



Center for Democratic and  
Environmental Rights

## **Rights of Nature Timeline**

**Updated October 2024**

Rights of nature laws secure legal rights of the natural environment, including species and ecosystems. Legal rights include rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, evolve, and be restored.

The rights of nature movement reflects a growing understanding that nature deserves our respect, protection, and legal rights. This represents a fundamental shift in humankind's relationship with nature – from one of use and exploitation, in which nature is treated as a resource, or as property – to one in which we recognize that we are part of and dependent on nature, and not – as Columbia's Constitutional Court explained – a “ruler” of nature.

Since 2006, local communities, states, countries, and Tribal and First Nations have established laws and policies, and issued court decisions, which recognize and protect the rights of nature. This includes national laws in Ecuador (in the 2008 Constitution), Bolivia, Panama, Spain, Uganda, and New Zealand, as well as local laws in the United States, Canada, and Brazil. Tribal nations, including the White Earth Band of Chippewa, the Yurok, and the Menominee, have enacted rights of nature measures. As well, courts in Colombia, Bangladesh, Peru, and India have recognized that rivers and other ecosystems possess legal rights.

These laws, policies, and court decisions, *for the first time*, recognize nature as a living entity with legal rights. Further, they institute mechanisms for people and governments to enforce and defend these rights on behalf of and in the name of nature.

*The founders of the Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights (CDER) have worked on the first rights of nature laws in the world. For more information or assistance in advancing the rights of nature, contact CDER at [info@centerforenvironmentalrights.org](mailto:info@centerforenvironmentalrights.org) or visit our website at [centerforenvironmentalrights.org](http://centerforenvironmentalrights.org).*

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**This timeline traces key moments in the Rights of Nature movement:**

- 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 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, in Ecuador, the first rights of nature court decision was issued, regarding the Vilcabamba River, upholding the rights of nature constitutional provisions.
- 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 state constitutional amendment to include rights of nature was proposed in Colorado, in the U.S. Efforts then advanced in Ohio, Oregon, New Hampshire, 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 – 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, 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 2016, the Democratic Party in the U.S. included a reference to the rights of nature in its party platform for the first time.
- In 2016, [Sebastopol, California](#), in the U.S., included the rights of nature in its General Plan, such that the rights of nature is to be considered "when making planning decisions and reviewing development and infrastructure project applications."
- 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 international *Rights of Nature Symposium* was held at Tulane Law School in the U.S. The *Rights of Nature Principles* – outlining the central elements of rights of nature laws – were issued from the Symposium.
- In 2017, the Municipality of Bonito, in the State of Pernambuco in Brazil, enacted a rights of nature law, securing rights to “exist, thrive, and evolve.”
- In 2018, the Ponca Nation of Oklahoma, in the U.S., adopted a customary law on the rights of nature.
- In 2018, in Colombia, the Supreme Court recognized the Amazon region as a “subject of rights.”
- In 2018, in Colombia, the Administrative Court of Boyacá recognized the Páramo in Pisba, a high Andean ecosystem facing significant mining, as a “subject of rights.”
- In 2018, in Brazil, the Municipality of Paudalho, in the State of Pernambuco, enacted a rights of nature law.
- In 2018, the High Court of Uttarakhand in India recognized rights of the “entire animal kingdom.”
- In 2018, the White Earth Band of the Chippewa Nation adopted the *Rights of Manoomin* securing legal rights of manoomin, or wild rice, a traditional staple crop of the Anishinaabe people. This is the *first law* to secure legal rights of a particular plant species. Rights of Manoomin was also adopted by the 1855 Treaty Authority.
- In 2019, the National Lawyers Guild in the U.S. amended the organization’s constitution to include the rights of nature, stating “human rights and the rights of ecosystems shall be regarded as more sacred than property interests....”
- In 2019, Uganda enacted the *National Environmental Act of 2019* in which nature is recognized as having “the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution.”
- In 2019, the *Lake Erie Bill of Rights* was approved by the residents of Toledo, Ohio, after they were prevented from voting on the measure in 2018 by the Ohio Supreme Court. It was the first law in the U.S. to secure legal rights of a specific ecosystem. A lawsuit by corporate agribusiness interests successfully overturned the law in 2020.
- In 2019, residents of Exeter, New Hampshire, in the U.S., enacted a law securing the rights of nature, including the right to “a stable and healthy climate system.”
- In 2019, residents of Nottingham, New Hampshire, in the U.S., enacted a law securing the rights of nature, including the right to be free from “chemical trespass.”
- In 2019, the High Court in Bangladesh recognized legal rights of rivers.
- In 2019, the Yurok tribe in the U.S. recognized legal rights of the Klamath River.

