

## BOUNDARY THINKING TRANSFORMED

MIKE WALTON, GUEST EDITOR

# Boundary Thinking Transformed

*Mike Walton*

**Boundary Thinking Transformed** aims to explore the idea of boundaries in the context of protected areas. We wanted to explore what boundaries are for people who have experienced them as part of their lives. We wanted to tackle what “across boundaries” might mean, and what “crossing boundaries” might look and feel like. We wanted to learn more about boundaries, how they affect us, and how might they be changing—or be changed themselves.

Our contributing authors bring personal experiences and observations built over lifetimes. They took up our challenge and wrote deeply and personally about what boundaries mean to them. For some, boundaries create opportunity for research and study. For others, boundaries are uninformed abstractions bereft of meaning, inspiring the need for blurring or erasing. For still others, boundaries created spaces unintended for them. For all, boundaries in the context of parks and protected areas revealed the need to learn more together about how connected and related all things are. The authors’ writings challenge us to see our own biases, reflect on what we think we know to be true, and invite us to reimagine how boundaries can be used to create inclusiveness, set aside intolerance, celebrate different ways of knowing, and share power and decision-making. The insights shared, when applied to protected areas, confronts the difference between how things are and how things ought to be.

The first article, “Rethinking Boundaries in a Half Earth World,” is by Tony Hiss. He takes on the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, the earth’s fragility, and the need to protect half the earth’s land and water for nature. He explores the American assumption that progress is achieved through dominance over people and land, and the United States’ coincidental introduction of national parks to the world. He awakens hope for our future by invoking the wonder of sentience, the “oneness” of beings together on this planet, and the straightforward realization that protecting half the earth is possible.



Detail from “American Progress,”  
a painting by John Gast (1872).  
WIKIPEDIA

**Mike Walton**

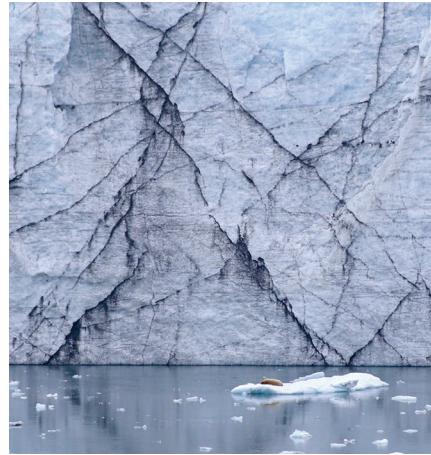
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Next, Leslie Leong, a mixed-medium artist and photographer living in Whitehorse, Yukon, tells us about her experiences in “Blurring Boundaries: An Invitation to the Imagination.” First, as a woman in a non-traditional occupation, then as a manager with a territorial parks agency, and later as an artist, Leong describes how she recognized, navigated through, and eventually crossed various boundaries in her life. Leong explains her connections to nature and how they shaped her life choices. She illustrates the essay with her own photos, including shots of her artwork in various media, which reveal how boundaries can be blurred and, with persistence, crossed.



Detail from “The Wall.”  
LESLIE LEONG

In our third article, “Courageous Conversations: Risks, Race, and Recreation in the United States,” Harrison P. Pinckney, IV writes a piece rich in memory and reflection that questions whether the United States is ready to have difficult and courageous conversations about Race, and, more specifically, about Race and recreation in protected areas. Pinckney explores the risks of misunderstanding the attitudes of People of Color (POC), Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and Unrepresented Minorities (URM) toward recreation in protected areas, and underestimating their potential contributions to the work of protected area establishment and management, and more broadly, to conservation as a whole. It will be a difficult piece for some to read because it drives home the realization that parks and protected areas—which are supposed to be places for everyone, places that inspire the hearts and minds, provide respite, and re-creation—are not that at all for many, many people. Clearly, the boundaries for parks and protected areas too often have been intentionally used to welcome only some people and exclude others.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARRISON P. PINCKNEY, IV

The fourth article is by Meade Krosby, Gwen Bridge, Erica Asinas, and Sonia Hall. In, “The Blueprint for a Resilient Cascadia: Reflections on a Regional Effort to Unsettle Large-Landscape Conservation” the authors reflect on how their work can help others advance Indigenous-led conservation. Members of Cascadia Partner Forum have worked over the past decade to correct power imbalances in conservation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada. The authors draw attention to the need for the dissolution of boundaries and authorities created through colonial governments and reconstituting them as co-created governance structures that share power and decision-making. They point to six strategies that have proven useful, in their experience, to promoting the resilience of natural and human communities in the Cascadia region.



