**S1E22 National Butterfly Center.mp3**

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:00:21] Welcome to a talk on the wild side. Your biweekly tour of all things wild in Texas. I'm your host, Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak. We have an intriguing and important story to share with you today. I'm going to be talking with Miss Marianna Trevino Wright of the National Butterfly Center, and she will be sharing some challenges that she's faced in recent years. So many times people choose a career in conservation because we want to have a positive impact on the planet, or at least our little corner of it. We have a passion for wild places or wildlife or the oceans or rivers, and we've been fortunate enough to turn that avocation into a vocation. Sometimes it's literally a dream come true, and we get to live out that passion every day. But the fact is that it's not always easy and it can be filled with one challenge after another. One of the most obvious challenges we face is that we currently have limited understanding of natural systems. They're complicated and our theories are often too simplistic. So we make decisions based on the best available science at the time. Sometimes that works out for us, but other times we're left with more questions than answers. Many times, though, the challenges we face are people-oriented because we just don't always get along and agree on things and conservation issues are no different. We might disagree about how to use scarce resources such as water. Land use is another challenge we face in conservation. The land we have is finite, but there are more and more people on the planet each day. This often leads to disputes about how to use public land. And sometimes there are unique situations that arise that we really can't foresee. That's the kind of challenge you'll be hearing about today. So let's get to our interview. All right, well, I'm here with Miss Mariana Trevino-Wright. She is the executive director of the National Butterfly Center in Mission Texas. Welcome to our podcast. Thank you so much for being here.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:02:29] Thank you, Sandra.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:02:31] Yeah, we really appreciate your time. And I know our listeners are going to enjoy hearing about the butterfly center and your mission and everything. So let's start off with that. Please tell us a little bit about the National Butterfly Center and what its mission is.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:02:47] Well, the National Butterfly Center is the pilot project of the North American Butterfly Association. It's a national nonprofit dedicated to teaching people about wild, free flying butterflies and their role in healthy ecosystems. So we are their Botanical Garden. We are a show and tell sight. And yeah, so it's one hundred acres. On the banks of the Rio Grande River and the land used to be an onion field.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:03:27] Really?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:03:28] Yeah. So 20 years ago, when we began acquiring the land, we took it out of commercial crop rotation and began revegetating it. And of course, the land is. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley wildlife conservation corridor. Mm hmm. Which is it's been described as a string of pearls. And it's a public private property initiative that was started in the 1970s. As a very serious and deliberate undertaking to preserve native habitat in South Texas, because Texas Parks and Wildlife had already recognized then that less than five percent of our native habitat remains.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:04:24] Less than five percent in the Rio Grande Valley. Yes. Yeah, well, that's really interesting. I didn't know. I didn't know hardly any of that. So you said you have re-vegetated it after the onion field? What kind of vegetation would people find there now?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:04:42] Well, we've planted over 300 species of native plants, and, you know, most people nowadays can't name five trees or wildflowers that belong in the landscape where they live in endemic or native plants. But they can name five celebrities or video game characters or musicians. So. I could list lots of things about, for example, the Mukiele tree is the host plant for the red border. Wow. And the Visa Delia is the host plant for the Mexican blue wing. OK, most most people know that milkweed and there are over 100 different species of milkweed. On the North American continent, but we have several endemic species, one of them is. She thought. That's the colloquial name, not the scientific name. Mm-Hmm. But we've planted over 5000 saw milkweed on the plant on the on the property to support the monarchs. But we also have plants like stinging nettle. That's not a plant anyone really wants on their landscaping, but

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:06:15] Yeah I ran into that before

