

# CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

## U.S. International Borders: Brief Facts

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### Summary

The terrorist attacks of 2001 and continued threats of future attacks have directed the attention of Congress to border related issues. This report provides information on the international boundaries that the United States shares with Canada and Mexico. Included is data on land and water boundaries for the northern Canadian border and the southern Mexican border, as well as the international boundaries for the U.S. states that border these countries. Coastline figures for the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, the Great Lakes, and extraterritorial areas are also included. For additional information on current border security issues, see CRS Report RS22026, *Border Security: Fences Along the U.S. International Border*; CRS Report RL33106, *Border Security and the Southwest Border: Background, Legislation, and Issues*; CRS Report RL31826, *Protecting Our Perimeter: 'Border Searches' under the Fourth Amendment*; and CRS Report RL32399, *Border Security: Inspections Practices, Policies, and Issues*. This report will be updated as needed.

### Canadian and Mexican Borders

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the length of the International Boundary line of the U.S.-Canadian border, excluding Alaska, is approximately 3,987 miles, while the length of the U.S.-Mexican border is estimated at 1,933 miles. The length of the Alaska-Canada border alone is 1,538 miles. The tables below list the 13 U.S. states that share international boundaries with Canada and the four states that share an international border with Mexico, with information from the International Boundary Commission and the U.S. Geological Survey.

**Table 1. Length of U.S.-Canada Land and Water Boundary by State**  
(in descending order in miles)

State	Boundary Length
Alaska	1,538
Michigan	721
Maine	611
Minnesota	547
Montana	545
New York	445
Washington	427
North Dakota	310
Ohio	146
Vermont	90
New Hampshire	58
Idaho	45
Pennsylvania	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,525</b>

**Source:** International Boundary Commission.  
[<http://www.internationalboundarycommission.org/ibcpg2.htm>]

**Table 2. Length of U.S.-Mexico Land and Water Boundary, by State**  
(in miles)

State (from east to west)	Border Length (including along the Rio Grande)
Texas	1,241.0
Arizona (including 19.1 miles along the Colorado River)	372.5
New Mexico	179.5
California	140.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,933.4</b>

**Source:** U.S. Geological Survey and CRS phone consultation with USGS library.

**Note:** The border area in the United States consists of four states.

## U.S. Coastline

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has surveyed the coastline of the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii several times. The current figures for the coastline are the results of the measurements done originally in 1915 and

updated several times thereafter. These figures reflect the general outline of the seacoast. The figures for Alaska reflect a 1961 remeasurement.

It is important to note that boundary and coastline distances can differ significantly based on the scale used on the maps or charts. The Canadian and Mexican international borders are less problematic than the coastline measures because there are long stretches that are straight, such as the nearly 900-mile section of the U.S.-Canadian border along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Coastline measurements are more difficult because of the effects of tides and the necessarily arbitrary decisions that must be made about measuring bays, coves, islands, and inlets leading to streams and rivers. The “general coastline” data in this report are based on large scale nautical charts, resulting in a coastline measure for the 50 states totaling 12,383 miles. Another measure using smaller scale nautical charts more than doubles this measurement to 29,093 miles, while the figures used by the NOAA in administering the Coastal Zone Management program (16 U.S.C. §1451) come to 88,612 miles (not including the Great Lakes).

**Table 3. Length of the U.S. Coastline**  
(in miles)

United States	General Coastline
Maine	228
New Hampshire	13
Massachusetts	192
Rhode Island	40
Connecticut	96 <sup>a</sup>
New York	127
New Jersey	130
Delaware	28
Maryland	31
Virginia	112
North Carolina	301
South Carolina	187
Georgia	100
Florida	1,350
Alabama	53
Mississippi	44
Louisiana	397
Texas	367
California	840
Oregon	296

United States	General Coastline
Washington	157
Alaska	6,640
Hawaii	750
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,479</b>

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *The Coastline of the United States*, 1975.

**Notes:** This table measures the U.S. coastline from northeast around the United States to northwest.

- a. The number for Connecticut is not in the original source cited above; this figure represents the tidal shoreline (general, not detailed) used by David Huckabee, CRS specialist in American national government, who has written about coastline measurement.

Variations in shoreline figures appear because of natural occurrences including bays and inlets, and in differing methods of measurement. In addition to the difficulties mentioned above concerning calculation of lengths of coastline, one encounters a similar problem when attempting to measure shoreline (i.e., that area of length along the Great Lakes).

## Great Lakes Shorelines

These shoreline lengths were measured in 1970 by the International Coordinating Committee on the Great Lakes Basic Hydraulic and Hydrologic Data.

**Table 4. Great Lakes Shorelines and Connecting Rivers**  
(in miles)

Body of Water	U.S. Shoreline
Lake Superior	1,250
St. Marys River	120
Lake Michigan	1,640
Lake Huron	840
St. Clair River	30
Lake St. Clair	140
Detroit River	70
Lake Erie	470
Niagara River	70
Lake Ontario	330
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,960</b>
St. Lawrence River (above Iroquois Dam)	220
St. Lawrence River (above Power Dam)	320

**Source:** U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *The Coastline of the United States*, 1975.

## Selected Print Sources

Shalowitz, Aaron L. *Shore and Sea Boundaries*, v. 2. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1964. Coast and Geodetic Survey Publication 10-1.

U.S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2002*. Washington: GPO, 2002.

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *The Coastline of the United States*, 1975.

Van Zandt, Franklin K. *Boundaries of the United States and the Several States*. Washington: GPO, 1976. Geological Survey Professional Paper 909.

*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2005*.

## Selected Internet Sources

International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) United States and Mexico  
[<http://www.ibwc.state.gov>]

This website has historical information on the two treaties — the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty of February 2, 1848, and the Treaty of December 30, 1853 — between the United States and Mexico that set the international boundary between the two countries. Also included is information on additional conventions and treaties between the two nations on maintaining the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers, as well as current IBWC reports and solutions for boundary and water problems.

International Boundary Commission between Canada and the United States  
[<http://www.internationalboundarycommission.org>]

This website contains information on the Treaty of 1908 between the United States and Canada that completed the mapping of the international boundary from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Information on U.S.-Canadian border history and boundary markings along open vistas is also included.