The Cascadia Region (outlined in red).  
CASCADIA PARTNER FORUM

The fifth article is by Brady Yu and Nang Kaa Klaagangs *Ernie Gladstone*. Yu and Gladstone work for Parks Canada at Gwaii Haanas National Park and Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site. Their contribution juxtaposes Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding related to the marine and terrestrial environments of Gwaii Haanas. It deftly crosses boundaries as if there were none between personal and professional experiences, and lays bare the many connections to nature, culture, and well-being that serve Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Calling for the creation of “ethical space” to transcend existing paradigms, the authors hopefully view coexistence as a likely outcome of boundary thinking transformed.



Boat in Gwaii Haanas.  
CHARLOTTE HOUSTON

Lastly, Peter Mather’s photo essay, “Invisible Boundaries,” is a resplendent display of life in the far North. Mather is a photographer in Whitehorse, Yukon. His narrative and images communicate the power and vulnerability of the Yukon and Alaska, their landscapes, and some of the animals that live there. His description reveals the individuality of wildlife species, and the uniqueness of human and wildlife interactions. His work touches on unseen and poorly understood life connections between people and wildlife.



Dempster Highway bisecting Tombstone  
Territorial Park, Yukon (detail).  
PETER MATHER

Whether personal or institutional, all the authors describe historical and contemporary power structures that have led and continue to lead to the creation of boundaries. The authors contend that personal awareness of one’s self-imposed boundaries activates awareness of outside forces pressing to maintain the status quo. Pushing through such resistance, one arrives in space that can be uncomfortable and disquieting. In this new space, one can unlearn what has been learned and create new pathways of understanding. Boundary thinking transformed requires asking oneself, why do I believe what I believe?

#### ALL MY RELATIONS

I first heard the expression “all my relations” in a sweat lodge ceremony 31 years ago on the North Shore of Lake Superior. I learned it was an acknowledgement of my place in the world. It required me to place myself in relationship with all beings—human and non-human—all the swimmers, flyers, walkers, and crawlers, and with all things, animate and inanimate—the trees rocks and water—that humans are related to. All my relations!

I grew up in downtown Toronto, I was a city kid, who fell in love with the idea of “wilderness” quite young. I railed when the tv show *Daniel Boone* was switched to another channel by my older brother and sister to watch a new band on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. At least they had a name that connected to nature: The Beatles.

Wilderness was for me an antidote to “the city,” it was the opposite of skyscrapers, apartment buildings, traffic, and crowds of people. It was open space, lands, and waters as far as the eye

could see, a great uninterrupted “emptiness” that was full of plants and animals, and absent people. Soon after I graduated from university, I was hired into the Ontario Provincial Parks system, and then later by Parks Canada. I was fortunate to experience firsthand what others understood to be wilderness in Eastern, Central and Northern Ontario, and then across Canada. What I once understood as wilderness was changing.

The sweat lodge ceremony in 1992 was my first one. I was in the community of Pic River First Nation, now Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, adjacent to Pukaskwa National Park in Northern Ontario. I was invited to participate in the sweat lodge ceremony by the Sweat Lodge Keeper. Thankfully, I said “yes.” Was I anxious? Absolutely. Was I uncertain? Unequivocally, yes. I was told by those gathered around the sacred fire in preparation for the ceremony, to strip naked and enter the lodge on all fours. I began to take my clothes off and when I got to my shorts, dancing smiles in the firelight caught my attention as did the laughter that mixed with the sound of the sacred fire. One of my earliest teachings was, laughter heals. Humor is a great equalizer and demonstration of power sharing. Thankfully, and thinking of the person immediately behind me, I entered the sweat lodge with my shorts on.

At first, feeling uncomfortable and unknowing, I listened intently to the instructions given. Quickly, the space became familiar. With the protection of the sweat lodge around me, seated on the ground in a circle, connected to others in ceremony, there was no room for anxiety or concern. There was, though, plenty of room for gratitude, empathy, and learning. And a great deal of humility; one of seven sacred teachings I would be taught and shown over time.

When I heard “all my relations” spoken out loud, surrounded by people who would become my friends and teachers, I deeply felt that there was an entirely different way of knowing about the world and everything in it. And I was curious. How different were these ways?

#### **ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED**

As I attended more ceremonies and learned more about what “all my relations” meant, it struck me that conservation science and protected area managers, were exploring “all my relations” in a Western science way of knowing—we were wondering how all things are connected (Noss 1992; Grumbine 1994; Parks Canada 1994; Walton 1997). Later, in the mid-2000s, at a workshop outside of Kluane National Park and Reserve, I recall explaining to an Indigenous Elder what ecosystem management was, how people are part of the ecosystem, and that everything is connected. I remember his smile and his response: “It’s about time.”