- In 2019, in India, the Punjab and Haryana High Court declared that all animals are legal persons.
- In 2019, in Brazil, the [City of Florianópolis](#) enacted a law recognizing the rights of nature.
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Single Civil Municipal Court, La Plata-Huila, recognized the Plata River as a "subject of rights."
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Third Court of Penalties and Security Measures in Cali recognized the [Pance River](#), including the river basin and tributaries, as a "subject of rights."
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Fourth Court of Penalties and Security Measures in Pereira recognized the [Otún River](#), including basin and tributaries, as a "subject of rights."
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Regional Court of the Province of Tolima recognized [rights of the Coello, Combeima, and Cocora Rivers](#), including their basins and tributaries, as "individual entities, subject to rights of protection, conservation, maintenance and restoration by the State and the communities."
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Superior Court of Medellín recognized the [Cauca River](#), including its basin and tributaries, as a subject of legal rights.
- In 2019, in Colombia, the Quindío Administrative Court recognized the [Quindío River](#) as a "subject to rights" with rights to protection, conservation, maintenance and restoration.
- In 2019, in Colombia, the First Criminal Court in Neiva-Huila, recognized the Magdalena River, including the river's basin and tributaries, as possessing rights to "protection, conservation, maintenance, and restoration."
- In 2019, in Colima, Mexico, the rights of nature was recognized in the state constitution.
- In 2019, in Sweden, a proposed rights of nature constitutional amendment was introduced in Sweden's parliament, the Riksdag.
- In 2019, in the [Philippines](#), national rights of nature legislation was introduced in the Senate and House of Representatives of the Congress.
- In 2019, the Florida Democratic Party adopted the rights of nature in its party platform, the first state political party in the U.S. to take this action.
- In 2019, the first rights of nature legislation was introduced in [Australia](#), in the Western Australia Parliament. It would secure rights of nature, future generations, and First Nations.
- In 2019, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines issued a Pastoral Letter calling for the recognition of the rights of nature, writing "recognition of the Rights of Nature is at the core of the call for ecological conversion."
- In 2019, the [Church of Sweden](#) announced its inclusion of the rights of nature in its educational programs.
- In 2020, the Alliance for the Sacred Sites of Earth Gaia (ASSEGAIA) released the *Declaration for the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites*, calling for sacred natural sites to be protected with rights of nature laws.
- In 2020, the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin adopted its [Recognition of the Rights of the Menominee River](#) resolution.
- In 2020, the [Nez Perce Tribe](#) recognized the Snake River as a living entity with legal rights.