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:06:17] it is the host or the common muestra, which is a very pretty yellow and white butterfly with this lovely flightpath pattern. And it's, you know, as if all butterflies aren't beautiful, but it's it's a charming butterfly. But if you don't allow the stinging nettle to grow, you don't have this butterfly. So that's just a small taste of what's on the property.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:06:48] Wow, that's neat. So I'm getting the idea here that the Rio Grande Valley is important for butterflies was it was the Rio Grande Valley specifically chosen, or was that just happenstance?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:07:04] For the National Butterfly Center, it was specifically chosen, and it was chosen by Dr. Jeffrey Glasberg, the founder of Naba. He leads tours all over the world teaching people about butterflies, taking them on photo safaris, that that sort of thing. And. Among those available for destinations was the Rio Grande Valley. Really? And that's because the Rio Grande Valley has a greater volume and variety of butterflies than anywhere in North America. Wow, that. Yeah. Yeah. That is because 11 biologically distinct ecosystems converge in the four county region that make up the Lower Rio Grande Valley. And this board, county region could fit inside San Diego County in California, so this is a huge area. But there's each distinct ecosystem has its own Flora. And because each butterfly species is intimately tied to one or two plant species, you know, butterfly young, their larva caterpillars are obligate feeders. They can only feed on their host plant to complete their life cycle. So this diversity of flora? Supports this incredible diversity of fauna. And Dr. Glasberg led a tour to the Rio Grande Valley one time, and as Legend has it, at least one of his tour participants said, Wow, you know, this place is so awesome. Wouldn't it be cool if we could come here year round? Like, I've never had a place where butterfly enthusiasts could visit any time they wanted and experience the wonder of butterflies in the Rio Grande Valley? And Dr. Glasberg said That's a great idea, but let's go talk to some people. And he went to the Greater Michigan Chamber of Commerce. And there he encountered a woman who may have been the president of the chamber at the time. Her name is Viola Espinosa, and she's still here in our community. And Dr. Glasberg says they told her about their idea, fully expecting to be laughed out of town. And instead, she said, That sounds really cool. Maybe we can, you know, help this happen. And it did. She connected Dr. Glasberg with Mike Rhodes and his business partners at that time. Mike Rhodes is a local developer. But he was all about living in harmony with nature and promoting native landscapes, even within his residential subdivisions. And so he donated the first 70 acres of land to Naba to start the National Butterfly Center. And that got the ball rolling, and we've just continued to grow since then.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:10:38] Wow, what a great story. I love it. Yeah, that is a great story. And you mentioned that all butterflies are pretty. I would agree with that, too. I don't know anybody who doesn't enjoy seeing butterflies, but butterflies are more than just pretty faces. So tell our listeners, what are the roles that butterflies play in ecosystems and why is it really important to have a diverse community of butterfly species?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:11:06] So. Butterflies pollinate. Nearly all of our trees, grasses, shrubs and wildflowers. Over recent years, people have learned how critical bees are to pollinating our food crops. It's estimated that one out of every three bites of food a person takes is pollinated by bees. But people don't know that butterflies pretty much. Pollinate everything else. So if we don't have butterflies. We won't have all of the plant life that covers the planet that holds soil in place to prevent dust bowl scenarios and land erosion that filters the water going into the ground table that produces oxygen for all of us. And that also reduced radiant heat reflected off the planet's surface. If there is no green stuff there, so. Butterflies are keeping us alive on planet Earth.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:12:35] Absolutely.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:12:36] It sounds like an exaggeration, but it's not.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:12:39] No, I think you're right. Like I said, more than just pretty faces. Yep. Wow. They do have some really important jobs. So you mentioned classes at the National Butterfly Center. And so what kind of classes and activities occurred? The Butterfly Center? What what can the public see and do there?