Understanding how important nature is to humanity continues to gain global attention, including dire warnings of nature’s deteriorating condition worldwide (Díaz et al. 2019). At the same time, knowing the effects of landscape fragmentation and the importance of ecological connectivity to human well-being has become clear. Hilty et al. (2020) write that “without connectivity, ecosystems cannot function properly, and without well-functioning ecosystems, biodiversity and other fundamentals of life are at risk” (p. 2). While warnings are increasingly worrying, some relief is found in an unexpected sector; transportation. Highway departments, known for their complexity, are showing great leadership in how they are addressing landscape-scale connectivity.

The construction of multi-million-dollar wildlife movement overpasses and underpasses (Jones 2022) across North America and around the world (Ament et al. 2021) signal fundamental change in society’s understanding of nature’s need to allow the free flow of genetic material. Additionally, in support of design changes to linear transportation infrastructure, evidence-based research in road ecology (Hilty et al. 2019), and railway ecology (Borda-de-Água et al. 2017) continue to show how plants and animals’ need for dispersal benefits from ecologically sensitive built infrastructure. While promising and significant in and of itself, additional help is needed to ensure landscape

connectivity. In this, parks, and protected/conserved areas are central (Woodley et al. 2021; Smith and Young 2022).

Achieving landscape-scale connectivity calls on parks to be ecologically connected to each other within networks of protected areas (Saura et al. 2018; Locke 2019; Woodley et al. 2019). In response to this requirement, Parks Canada (2022) launched a new national program for ecological corridors to “develop better ecological connections between protected and conserved areas” (p. 1). Critically important for the functioning of these networks are anchors, connectors, and adjacent land uses that respect individual species’ needs. What is core, though, is the presence of parks.

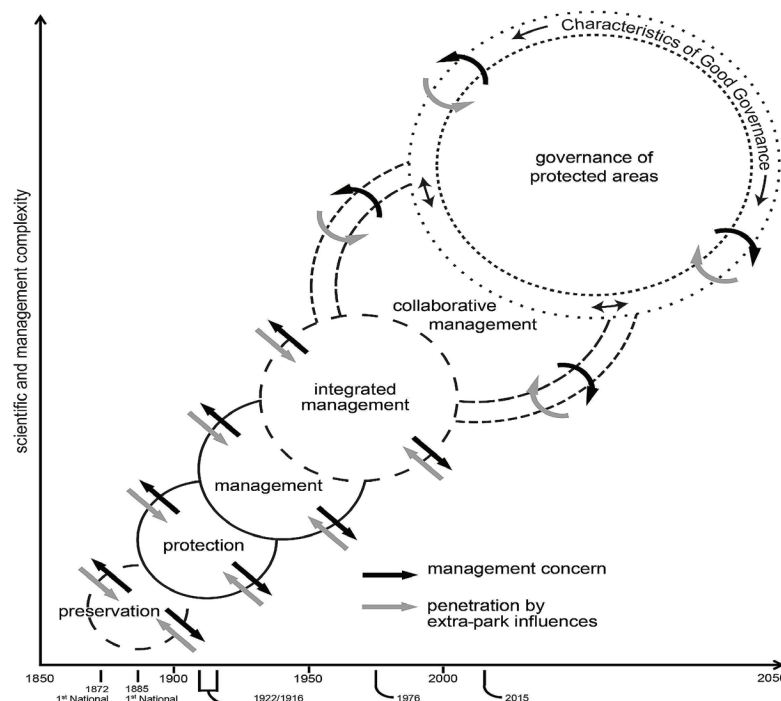
Pointedly, landscape-scale conservation relies on the public’s continued support for parks as an idea—an idea favorable to the majority but falling short of fulfilling “in perpetuity” obligations to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. All have reasons to be suspicious and fearful of the outdoors and parks (Byrne 2009; Taylor 2021; Davis and Edge 2022). Making parks welcome and safe spaces for everyone requires an exorcism of racism, intolerance, and bias in systems design, policy, and practice.

### POWER-SHARING AND TRUST-BUILDING

Fully accounting for the consequences of park establishment and management practices on BIPOC, and those individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, requires measuring and understanding the disproportionate harm experienced by them when compared to the majority White, heterosexual population in Canada and the United States. It is easier to see White sovereignty over land (Bae-Dimitriadis and Meeken 2022), when power is recognized and accounted for in socio-ecological processes (Walton 2016).

Examining power, and governance arrangements of parks and protected areas inspires different ways of thinking about boundaries, their relationships to people individually, and to communities (Grumbine 1997; Graham et al. 2003; Kothari 2006; Borrini-Feyerabend and Hill, 2015). Acknowledging the presence of power, and understanding how it is held or shared from an individual and institutional perspective, can play an important role in trust-building (Figure 1). Achieving trust between parks and protected area authorities and local users remains elusive, and yet necessary for parks and protected areas to meet their purposes (Stern 2008; Jones 2022).