- In 2020, the Punjab and Haryana High Court in India declared Chandigarh's [Sukhna Lake](#) as a "legal entity/legal person/juristic person/ juridical person/moral person/artificial person for its survival, preservation and conservation having distinct persona with corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person."
- In 2020, the T̓silhqot̓in Nation enacted its Sturgeon River law which recognizes that "animals, fish, plants...have rights in the decisions about their care and use that must be considered and respected."
- In 2020, in Colombia, Supreme Court of Justice declared the [Isla de Salamanca Park](#), in the Caribbean, as a "subject of rights." In 2000, UNESCO declared the park a Biosphere Reserve, and previously, in 1998, it was declared a Ramsar Site.
- In 2020, in Colombia, a legal case was brought by citizens before the Administrative Court of Caquetá seeking to have the [Caquetá, Caguán and Pescado Rivers](#) recognized as subjects of legal rights.
- In 2020, the [Blue Mountain Council](#) in New South Wales, Australia, adopted a measure to integrate the rights of nature in its municipal planning and operations.
- In 2020, in Spain, a national initiative to recognize rights of [Mar Menor](#), Europe's largest saltwater lagoon, was launched with an introduction into the national parliament.
- In 2020, legislation was introduced in the National Assembly of Panama to recognize that nature is a living entity and a subject of rights.
- In 2020, [Orange County, Florida](#), in the U.S., voters approved the Right to Clean Water Initiative, making the county the largest municipality in the U.S. to legalize the rights of nature.
- In 2020, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador selected to review case No. 253-20-JH involving the scope of habeas corpus with regard to the protection of non-human living beings (in this case, a chorongo monkey), and if non-human living beings can be considered as subjects of rights protected by the constitutional rights of nature.
- In 2021, the [Magpie River](#) (Muteshekau-shipu) in Canada was recognized as possessing legal rights through resolutions adopted by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality. These are the first rights of nature law in Canada. Translations of legal rights can be found in both [English](#) and [French](#).
- In 2021, the [first enforcement case](#) in the U.S. was filed under a rights of nature law. The lawsuit was filed in the 9th Judicial Circuit Court of Florida by Wilde Cypress Branch and other waterways to enforce their legal rights against a proposal to destroy wetlands and streams.
- In 2021, two citizen-sponsored initiatives were filed in Florida, in the U.S., to establish the [rights of rivers and other waterways](#), as well as the [rights of iconic species](#), within a state constitution. The proposed state constitutional amendments were the first to be approved for ballot petitioning in the U.S.
- In 2021, a [Declaration of the Rights of the Moon](#) was released, recognizing the fundamental rights of the Moon to "right to be defined as a self-sustaining, intelligent, cohesive, intact lunar ecosystem."
- In 2021, five Members of Parliament in [Switzerland](#) submitted an initiative to the federal government requesting that the government draft a constitutional amendment to

enshrine the human right to a healthy environment and the rights of nature in the Swiss Constitution.

- In 2021, the Facilities, Infrastructure, Transportation, Environment & Sustainability Policy Committee of the City Council of Berkeley, California, in the United States, approved a recommendation to “to recognize that the natural living world has a right to exist, thrive, regenerate and evolve its life cycles,” with the proposed resolution now moving to the full City Council for consideration.
- In 2021, the [Blue Mountains City Council](#) in New South Wales, Australia, unanimously adopted the rights of nature as a foundational principle, following a Council vote in 2020 to consider how the rights of nature may be integrated into the city’s operations. This is the first municipality in Australia to advance the rights of nature into policy.
- In 2021, Nederland, Colorado, within the U.S., adopted a resolution recognizing the rights of Boulder Creek and the Boulder Creek Watershed.
- In 2021, legislation was introduced into Peru’s Congress on the rights of nature.
- In 2021, the [first rights of nature case was filed in a tribal court](#), to enforce the rights of manoomin (wild rice), the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and White Earth tribal members. In 2018, the White Earth established its rights of manoomin law.
- In 2021, legislation was introduced in the Florida House of Representatives, in the U.S., to overturn a state law which prevents communities from establishing rights of nature laws.
- In 2021, in Northern Ireland, the local [Derry City and Strabane District Council](#), and the local Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, approved rights of nature motions. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of the Belfast City Council also adopted a rights of nature motion.
- In 2021, in Ireland, the Donegal County Council approved of a rights of nature motion.
- In 2021, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador selected case No. 27-21-JC for the development of jurisprudence on the rights of nature. The matter in dispute is regarding the pollution of privately owned land by a public company - Petroamazonas EP.
- In 2021, in Ecuador, the provincial court of [El Oro](#) upheld a lower court ruling in support of the rights of nature. The court determined that the rights of nature were violated by mining activities.
- In 2021, the town council of [Ridgway, Colorado](#), in the U.S. adopted a resolution recognizing the rights of the Uncompahgre River.
- In 2021, the [UK Green Party](#) adopted a policy calling for a *Rights of Nature Act* for England and Wales.
- In 2021, the Oneida Nation adopted a rights of nature proclamation.
- In 2021, in Ecuador, the Constitutional Court issued a seminal verdict in the [Los Cedros](#) case. The Court ruled that mining in the Los Cedros Protected Forest was a violation of the constitutional rights of nature, and was therefore prohibited in the forest. Further, the Court ordered that mining authorizations for the forest be revoked.
- In 2022, the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe filed a [“rights of salmon” case](#) in Tribal Court seeking to protect salmon, and the rights of tribal members to fish for salmon.
- In 2022, Panama adopted a national rights of nature law.
- In 2022, the Ecuador Constitutional Court issued a ruling in the [Estrellita Monkey](#) case, finding that “Animals are subjects of rights protected by the rights of Nature.”