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:13:05] Well, when we're open to the public, which used to be seven days a week from eight to five, we have school field trips for her children where they get traditional field education. They get to go outdoors and explore. We are Project Wild Certified Educators. Project Wild is the nation's oldest environmental curriculum that is correlated in Texas to Teeks, which are the Texas essential knowledge and skills that are taught by our our public school system. And we all we also have lesson plans. We have our own lesson plans, but we also do opportunistic teaching. And so like when a school science coordinator, a campus or district science coordinator calls this and says. Describe a typical field trip. We'll tell them, you know, we're going to cover butterfly life cycle for your third graders because that's part of their curriculum for that year. And we're going to cover the water cycle if that's on the agenda. We're going to cover reptiles and, you know, cold blooded versus warm blooded creatures as part of our walk and talk, but also. If we walk out of the visitor center to start our hike and our lessons and we encounter Mexican free tailed bat, a Brazilian free tailed bat. We're going to teach about that, too. That's an opportunity to learn if if we walk out of the building and there's a giant pile of scat left behind by some animal. We're going to learn all about tracks and scat and you know, how wildlife serve as. Seed distributors, how you know, the role that they play in ecosystems, apex predators and all of that. So that's what people can learn in addition to enjoying all of the exhibits that we have in the visitors center. You know, when those are museum type things with lots of information and then we do guided tours, we do wildlife photography tours and even photo classes. At times we we've done build a bear house workshops where people learn all about that. So I mean, it's just there's an enormous amount of learning going on about all of the wild creatures and features of the Rio Grande Valley. It is an immersive hands on experience and we say you never know what you'll see at the NBC. You know, we take because our property goes to the Rio Grande River and we are one of very few places where the public can still experience the Rio Grande River. We do fishing. We allow visitors to come in and fish, but we also have youth fishing poles and so we do kid fish adventures. And so, yeah, it's about a lot more than butterflies.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:16:44] So you mentioned that those things happen when you're open, and I understand that the Butterflies Center has recently had to close its door because of credible threats of violence. This is a story that started in 2017 with the proposed expansion of the border wall. Can you take us back to 2017 and walk us through what happened several years ago that caused the butterflies center to become a center of political debate?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:17:14] So after President Trump was elected and, you know, he had his signature campaign promise, which was to build the wall, we fully expected that the government would. Exercised their constitutional authority to take a portion of the National Butterfly Center to build a border wall. But what happened was on July 20th, 2017, I went over the levee at the Butterfly Center, which is bisected by the mission main canal. And I found five workmen near three with chainsaws and one with a brush hog and one with a brush. So those are two very large pieces of heavy equipment for eliminating vegetation. And these five workmen were cutting down trees and clearing the land. And it was really, you know, like a bucket of cold water in the face, the moment I was stunned and I said, Who are you and what are you doing here? Right? And they said the government said, Just declare this land for a border wall. Wow. Yeah. And I mean, it's not my land personally, but I am the agent matter there and I said my land. Mm-Hmm. And the young man with the chainsaw looked at me about as confused as I was looking at him confused. And he said, Ma'am, maybe I should call my supervisor, and I said, Yes, I think you should call your supervisor. And when the supervisor came, he was on the phone. He was quite animated. He was waving some papers around and having this conversation with someone and I could see. On his paper, there were photos and the photos were of our property, of our gate and our signs of the area where they had begun work. Mm-Hmm. And I asked him, You know, what's the deal? And he said, Somebody will be in touch with you. Well. You know, that really wasn't much of an answer. So I called my community border liaison with U.S. Border Patrol at that time, I had a community border liaison that we could call on for questions or problems or whatever. And I called him and I said, Hey, I just found these guys. They said the government sent them for a while what's going on? And he had no idea.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:19:59] Really?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:20:01] Really. And he said, Let me make some calls and see what I can find out. And I checked in with them again later in the day. He never had any answers. But the next morning I got to work and five Border Patrol agents were there to speak with me. And we went inside the visitors center and they told me that what I was reporting had happened because we had gone to the media and YouTube and Facebook and everything that what we were reporting had happened had not happened.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:20:36] Oh OK. Yeah.