OUR MISSION IS TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES BY ASSISTING PEOPLE TO ASSERT THEIR RIGHT TO LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE RIGHTS OF NATURE.
From Our Co-Founder and Executive Director

Dear Friends,

For 25 years I watched a bold idea — planted before its time — take root and flourish into a strong organization that stands at the forefront of a global movement. CELDF was the result of the heartache I felt from the imminent threat of deforestation, species loss, climate change, and overwhelming environmental injustice. What began as an idea in rural Pennsylvania has expanded across the nation and beyond.

As an organization of just two people and an idea — CELDF has grown. Over the years, we brought on staff with fresh new thinking allowing our work to evolve. We learned how to move around roadblocks, change paths and move forward. We have realized many milestones through the years. We assisted Tamaqua Borough pass the first Rights of Nature law in the U.S. and assisted Ecuador draft the first Rights of Nature constitutional language. We established Community Rights Networks in Oregon, New Hampshire, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia; and we continue to assist communities in Florida, Maine, Vermont, Washington and Michigan. Through our work, we have witnessed the Rights of Nature become a popular concept.

The past year brought us Covid-19, the corresponding economic crisis, and exposed the patterns of racial and economic disparities long embedded in our nation. The high cost of our current system to Nature and people has only intensified, especially for people of color. CELDF has launched projects to stand in solidarity with these communities, and continues to fight back as states and corporations hamper the local capacity to respond to the demands of the pandemic, ecological crisis and social injustice alike. We are eager to assist communities to solve problems and expand their rights, including the authority to enact minimum wage increases, houseless rights initiatives, civil rights expansions, and sustainable policies that forge a more just and equitable society. We will continue to lead as the Rights of Nature movement enters a new phase.

CELF is in a moment of transition. Our work is coalescing with other, broader movements, and we are devising new tools and strategies for reaching movement goals. We join with and support the many activists fighting for change while honoring the leadership of indigenous cultures in advancing the Rights of Nature. Momentum is building across the globe as the movement grows. We have your support — our donors, funders, and community partners — to thank for our collective success. Thank you for your belief in CELDF and in the movement for Community Rights and the Rights of Nature.

In solidarity,
Stacey L. Schmader
ONLINE DEMOCRACY SCHOOL

Our flagship education program and a key piece of our community organizing went online.

CELF staff developed a stimulating and illuminating virtual course to work with residents and activists on how to confront corporate control and advance real solutions.

The virtual democracy school consists of four modules organized as lecture/presentations, and group breakout discussions.

**MODULE 1:** Where We Are Now – Exposing Intentional Barriers to Community Self-Determination

**MODULE 2:** How Did We Get Here? The Power of Property

**MODULE 3:** How We Could Make Change – Asserting Rights

**MODULE 4:** Where We Could End Up – Building a Movement for Real Change

122 people attended Seven Democracy Schools. Virtual classes were held in Eugene, OR, Snohomish County, WA, San Juan County, WA, Colorado (statewide), two in Florida (statewide), Ashtabula, OH and Cincinnati, OH.
VIDEOS

‘GRASSROOTS VIDEO SERIES’

We completed an eight-part video series highlighting our grassroots work with partner communities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Hampshire, and Oregon. The series was completed in association with the Myrin Institute and with the support of the JustPax Fund.

‘THE TRANSFORMATION FROM REFORMIST TO REVOLUTIONARY’

This video pays tribute to the community pioneers fighting for a basic tenet of democracy: the right to decide their own future. We are building a movement, community by community, to create the just and sustainable communities we envision.

‘ENVIRONMENTAL POKER MATCH’

In this video, we highlight communities and their realization that the rules need to change. They begin to ask ‘what do we want?’ and ‘what do we deserve?’ as they strive to build a structure based on community, people, and Rights of Nature.

FAST FACT SERIES

Featuring: Rights of Nature, Community Rights, Preemption, Dillon’s Rule, the Box of Allowable Activism, the Regulatory Fallacy, Corporate Constitutional Rights, Eminent Domain, Chemical Trespass, and Defunding the Police.

This mini video series provides quick introductions to big ideas and concepts tackled by the Community Rights Movement! Stay tuned; there are more to come!
WEBINARS

With communities facing stay at home orders, we used our organizing skills to launch a series of webinars.

NATURE’S REBELLION AGAINST THE CORPORATE STATE, FEATURING: "Nature’s Rebellion against the Corporate State"

PART 1 A COMMUNITY’S VOICE
PART 2 A LAKE’S VOICE
PART 3 A MOVEMENT’S VOICE

This three-part webinar series started with a conversation about standing with ecosystems locally, in Toledo. Part 2 moved out to broaden the discussion to several communities bordering Lake Erie and Part 3 expanded the conversation nationally.

“50 Years of Earth Day and What are We Celebrating?”

WEBINAR EARTH DAY
EARLY INTERVIEWS LET’S TALK
MUSIC WITH MICHELLE SANBORN ENOUGH

This webinar featured CELDF Community Organizers Ben Price, Tish O’Dell, Michelle Sanborn, Chad Nicholson, and Kai Huschke leading a robust discussion on the failures of the regulatory system to protect us and the environment.