- In 2022, Chile's Constitutional Convention approved of rights of nature provisions to be included in the country's draft constitution, however the draft was not approved in a nationwide vote.
- In 2022, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, in the State of Tamil Nadu in India, declared that ["Mother Nature" is a "Living Being"](#) with constitutional rights for its "survival, safety, sustenance and resurgence."
- In 2022, Spain's national legislature adopted a law, advocated for by the citizenry, to secure legal rights of the [Mar Menor](#) lagoon. This is the first rights of nature law in the country.
- In 2022, the [Ponca Tribe of Indians](#) of Oklahoma adopted a new statute recognizing the "immutable Rights of Rivers" for Ní'skà (the Arkansas River), Ní'ží'dè (the Salt Fork River), and other water bodies that flow through their territory.
- In 2022, the communities of Gig Harbor and Port Townsend, in Washington State, in the United States, adopted resolutions recognizing the [legal rights of Southern Resident Orcas](#).
- In 2022, S.B. 143, national legislation to protect the rights of nature, was introduced into the Senate of the Philippines, the second time that such legislation has been introduced.
- In 2022, the [Green Party of the United States](#) adopted a rights of nature policy platform.
- In 2022, the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) was agreed to at the COP 15 gathering of the Convention on Biological Diversity. For the first time, it includes the rights of nature, stating: "The framework recognizes and considers these diverse value systems and concepts, including, for those countries that recognize them, rights of nature and rights of Mother Earth, as being an integral part of its successful implementation."
- In 2022, the Town of Potsdam, New York, in the U.S., adopted a resolution recognizing that the Raquette River should have its rights secured in law.
- In 2022, the [National Congress of American Indians](#) adopted Resolution #ANC-22-008 supporting the rights of nature.
- In 2022, the [Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes](#) adopted a resolution recognizing the rights of nature.
- In 2023, the local council in Lewes, England, adopted a motion to "explore with local communities and relevant stakeholders the implementation of Rights of Rivers along the River Ouse" over two years.
- In 2023, [Jefferson County, Washington](#), in the U.S., signed a proclamation in support of local, state, federal, and tribal governments securing legal rights of the Southern Resident Orcas population.
- In 2023, Panama adopted Law 317 recognizing the rights of marine turtles.
- In 2023, the first river in Brazil, the [Rio Laje](#), was recognized as possessing legal rights by the Municipality of Guajara-Mirim.
- In 2023, the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) adopted a resolution recognizing legal personhood of the [St. Lawrence River](#) in Canada.
- In 2023, the Ramapo Munsee Nation in the U.S. adopted a resolution recognizing rights of Mahicannituk, known today as the Hudson River.
- In 2023, the [Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#), in Ireland, recommended that the Irish Constitution be amended to include the rights of nature.