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:20:40] And I said, that's great getting your trucks, boys and follow me over the levee. And they did. And the brush hog and the brush boom were still there, the contractors had left their equipment on our land along with all of the felled trees and everything. So then it was me with five Border Patrol agents walking around scratching their heads, murmuring to one another. Darling people on their phones because they clearly had no idea what was happening, either. I guess it was all above their pay grade. Wow. So so they told me over the coming week that someone from Customs and Border Protection real estate office would be in touch with me, and we had an appointment set for August 1st. OK. On August 1st, I got a text message that my appointment was canceled because they were. And I quote not ready to meet with me. And I couldn't get any further explanation of what that was supposed to mean. But. On August 1st, instead of meeting with someone from the real estate office, Chief Manuel Prada showed up. He was the chief of the Rio Grande Valley sector of U.S. Border Patrol at the time. OK. He showed up in plain clothes with his secretary with his attache. And a uniformed agent. And he sat with me and I recorded this meeting. Hmm. And he told me that yes, the government had sent those contractors and they would be back. That they had come. For border wall construction. And that armed US government agents would be present in the future. To safeguard. The employees of for profit private corporations. Because. And these are his words. People get pretty upset when we take their land.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:23:04] Well, OK.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:23:07] Yeah. But this was nine months before any congressional vote. Authorizing border wall construction or appropriation funding it. This was also. Before any right of entry requests had been made or granted. It was before the waiver of law. Because most people don't understand that the government has given itself the authority to waive every U.S. law for a border wall construction. Mm-Hmm. So before they begin building, they waive all of the laws they know they're going to violate. Can. And so that waiver of law had not taken place and there had been no. Lawsuit filed by the Department of Justice. Notifying us of the government's intent to condemn the land by eminent domain. There hadn't even been a letter sent out. Wow. And yet there they were destroying private property, which is supposed to be sacrosanct.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:24:30] Yes.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:24:32] Right? Yes. So. So that is what we objected to. OK. It's not that we thought we can stop border wall construction. It's Hey, U.S. government. You have the authority to do this. For your law and order project. Mm-Hmm. How about you follow the law? Yes.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:24:58] How about do it properly?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:24:59] That's exactly right. OK. We didn't think that was an unreasonable request.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:25:06] I think most people would would think that that's reasonable. I think most people would think that, yes. So that was the beginning. That was five years ago, almost five years ago. Can you bring us up to current times now what what has happened in recent months that led this sooner? Dedicated to butterfly conservation to become a backdrop for political candidates from all over the country to come to the Rio Grande Valley to campaign?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:25:39] Well, I mean, what a five years it's been, you know, in December of 2017, we filed suit against the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Border Patrol for what they had done in July and. Things they had done prior to that and and lots of things that they have done since that that lawsuit is still ongoing. Mm hmm. But that didn't provoke the public threat and the disruption to our regular business activity is what happened after word got out that we had filed suit against DHS. Mm-Hmm. Was that a lot of we call them disaster? Tourists showed up saying, Show us where they're going to build our president's big, beautiful wall. And we would tell them, okay, you know, pay your admission fee and you need to walk, you know, about a half mile south to the canal. And that's where they're going to build the wall, and then if you want to see the river and the actual U.S. border, you need to keep walking another 1.2 miles south of that. And then most people were shocked that the wall was going to be built. One to two miles or more inside the United States. You know, and that it would be actually. Ceding land to Mexico and putting residential communities, churches, orphanages, entertainment venues, country clubs and golf courses and nature centers entire state parks. Behind the border wall between the river and the wall.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:27:54] Yeah, I think that's I think that's surprising to most people. There's, there was a levee built many years ago along much of the Rio Grande Valley to just prevent flooding, right? And that's where the wall has to go, right?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:28:12] Correct.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:28:13] And so the wall can't just go along the edge of the river. It has to be on the levee. And that might be a couple of miles away from the river with all sorts of things, like you just said on the south side. Correct. OK. So some folks were surprised to learn that, huh?