
Human-animal conflicts and social dimension

Effects of Poland's state border militarization on wildlife in Białowieża Forest

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DOI: 10.20315/evmc.2025.036

Linear infrastructure and militarization are ubiquitous features of the Anthropocene. Transboundary areas are increasingly vulnerable to both on account of border security measures implemented by non-environment sectors and require special attention for effective biodiversity and connectivity conservation. Białowieża Forest is a transboundary World Heritage site recently split by a state border barrier. Drawing on a variety of methods including transects, camera traps, snow-tracking, and audio recording, we are attempting to evaluate how militarization of the Polish-Belarussian border is affecting wildlife and the forest. Transect data from 10 locations along the border and 3 from “control” roads suggests that wildlife avoids both types of structures but avoidance of the border is stronger. At the border, there is relatively more human activity (as determined by human sign encounter rates and camera trap rates) and less animal sign and activity, while near roads, animal sign is concentrated at intermediate distances. Human signs and sounds are most pervasive along the border but fall off with increasing distance from the edge. Observations from snow track surveys suggest that some opportunistic mesocarnivore species are relatively undeterred by the barriers and attracted to military outposts for feeding opportunities. Signs (tracks) of domestic animals, especially cats, also appear near outposts indicating increased domestic animal-wildlife-human interface. A mix of field methods under challenging conditions is yielding insights which can help inform further monitoring and mitigation.