

BOUNDARY THINKING TRANSFORMED

MIKE WALTON, GUEST EDITOR

Invisible Boundaries

Peter Mather

There is nothing we like more as a species than creating boundaries. Boundaries for our yards, our city, our friends, our work, our nations, and our landscapes. It is so interesting to see how animals adapt to, and sometimes ignore, our boundaries. I find that wildlife, whether bears, foxes, or ravens, all have their own personalities, much like us as people, and that every individual animal has a different set of boundaries.

I've spent the last couple of years photographing grizzly bears fishing for salmon in winter, just outside of Kluane National Park and Reserve in Canada's Yukon Territory. Much of my work has been in the small, seasonal, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations fishing village of Klukshu. One large bear in particular is called the "Mayor of Klukshu." And there is another unofficial mayor of Klukshu, a First Nation Elder named Chuck Hume. Grizzly bears have been sharing this place with Tlingit and Champagne and Aishihik members for hundreds of years. Hume has conditioned the Mayor to stay on his side of the river opposite the village, and the Mayor respects this. He avoids people and sticks to his boundary. The Mayor is the most dominant bear in the area, and he protects the best fishing grounds that are right beside the village. This has a secondary effect of keeping most of the young two- and three-year-old bears away from the village. These young, curious bears are the most likely to get into trouble in the village by chasing people or rummaging through fish caches. By enforcing boundaries of his own making, the Mayor is unintentionally protecting the young bears and the people of the village from each other.

I find the unseen boundary of time to be another interesting one for animals. It feels like in some areas where I photograph, the animals know when hunting season is upon them. They suddenly disappear, only to reappear when the season is over. Other animals behave as if they know park boundaries help protect them from hunting, and yet not all wildlife figure this out. Like people, animals are individuals who learn, act, and behave uniquely.





A red fox on the clay cliffs above the city of Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. We can only guess whether it recognizes a boundary between places where people are predominant and the surrounding countryside.



Tombstone Territorial Park in the Yukon Territory. The park protects a unique wilderness of rugged peaks, permafrost landforms, and abundant wildlife, all reflected in a rich First Nations culture. The area's Hän name, **Ddhäl Ch'èl Cha Nän**, means “ragged mountain land.” The park is a legacy of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Claim Agreement and lies within their Traditional Territory.



The Dempster Highway cuts through the Tombstone Territorial Park, and begs the question: What are bigger boundaries for wildlife: roads and other human structures, or rivers and mountains—the boundaries of the natural landscape?



In the seasonal fishing village of Klukshu, on the edge of Kluane National Park and Reserve. The river serves as the unofficial boundary between the bears and the people.



A wolf den lies outside the edge of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), but the den is protected by another artificial boundary. Hunting is not allowed within a mile of the Alyeska Oil pipeline, which is only 300 yards from the den site, giving the wolves a welcome reprieve from human predators.



The alpha female of the wolf pack.



The Porcupine caribou herd has the longest migration of any land mammal in the world, crossing two countries, one state, two territories, and four protected areas, and yet the herd's most crucial habitat, its calving grounds, sits in a gray zone called the "ANWR 1002 area" after a pertinent section of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Neither protected nor open to development, the ANWR 1002 area is a sliver of land that has been fought over for 50 years. Its fate is still undetermined.



A lynx kit on the edge of ANWR gets ear-tagged by university students who are studying the dispersal of the species. Recently, lynx are being seen and tracked regularly along the Arctic Coast, north of their usual habitat. Another boundary broken with the help of our changing climate.



Every animal is an individual, and some animals are very aware of both visible and invisible boundaries. Most bears in the Kluane region avoid passing through this culvert and walk up and over the road. This particular bear doesn't mind the culvert one bit and takes the easy route through it.



Co-published by the **University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity**, and the **George Wright Society**.
ISSN 2688-187X



This article is published in Volume 39, Number 1 of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, 2023.

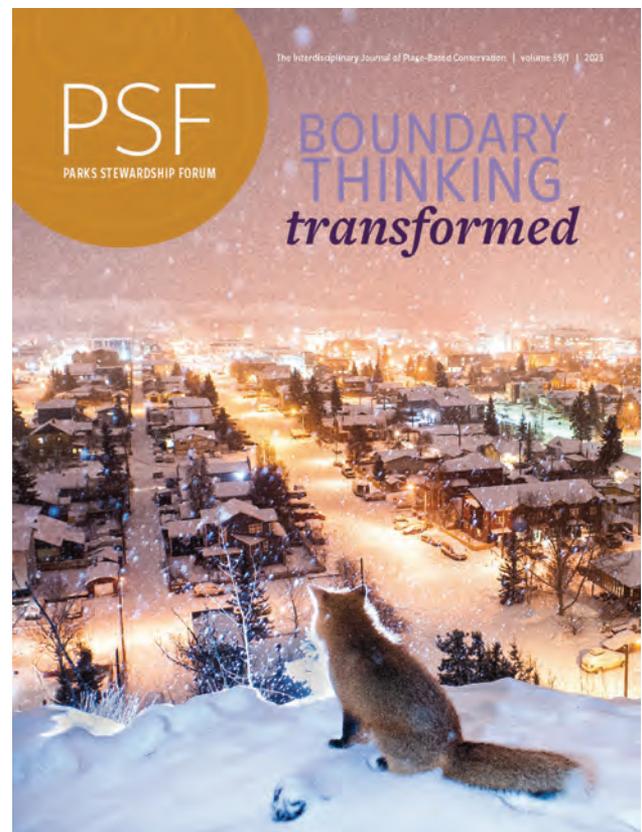
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Parks Stewardship Forum is published online at <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf> through **eScholarship**, an open-access publishing platform subsidized by the University of California and managed by the California Digital Library. Open-access publishing serves the missions of the Institute and GWS to share, freely and broadly, research and knowledge produced by and for those who manage parks, protected areas, and cultural sites throughout the world. A version of *Parks Stewardship Forum* designed for online reading is also available at <https://parks.berkeley.edu/psf>. For information about publishing in PSF, write to psf@georgewright.org.

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The journal continues *The George Wright Forum*, published 1981–2018 by the George Wright Society.

PSF is designed by Laurie Frasier • lauriefrasier.com



On the cover of this issue

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PETER MATHER