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:28:33] They were really surprised to learn that, and then they were even more surprised to understand that. Eminent domain allows the government to seize only the land they need for their project. OK, so they pay a portion of private property, but the rest of it, you know, remains the property of the landowner. Sure. And they cannot be denied access to their land or use and enjoyment of it. So that means that the border wall has gates in it. Mm hmm. Every couple of miles there is a gate and that gate opens and closes with an electronic keypad like the kind you might have on your garage door at home. Yeah. And everybody gets the gate code by everybody.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:29:29] Who do you mean by everybody?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:29:31] I mean, everybody who lives back there or belongs to the country club and is going to play golf, everybody who belongs to the church and wants to go worship there, everybody who. Lives there in the residential community that's been walled off. But not just all of those people, every service provider, so every first responder, so fire ambulance, police, every Time Warner Cable Guy, every public garbage man, every municipal water meter reader. I mean, everybody gets the gate code.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:30:20] OK. And so, so folks are just going back and forth. Through the gates, many gates along the wall on a regular basis. Yeah.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:30:34] Hmm. And you know, so. Any idea that the gate code would be kept secret or that some bad hombre couldn't join the country club or buy a house behind the border wall? Yeah. I mean, it's just preposterous. There's there's really no security. OK, sure. In the wall. So. Twenty seventeen, we fast forward to 2019. Mm. In May of 2019, it was widely reported that Jared Kushner told an Oval Office full of GOP senators, We sold the butterfly thing. Hmm. And, you know, we were made aware of this, but had no idea what it meant. OK? Until Steve Bannon's We Build the wall operation took aim at us.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:31:40] OK. And by "took aim" at you, what do you mean by that one?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:31:46] Hmm. First, build a tiny section less than a half mile of. Private border wall on the international boundary line in Sunland Park, New Mexico, a suburb of El Paso. And then they came to Mission Texas.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:32:08] Oh, that's a big that's a big hop down the river.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:32:12] It is. And when they change Mission Texas, we now know from Tommy Fisher. Fisher Industries from his own sworn testimony in court. But they tried to buy the land right next door to us. Hmm. They weren't able to do that. They had to buy land one property over. But they claim to be at Annex to the National Butterfly Center when they launched their malicious, defamatory campaign of lies against us and against me personally.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:32:58] Wow. I'm sorry to hear you've been the subject of lies. What? What were these lies?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:33:05] They claimed on all of their media channels, Twitter and YouTube and space online supposed news sites that the National Butterfly Center was a cartel friend and that we were actively engaged in smuggling and human trafficking, that we were bringing drugs and people across the property, that there were dead bodies and terrorists found there, and that I personally was selling women and children into sex slavery.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:33:47] How have there been dead bodies there?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:33:51] Never, never.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:33:54] And. Just if you want to set the record straight, have you, have you been selling folks into sex slavery?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:34:03] Absolutely not. OK.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:34:07] Thank you so. All right. I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sorry to hear that, that's happened to you. That's unfortunate. And so lately it's really ramped up and you've been told that you were in danger and that's why you closed.