

Transfrontier conservation areas as an antidote to border walls and fences

Edited Transcript of video presentation at: *6th Annual International Conference on Rights of Nature for Peace and Sustainable Development*, 11–12 December 2017, Geneva, Switzerland.

For information on transfrontier conservation areas, see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transboundary_protected_area

Hello. I'm Joe Gray, and those of you who attended last year's conference will hopefully recognize me, as I presented then on ecocentric democracy.

This year, I will very briefly talk about an area of particular concern to me, and one that I believe the UN could usefully be involved in, namely transfrontier conservation areas. I was due to speak here in person, but unfortunately I ended up having a clash with another meeting, and so I am in Belgium this week, presenting at the appropriately titled conference, *Ecology Across Borders*.

Before I briefly talk about transfrontier conservation areas, I wanted to provide an update on something else that I mentioned last year, the launch of *The Ecological Citizen* journal, of which I am one of the founding editors. This is a free-to-access, peer-reviewed journal run solely by skilled volunteers and it has the unique remit of promoting a truly Earth-centred worldview. You can find the journal at www.ecologicalcitizen.net, and if you have not already signed up for email alerts (which you can do on the homepage), I urge you to do so. The website address, again, is www.ecologicalcitizen.net.

I will turn now to transfrontier (or transboundary) conservation areas. Put simply, these are protected areas that cross national borders, and they offer a truly invaluable antidote to the deeply worrying trend of border walls and fences. We all know about Trump's proposed border wall, which would be ecologically devastating (even if it was covered in solar panels)

and is hopefully far too expensive to ever be built. But it is not just in North America that this is happening.

In Central and Eastern Europe, recent years have seen an estimated 30,000km of wire fences and walls being built, some of them in response to 2015's refugee crisis. For instance, in November 2015, the Slovenian government constructed a razor-wire fence along large parts of its border with Croatia, in order to stop refugees crossing into the country. While such constructions are often billed as being temporary, they could easily become permanent and have long-term impacts on wildlife.

The establishment, protection and expansion of transfrontier conservation areas, coupled with fierce campaigning against border walls and fences, is essential to allow the natural wide-scale movements of many animals to continue, especially those of larger mammals such as bears, wolves, and lynx. These movements are necessary for the species to maintain healthy gene pools. There is also the issue of many animals, such as deer, dying while trying to cross protective fences.

The issue is especially important when it comes to national borders that have a roughly east-to-west orientation. As the climate warms, many species will seek to move from the equator towards the poles in order to survive, and it is vital that there is a clear path for them. Successful range changes also require that good-quality suitable habitat is available in the area being moved to, but if there is an impediment to movement such as a border fence, then it does not matter how much greener the grass is on the other side.

In summary, we need to promote transfrontier conservation areas and fight against border walls and fences. Simple, partial solutions to the latter problem would be to open fences at important times for animal migration, to explore options for fencing that is less dangerous, and to leave gaps in fences that could be monitored with the use of technology.

Thank you for your time.