/13 special agents to EPFO and El Paso II
- Solicit agent volunteers from the El Paso Field Office, the Dallas Field Division, and the Bureau for both offices and reassign them as approved
- Advertise and hire one investigative analyst (GS-7/8)
- Provide all additional equipment to support El Paso II