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:34:28] That is why we close, so. You know, Bannon and and two of their other business partners were federally indicted and arrested. And we continue to endure some threats and harassment after that can. Finally, Brian Kolfage was taken off Twitter, he was deplatformed, so was Steve Bannon, but. There are other channels that they now spread their lies and propaganda on, people might remember Pizzagate. Mm-Hmm. So back in 2016, I believe it was. Q anon and or 4chan and and all of these other anonymous, you know, amorphous boogeyman type online venues declared that a pizza parlor Comet Pizza in Washington, DC. Mm hmm. Was the headquarters for a. Human trafficking, child trafficking operation run out of its basement. Who did things like participate in child sacrifice and rape? And as a result of those lies, a man armed himself. And went to Comet Pizza and shot up the joint because he was determined to rescue the poor children being held and abused and trafficked from the basement. Mm-Hmm. The building doesn't even have a basement. Yeah, much less operate as a child or human trafficking site. The whole thing was a lie. But it worked. It provoked the lone gunman, the stochastic terrorist, to take action. So fast forward to the summer. Of 2019. OK. Kushner says in May we solve the butterfly thing. We build the wall, throws up this less than half mile section of wall around Independence Day around July 4th, and they host a three-day fundraiser called there Wallace on in celebration of their accomplishments building private border wall. And the operatives and the content creators promote lies. And inflammatory rhetoric. That ultimately. Leads a man from Plano, Texas, to drive to El Paso. And massacre 22 people at the Wal Mart there. Mm hmm. Then they target us in the fall of 2019. Wow. The threats come, the militia, people arrive. We have to involve the local PD, the Texas Rangers, the FBI. And these things continue basically until. And shortly thereafter, coal fashion down in our federally indicted. Things quiet down a little bit after that, OK, but then January 21st of this year. A woman named Kimberly Lowe, who's running for Congress in Virginia. Shows up at the Butterfly Center on a Friday afternoon with her companion, Michelle, OK? And they demand that we open up. The property for them. So they can go watch the illegals crossing on the rafts at the butterfly center. All right. Well, there are no there are no illegals crossing on rafts at the National Butterfly Center. This is a direct reference to a fake photo in the fall of 2019. Mm-Hmm. So we immediately understood what this woman was up to. Yeah. And told her that she and her agenda were not welcome and this was private property they needed to leave. OK. They said, OK, we'll leave, but then started with the rhetoric. You must be OK with babies being raped and all this stuff. I told my son, who was covering the front desk for one of our staff who was out sick. You go ahead and call the police. OK. The women move toward the front door and one of these women, Michelle, had already claimed to be a Secret Service agent. All right, which we knew was false. Secret Service agents don't go around declaring that they are Secret Service agents. What am candidates running for Congress are not assigned? Secret Service detail?

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:39:55] Mm hmm.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:39:57] So the women are like, finally, they move toward the front of the building and go out the front door, but stop. So they're not leaving, I open the door, you know, to go out after them to keep it moving. We're again, Michelle declares, I'm a fed. I work for the Secret Service and nothing is off limits to me. Oh, at which point I turn and Cee Lo has her camera up and appears to be filming me and the building and starting some video. I put my hand up to block her camera to stop that swat her phone away. And the next thing I know, I'm on the ground and all hell broke loose, and there's screaming and yelling, you can hear on the audio. One of the women is yelling something about killing or kill. Yeah. She called me the name for a female dog. The bad name is. And my son, who's on the phone with 911 one, comes bursting out of the building. I'm on the ground trying to get up and he is over me and then between me and Michelle. I'm trying to. Protect to protect you. Yeah. And Michelle has run, not Michelle, but Lo has apparently disappeared. We then see she's in her car and she's filming again. And. I get up and noticed I don't have my phone. Michelle has taken my phone. Hmm. And Michelle's trying to. Leave to go, get in the car with low and leave the property, my son runs toward the front gate to close it. I'm telling Michelle, you have my phone. Give me my phone back. You're not leaving with my phone. You have to return my phone. Michelle does return my phone and goes and gets in the car with low. At which point she is declaring and this is all video recorded. Oh my God, I had her phone. I took her phone because I thought she had your phone. And Kimberly Lo. Presses the pedal to the metal in her in her Range Rover, and she's screaming, get out of the way, get the f out of my way as she gunned it. And drives her car and swerved to hit my son.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:42:41] Gosh.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:42:44] At this point, a visitor in the parking lot has called 9-1-1 and then goes to check on my son, who had to leap out of the way and roll across the ground to escape being run over. Wow. And while we waited for the police to arrive, we went back in the building and spent some time on Kimberly Lowe's Facebook page. There I saw a photo of her with a man I know who is a former Texas state representative, and he's currently running for office for an appellate judge position. So I called him. And I said, Hey, you know, I see a picture of you with this woman. Who is she? What is this about? What's going on? And he is the one who delivered the warning, the first warning, he said. This is the strategy for the midterm elections. The new battle cry is every state is a border state. He's the one who said, I suggest you be armed at all times. Or better yet, out of town. Because there's an event coming and you should consider closing the center, you in the center are targets of this event. The event is We Stand America. And the event that took place in McAllen, Texas, January 28th, 29th and 30th was their inaugural mid-term rally kickoff event. For their take action tour. And they had planned their own caravans to the border. So we decided to close for those three days.