Call for Papers

More-than-Human Legalities for Earth-Space Governance: Exploring Legal Personhood Across Entities and Scales

Workshop: University of Surrey, 26–27 April 2027
Format: Hybrid
Publication opportunity: Selected papers will be invited for consideration in a proposed special issue of a leading legal journal.

About the Call

Law increasingly encounters entities whose interests, agency, vulnerability, or systemic importance do not fit comfortably within conventional human-centred categories. Animals, ecosystems, rivers, forests, artificial intelligence systems, celestial bodies, orbital environments, and other more-than-human entities have been recognised, represented, protected, or governed through markedly different legal forms. Yet these developments are usually studied within separate doctrinal and disciplinary silos.

This workshop invites comparative and interdisciplinary scholarship that places these legal experiments in direct conversation. Its central aim is to compare the legal status, standing rules, and remedial designs available to more-than-human entities and to test whether shared legal principles—especially standing, guardianship, precaution, and stewardship—can travel across different entities, jurisdictions, and spatio-temporal scales.

Rather than asking only whether a particular entity should possess legal rights or personhood, the workshop focuses on the portability of legal concepts across legal domains and jurisdictions where the more-than-human world is at issue.

Core Questions

- How do legal systems classify more-than-human entities: as persons, subjects of rights, objects of protection, commons, property, or something else?
- Who has standing to assert an entity's interests, and what procedural thresholds govern access to courts, tribunals, administrative bodies, or other forums?
- How are guardians, trustees, stewards, representatives, custodians, experts, communities, states, or technological intermediaries selected and held accountable?
- Which remedies are available—injunctions, restoration, compensation, cessation, monitoring, fiduciary duties, criminal sanctions, or preventive measures—and how well do they fit the entity and its need for safeguarding?

- Can legal principles such as precaution and stewardship operate consistently across human, animal, ecological, technological, planetary, and extraterrestrial contexts?
- What changes when the relevant entity or injury spans borders, ecosystems, infrastructures, generations, orbital zones, or planetary systems?
- When does the transfer of principles across contexts illuminate common legal architecture, and when does it erase morally or legally significant differences?

Indicative Themes

We welcome doctrinal, comparative, theoretical, empirical, historical, socio-legal, critical, and design-oriented papers. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Comparative legal personhood or subjecthood for animals, ecosystems, artificial intelligence, robots, embryos, future generations, celestial bodies, and other entities;
- Guardianship, trusteeship, stewardship, fiduciary representation, public-interest standing, and community-based representation;
- Remedial design for diffuse, cumulative, irreversible, uncertain, cross-border, intergenerational, or extra-terrestrial harms;
- Precautionary approaches in environmental, technological, animal, public, international, and space law;
- Restoration, reparative justice, ecological repair, decommissioning, and long-term monitoring;
- Planetary governance, orbital commons, lunar or planetary protection, and legal responsibilities beyond Earth;
- Indigenous, pluralist, and relational legal approaches to more-than-human entities;
- Institutional accountability and conflicts among guardians, communities, states, corporations, developers, scientists, and affected publics;
- The value and danger of analogies among living beings, ecological collectives, artificial systems, and extraterrestrial environments.

Participation and Workshop Format

The workshop will bring together scholars and practitioners working across legal theory, environmental law, animal law, technology law, international law, space law, human rights, jurisprudence, political theory, ethics, science and technology studies, Indigenous and plural legal traditions, and related fields. Contributions from early-career researchers and scholars based in underrepresented regions are strongly encouraged.

The event is planned as a hybrid workshop hosted by the University of Surrey. Presenters will receive focused feedback from participants and will be expected to engage with the shared comparative framework. Unfortunately, support for travel won’t be possible, but accepted presenters will have the option to participate virtually.

Publication Pathway

Following the workshop, selected presenters will be invited to submit full manuscripts for a proposed special issue of a leading legal journal. Invitation to the workshop or to submit a manuscript does not guarantee publication. All manuscripts will be subject to the journal's requirements and peer-review process.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit:

- A title and abstract of no more than 250 words;
- A brief explanation of the comparative contribution and the two or more entities, regimes, jurisdictions, or scales examined;
- Up to five keywords;
- A biographical note of no more than 150 words for each author; and
- An indication of whether you expect to participate in person or online.

Submissions should be sent by email to the address provided below.

Abstract deadline: 11 December 2026
Notification of decisions: 15 January 2027
Workshop draft paper deadline (4000 words): 10 April 2027
Submission via email: Send abstract to Josh Gellers and Feja Lesniewska with subject title - More-than-Human Legalities for Earth-Space Governance

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be assessed for:

- Fit with the workshop's comparative and more-than-human legal focus;
- Clarity and originality of the research question;
- Rigour of the legal, theoretical, or empirical approach;
- Attention to status, standing or representation, and remedial design;
- Capacity to test the portability and limits of shared legal principles; and
- Contribution to a globally and disciplinarily diverse programme.

Convenors and Institutional Context

The workshop forms part of a collaboration between scholars at the University of Surrey School of Law and the University of North Florida. At Surrey, the project connects expertise across the Surrey Centre for Law and Philosophy, the Surrey Law and Technology Hub, Surrey Centre for International and Environmental Law, Surrey Space Institute, Institute for Sustainability, and Institute for People-Centered AI.

Convenors: Josh Gellers and Feja Lesniewska (f.lesniewska@surrey.ac.uk)
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