



***We must respect “the rights  
of all the rest of creation.”***

***-John Muir***

***“A true ‘right of the environment’  
does exist...”***

***-Pope Francis***

## **Advancing Legal Rights of Nature: A Timeline**

**Updated April 2018**

The **Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)** has been at the forefront of the Rights of Nature movement for over a decade, working in the first communities and states in the *United States*, as well as the first country, *Ecuador*, to advance Rights of Nature laws.

Today, **CELDF’s International Center for the Rights of Nature** is working in the *U.S., Nepal, India, Australia*, and other countries, in partnership with grassroots groups, civil society, tribal nations, indigenous peoples, and governments, to advance Rights of Nature legal frameworks. To learn more, contact [rightsofnature@celdf.org](mailto:rightsofnature@celdf.org) or visit our website at [www.celdf.org](http://www.celdf.org).

### **Rights of Nature Timeline**

Below are key moments in the growing movement for legal Rights of Nature:

- In 2006, Tamaqua Borough, Pennsylvania, in the U.S., banned the dumping of toxic sewage sludge as a violation of the Rights of Nature. Tamaqua is the very first place in the world to recognize the Rights of Nature in law. Since 2006, dozens of communities in ten states in the U.S. have enacted Rights of Nature laws.
- In 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize the Rights of Nature in its national constitution. In 2011, the first Rights of Nature court decision was issued in the Vilcabamba River case in Ecuador, upholding the Rights of Nature constitutional provisions.
- In 2010, Bolivia held the *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, where the *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth* was issued. It has been submitted to the U.N. for consideration.
- In 2010, the *Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature* was formed. In 2014, the Global Alliance sponsored the first *Rights of Nature Tribunal* in Ecuador. Subsequent tribunals have now been held, including in Bonn in 2017.
- In 2010, Bolivia’s Legislative Assembly passed the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth.
- In 2011, a campaign was launched in Nepal to advance the Rights of Nature. Today, Members of Parliament are considering a Rights of Nature constitutional amendment.
- In 2012, a campaign was launched in India to recognize rights of the Ganga River through national legislation. The campaign slogan is “Ganga’s Rights are Our Rights.”
- In 2012, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) adopted a policy to incorporate the Rights of Nature in its decision-making processes.

- In 2013, the campaign for the European Citizen’s Initiative for the Rights of Nature was launched. The initiative process allows citizens to present proposals to the European Union government for consideration.
- In 2014, the first Rights of Nature state constitutional amendment was proposed in Colorado. Efforts are now advancing in Ohio, New Hampshire, Oregon, and other states.
- In 2014, the New Zealand Parliament passed the *Te Urewera Act*, finalizing a settlement between the Tūhoe people and the government. The Act recognizes the Te Urewera – a former national park, of more than 2,000 square kilometers – as having “legal recognition in its own right.”
- In 2015, Sweden’s Riksdag considered a motion to create a commission to prepare a proposal on how the Rights of Nature can be incorporated into Swedish law.
- In 2015, Pope Francis, in calling for a new era of environmental protection at the U.N., declared, “A true ‘right of the environment’ does exist...”
- In 2016, the Green Party of England and Wales adopted a Rights of Nature policy platform. The Greens in Scotland have taken similar steps.
- In 2016, the Ho-Chunk Nation took a first vote for a Rights of Nature tribal constitutional amendment, the first tribal nation in the U.S. to do so.
- In 2016, Colombia’s Constitutional Court ruled that the Rio Atrato possesses rights to “protection, conservation, maintenance, and restoration,” and established joint guardianship for the river shared by indigenous people and the national government.
- In 2017, Mexico City incorporated language into the city constitution which requires a law to be passed which would “recognize and regulate the broader protection of the rights of nature formed by all its ecosystems and species as a collective entity subject to rights.”
- In 2017, the New Zealand Parliament finalized the *Te Awa Tupua Act*, granting the Whanganui River legal status as an ecosystem.
- In 2017, the High Court of Uttarakhand in India issued rulings recognizing the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers, glaciers, and other ecosystems as legal persons with certain rights.
- In 2017, Lafayette, Colorado, in the U.S., enacted the first *Climate Bill of Rights*, recognizing rights of humans and nature to a healthy climate, and banning fossil fuel extraction as a violation of those rights.
- In 2017, *Colorado River v. State of Colorado* was filed in U.S. federal court. In this first-in-the-nation lawsuit, an ecosystem sought recognition of its legal rights.
- In 2017, the *Rights of Nature Symposium* was held at Tulane Law School in the U.S., where *The Rights of Nature Principles* were agreed upon and issued.
- In 2018, the Ponca Nation of Oklahoma adopted a customary law recognizing the rights of nature.
- In 2018, the Colombian Supreme Court recognized the Colombian Amazon as a "subject of rights."

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The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit, public interest law firm and organizing organization based in the United States. Through organizing, education, outreach, and legal support, we partner with civil society, grassroots groups, tribal nations, indigenous peoples, communities, and governments around the world to develop rights-based legal protections for the environment. To learn more, please visit our website at: [www.celdf.org](http://www.celdf.org). For assistance, please contact us at [rightsofnature@celdf.org](mailto:rightsofnature@celdf.org).