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:44:50] That was probably wise.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:44:52] I think so, because during those three days, those people did indeed come to the National Butterfly Center.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:45:01] Even though you were closed,

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:45:02] even though we were closed. And they used our building. As a backdrop, as a prop. For their lies, for filming the videos that they have put out again on all of their communications channels. Declaring insane and outrageous and horrific things. So. One of the videos filmed a video outside of the National Butterfly Center where they claimed that. Children are being raped and killed in Mexico across from the National Butterfly Center. Having all of their organs harvested for sale. And then having their body cavities filled with drugs. And transported across the river like that and across the butterfly center, and as they begin to decompose, as their bodies begin to rock, they behead them and leave the heads at the butterfly center, presumably and just keep the merchandise moving that way.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:46:25] That's a, that's a crazy story. I just think that's, a crazy story. I don't even know how else to respond to that. You guys, do you patrol your property? Do you make sure that stuff like this doesn't happen?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:46:43] We've never had to make sure this stuff doesn't happen because it has never happened. It doesn't happen. It's all a lie. As we saw at Pizzagate. Mm-Hmm. And at the Wal-Mart in El Paso. And now the only thing that's changed is the backdrop, and it's the National Butterfly Center. Hmm.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:47:11] Like I said, I'm really sorry that this has happened to you. Some people, there might be people who would say, you know, you were never in a safe place being right there along the Rio Grande. Did you ever feel like you were in danger before any of this?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:47:32] Never. My husband and I have six children. We are both skilled professionals.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:47:41] Mm-Hmm.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:47:42] I have an Ivy League education. We could live and work anywhere in the United States and we could have chosen to rear our children anywhere in the United States, but for the last 10 years. A decade. I have reported for work every day. On the banks of the Rio Grande River. Hmm. We hosted sleepovers with Girl Scouts, my husband and I have a boat. We take friends and family and photographers out on the river for nature photography. We take journalists out on the river to see how safe and peaceful it is. Mm-Hmm. Never. Ever. Have we experienced or encountered? The kinds of things in the lives that these people are telling. Hmm. And right next door to us is a 24 hour a day fully operational Border Patrol outpost. Really, there's yes, there's stables, there are mounted patrols on the National Wildlife Refuge next door to us in between US and Vincent-St. Park 24 hours a day. There are Border Patrol agents there and working, bringing the horses in and loading them up to go out and doing the work of Border Patrol right next door to us.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:49:26] Wow.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:49:27] Twenty-four hours a day. We have a Raid tower on the other side of us, which is the 80 foot tall, fully loaded technical tactical asset that can see 100 miles into Mexico with 360 cameras, with night vision, with dirt box audio technology that has your cell phone connects to it automatically. So there's audio surveillance, there's radar, there's sonar there, drones there, boats from the Rio Grande River. So, you know, this is not going on. And if it ever does, the real question people should be asking is where's Border Patrol? Yeah, right.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:50:22] That's yeah, that's a really good question, but. But in reality, they are right beside you.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:50:30] And so not only are they beside us, but since 2013 or 2014, we've had the National Guard on the levee at our property.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:50:43] You've had the National Guard on the levee, on your property.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:50:47] Yes. Since how long? Since 2013 or 2014 when Governor Perry deployed them?