The circles represent the growing size of the protected area system over time, while their borders (either solid or dashed) indicate the permeability of the protected area boundaries. The governance-based



**FIGURE 1.** Evolution of protected areas paradigms. Source: Walton 2016, as adapted from Dearden and Rollins 2009.

paradigm has two borders: one that represents the management boundaries, the other that describes the broader diffusion of conservation values. Between the two operate principles of good governance, influencing management internally and collaboration externally.

More recently, the concept of ethical space has emerged as a key consideration in protected area establishment and planning, particularly associated with Indigenous-led conservation initiatives such as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). Described as “a place for knowledge systems to interact with mutual respect, kindness, generosity, and other basic values and principles” (Indigenous Circle of Experts 2018: 17), ethical space holds promise for trust-building by valuing different ways of knowing and learning about the world. Noted, however, is the significant challenge of colonial governments’ ability to recognize unconscious bias and do something about it. Ermine (2007) warned that “the norm of Western existence, the norm of its governance, becomes so pervasive in its immediacy, so entrenched in mass consciousness, that the foundations of its being become largely invisible to itself” (p. 199).

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Jokingly, our household knew the sensitivities of speaking about politics, religion—and parks—at family gatherings. Created by imagination, and made real by imaginary borders, parks and protected areas invite passionate debates about fundamental human rights, and individual rights and freedoms.

Western scientists speak about ecosystems and connectivity; Indigenous Peoples talk about “all my relations.” Non-Indigenous people talk about going camping and getting into the outdoors; Indigenous people talk about going to fish camps and being on the land. Indigenous people see themselves as part of the ecosystem, and non-Indigenous people are beginning to realize they are too. Complex interconnections between people and the environment reveal socio-ecological systems that support the health and well-being of humans and nature.

Boundary thinking transformed requires investigating institutional governance and individual beliefs. To institutions it poses the questions, Who has power? Are you willing to share it? and, Under what conditions? To individuals, boundary thinking transformed asks, Are you willing to give up power and learn together? Answering these questions determines the readiness for an institution or an individual to be uncomfortable and have difficult conversations. Whichever the circumstance, institution or individual, and whatever the motivator, courage is partner to such an exploration.

Connected to nature and nature-connected, humans and non-humans share the same space. In this relationship, in kinship with other species, humans have stewardship responsibility for all things. In return, healthy plants and animals provide clean air, clean land, and clean water.

The transformative change in our relationship with nature that is called for to avoid catastrophic effects on society is an inside-out experience. Recognizing one’s own boundaries, confronting them, and pushing through them, allows for re-imagining what parks and protected areas are, at a time when connection to the land, to each other, and to all things demand society’s collective attention.

Finally, and hopefully, what is exciting and possible in *boundary thinking transformed* is that parks and protected areas can be reinvented with the benefit of knowing what they aren’t now.

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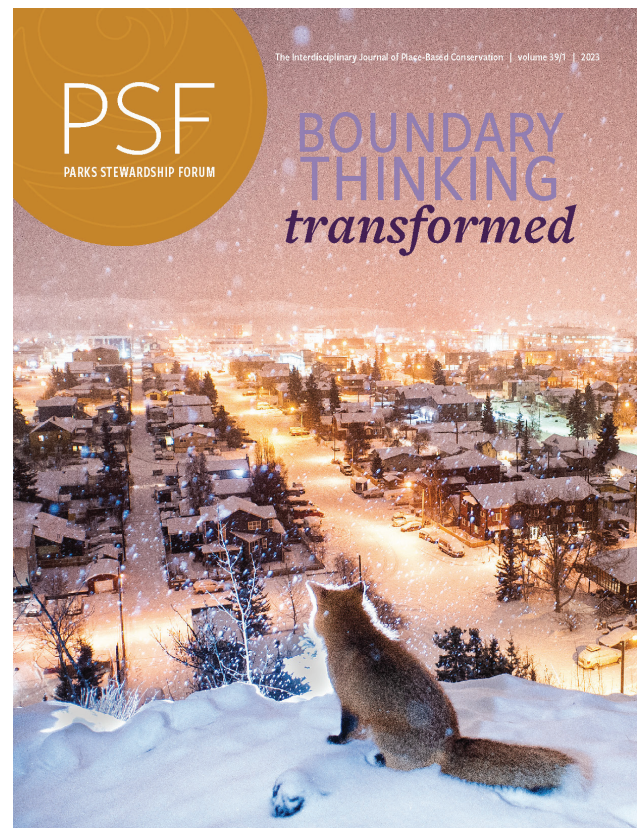
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**On the cover of this issue**

A red fox on the clay cliffs above the city of Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.  
**PETER MATHER**