- In 2023, the Fourth District Court in Mexico recognized the [Rights of the Cenote Aquifers](#) on the Yucatan Peninsula.
- In 2023, national rights of nature legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives of the Congress of the Philippines.
- In 2023, [Milwaukee County, Wisconsin](#), in the U.S., adopted a rights of nature resolution, the first municipal rights of nature policy in the state.
- In 2023, Belfast and the Derry and Strabane District Councils, in Northern Ireland, adopted rights of nature motions calling for Lough Neagh to be recognized as having rights.
- In 2023, [Ojai, California](#), became the first municipality in the U.S. to adopt a law recognizing the rights of elephants to "bodily freedom."
- In 2023, the first community in the Netherlands – [Eijsden-Margraten](#) in Limburg – adopted a motion declaring that nature is a "legal entity."
- In 2023, Kingston, New York, in the U.S., adopted a resolution "to recognize, secure and create a Bill of Rights providing for the rights of the Hudson River Watershed."
- In 2023, Panama's Supreme Court, citing the nation's rights of nature law, Law 287, ruled that the Cobre Panamá copper mine was unconstitutional, failing to prevent environmental harm. The Court's decision also affirmed that nature possesses legal rights.
- In 2023, the [Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe](#) adopted a resolution on the rights of herring.
- In 2023, the [Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action](#) of Ireland's National Parliament (Oireachtas) recommended that the Irish Government advance a national referendum on a constitutional amendment to enshrine the rights of nature in the country's constitution.
- In 2023, the Wisconsin Farmers Union adopted a rights of nature resolution.
- In 2023, the U.N. Environment Programme released a report, [Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions](#), which identifies the rights of nature as a new innovation in environmental lawmaking.
- In 2023, the [Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador](#) adopted a resolution calling for the recognition of legal personhood rights of the Saint Lawrence River.
- In 2024, in the [Utah legislature](#), Representative Walt Brooks introduced a bill, [H.B. 249](#), which would prohibit any governmental entity in the state from recognizing the natural environment as a "legal person," which would include a prohibition on recognizing nature as possessing legal rights.
- In 2024, in the [Hawaii legislature](#), Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa introduced a bill, [H.B. 2077](#), to recognize that all watersheds in Hawaii possess "legal rights to exist, flourish, and naturally evolve, in reflection of native Hawaiian traditional and customary cultural values, practice, and worldview."
- In 2024, the Government of Ireland released [Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030](#), which for the first time includes an objective on the rights of nature, specifically to "explore the ways in which the rights of nature could be formally recognised, including the potential for constitutional change."
- In 2024, in Peru, in a case brought by the Huaynakana Kamatahuara Kana Federation, an Indigenous Kukama women's group, the Mixed Court of Nauta recognized the rights of



the [Marañón River](#), including rights to exist, restoration, be free from pollution, and perform its natural functions.

- In 2024, Falmouth, Massachusetts, adopted a resolution recognizing the “rights of nature on Cape Cod.”
- In 2024, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians adopted a resolution establishing “the Rights of More than Human Relatives...including winged, swimmers, insects, plants, 4-legged, fresh water, air, mineral and land.”
- In 2024, the [India Greens Party](#) included the rights of nature in its manifesto “Charter of Hope.”
- In 2024, legislation (H.B. 923) was introduced into the North Carolina General Assembly, in the U.S., to recognize rights of the Dan River.
- In 2024, Ecuador’s Constitutional Court decided not to select the [Intag case](#) for review, upholding the lower court’s ruling that the rights of nature would be violated by a copper-molybdenum mining project.
- In 2024, the [Green Party of England and Wales](#) included a rights of nature plank in its party platform, calling for a “Rights of Nature Act” to protect and restore nature.
- In 2024, the Congress of the Philippines adopted Republic Act No. 11995, which states that the nation’s policy is to protect ecosystems and implement the rights of nature recognizing “nature’s pricelessness, its heritage and intrinsic value...”
- In 2024, [Linhares, Brazil](#), recognized in law the rights of waves found at the mouth of the Doce River.
- In 2024, a court in the Province of Pichincha, Ecuador, ruled that the Municipality of Quito violated the rights of the Machángara River.
- In 2024, the [Rappahannock Tribe](#) in Virginia, in the U.S., became the first tribal nation to enshrine the constitutional rights of nature in a tribal constitution. The constitution recognizes the constitutional rights of the Rappahannock River.