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:50:56] So if any of this activity was taking place, which which it hasn't been, it would have had to have been taking place with with the permission, basically the permission of Border Patrol and the permission of the National Guard.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:51:11] So it would seem so, yes, because there the law enforcement, along with the game wardens of Texas, Texas, DPS, the US Fish and Wildlife Police also next door the county constables, the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office Mission PD, Palm View PD, DEA, ATF. I mean, we're so patrolled and militarized that it is amazing to me that it's not more of a deterrent for the yho tourists. Really? Yeah. Wow.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:51:58] And, and some people think some people might think well, Mexicans or people from Colombia or wherever would know that, and they're just going across wherever they want to cross. Possibly. But they would be caught by those people. But many, many people are brought over by coyotes, and those coyotes are not going to pick a place right next door to the Border Patrol to come across to bring their people across right. They don't want to get caught.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:52:27] Exactly. I mean, they are running a business. Yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:52:34] They can't get caught.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:52:37] I mean that that that interferes with their ability to operate their criminal enterprise, so.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:52:47] So your property really just wouldn't be an attractive place to cross?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:52:52] No, not at all. And if not for all the law enforcement, again, our visitors have great camera equipment. Yeah, that's new roaming deer roaming all around, taking pictures of birds. And you know, I was in a wildlife blind near the river not long ago, photographing the wild turkeys with a with another photographer. We've got winter Texans sitting on our dark fishing and and other visitors photographing the three species of kingfisher. As you can see, only, you know, the North American kingfisher, as you can see only in, you know, the Rio Grande Valley Valley. You know, to see you've got all these people wandering around with really great camera equipment.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:53:42] I just want to ask, in addition to butterflies, these other critters are there. Are there threatened an endangered species there? Have you seen anything of conservation, of special conservation needs there that would be impacted by a wall?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:53:59] The National Butterfly Center, as I mentioned, is not just about butterflies. We have threatened an endangered species present like the Texas horned lizard, the Texas tortoise, the Texas Indigo. We have birds like the Gray Hawk, which were a species of conservation interest up until just a few years ago because their numbers had been reduced so dramatically. We're also a site of robust research, everything from people looking for. Safe and organic mosquito repellent to people. Documenting the presence of the Rio Grande de hoop and a variety of flea details and all kinds of other things that I am largely unfamiliar with because I am not a biologist, but I am the one who has to field those inquiries and also receive their formal paperwork, their request for research permission and for that on to the NAB board. So, you know, the conservation corridor. Exists as a haven for species that have been pushed out. And the rest of our lower Rio Grande Valley landscape by commercial agriculture and cattle farming, by rapid commercial, residential and industrial development. And now it's threatened by the border wall because the corridor runs along the banks of the Rio Grande River. Mm-Hmm. So it's not just about the butterflies, it's not about butterflies being able to fly over border wall. It is about wise land confiscation and about the elimination and further degradation of a precious remnant of native habitat left. To sustain Texas is natural treasures. Mm-Hmm.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:56:39] So for our listeners who would like to support the National Butterfly Center and its mission, what could they do should they donate? Should they call people? What can they, what can they do to help you have a safe place to continue the work?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:56:53] Well, absolutely. We would love for people to join, and joining the National Butterfly Center actually gets you benefits like free or reduced admission to about 400 other zoos, botanical gardens, nature centers and arboretum across the United States. Yeah, they can learn about that on our website. National Butterfly Center dot org under the Join tab. All of that information is there and links. Hopefully they're still working. And so joining would be great and obviously donating, even buying some of the merchandise we have on our website, you know, hitting their own butterfly guide, that sort of thing. All of that will help. And and right now, the national board has decided to continue to pay staff, even though. The property is locked and closed. We're working remotely. You know, our nursery staff is taking home diff cleaning for the plants that we propagate and sell and and all of that. So and donating obviously helps because. We're also currently seeking to retain security professionals. OK. Who can help us with more training and and and a safety plan? And tell us what we need to acquire and do, and maybe even higher to make sure the property is safe ahead of the midterms when we fully expect the lies and propaganda will only escalate.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:58:50] OK. Well, yeah, I hope our listeners will support, donate, buy merch, whatever it's National Butterfly Center, dot org. Is that your site again?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:59:03] That is it. Okay.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:59:06] Is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today?

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:59:09] I'd like to encourage them to get outdoors because it really is the most wonderful place to be wherever you are.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:59:19] Definitely, definitely. OK. Thank you so much, Marianna, for your time. We really appreciate you.

**Marianna Trevino-Wright** [00:59:27] Thank you so much, Sandra. Bye bye.

**Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:59:32] A talk on the Wild Side is a production of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University Kingsville. Funding for this project is provided by the Harvey Wile Sportsman Conservationist Award by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi. Editing was completed by the talented Gabby Oliva. Andrew Lowery and Trey Kendall. We thank the TAMUK distance learning lab for all their help and cooperation.