“Expanding Rights-Based Organizing during a Crisis”

WEBINAR EXPANDING RIGHTS

CELDFF Community Organizers hosted a webinar in June to assist our community organizers, partners, and activists navigate activism during a pandemic.

More than 700 people from across the nation have attended our webinars.
A Guide to Protesting and How to Support the Black Lives Matter Movement

What Wasn’t Voted On (2020)

THESIS: Anticapitalism and Environmentalism in the American Rights of Nature Movement

Observing Revolution: Pennsylvania

Corporate America is on Offense, Local Communities Can Be Too

Social Distancing for Community Organizers

Corporations Are Suing Cities Across the USA

Crisis Calls for More Democracy, Not Less

This documentary by Mark Ruffalo explores the global Rights of Nature movement, including CELDF’s story and work in Grant Township, PA and Toledo, OH. The film features CELDF’s Markie Miller, Tish O’Dell, Chad Nicholson, Ben Price, and community leaders.
LEGAL WORK

CELDF provides pro bono and low-cost legal assistance to grassroots groups and municipal governments seeking to advance community rights, environmental rights, worker rights, as well as other social and economic justice rights.

In addition, CELDF provides legal support to non-governmental organizations and governments around the world to advance the Rights of Nature. This includes assistance with drafting local laws, ordinances, and *Home Rule* Charters; legal research; model state legislation and state constitutional amendments.

CELDF has worked with over 200 communities across the U.S. to develop “rights-based” laws to protect against environmental threats and to secure community and environmental rights.

**CELEBRATING 25 YEARS**

CELDF developed the legal framework for Community Bill of Rights — which communities across the U.S. are now advancing into law to secure the rights of communities and ecosystems.

CELDF has worked in countries, including Ecuador, India, Australia, Nepal, Cameroon, Colombia, and others to advance the highest legal protections — and thus places the highest societal value — for vital ecosystems.

**CELDLF LEGAL WORK IN 2020**

*In 2020 CELDF continued to provide legal assistance to communities and represent the public interest in the following cases:*

**PGE v. Grant Township:** CELDF defended the authority of the people of Grant Township to decide whether a frack wastewater injection well can be sited within the community, and whether attorney’s fees should be awarded to a corporation under the civil rights fee-shifting statute.
**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Environmental Protection v. Grant Township of Indiana County and the Grant Township Supervisors:** CELDF defended the authority of the people of Grant Township to adopt their own structure of local government and enforce their rights to clean air and water under the ERA.

**Beiersdorfer v. LaRose:** CELDF represented a group of plaintiffs whose initiative measures were prevented from going onto the ballot.

**Drewes Farms Partnership v. City of Toledo:** CELDF represented Toledoans for Safe Water and Lake Erie Ecosystem right to defend the law when they attempted to intervene in a lawsuit brought after the voters of the City passed a city charter amendment called the Lake Erie Bill of Rights.

**Ferner v. Ohio (Toledo pro se case):** CELDF helped three Toledo residents draft court documents for a lawsuit they filed alleging that the State violated the Ohio Constitution when it sought the invalidation of the Lake Erie Bill of Rights in federal court.

**Unger et al. v. Ellen Rosenblum, Attorney General, State of Oregon; Geddry et al. v. Dennis Richardson, Secretary of State:** CELDF defended the ability of the public to use the initiative process to place voter initiatives on the statewide electoral ballot.

**Long v. Betschart, Lane County Clerk et al., Lane County, Oregon; Long v. Betschart, Lane County Clerk et al., Lane County, Oregon; Bowers et al. v. Betschart, Lane County Clerk et al., Lane County, Oregon; Bowers et al. v. Betschart, Lane County Clerk et al., Oregon; Bloomgarden et al. v. Betschart, Lane County Clerk et al., Lane County, Oregon; Bloomgarden et al. v. Betschart, Oregon:** CELDF defended the authority of the people of Lane County to circulate, qualify, and place citizens’ initiatives onto the County ballot.

**Rex Capri v. Wakefield Farms, LLC. v. Dana W. Jenkins, Lincoln County, and Lincoln County Community Rights, Lincoln County, Oregon:** CELDF defended the authority of the people of every local government in Oregon to ban or otherwise control aerial spraying of pesticides, which causes widespread health problems. It will also decide whether an ecosystem can be a party to litigation in Oregon.

**Brent Tweed et al v. Town of Nottingham et al (2):** CELDF represented the Nottingham Water Alliance as the sole advocate for a protective ordinance adopted through citizens initiative petition; and in a decision to deny their intervention that was undemocratic and contrary to precedent, allowing the case to be decided by parties in complete agreement over the substantive issues.
I do this work because injustice and greed are threats to life and this beautiful planet. Community Rights and Rights of Nature is a way to battle both of those and try to level a very uneven playing field...in other words, I don’t like bullies taking advantage!

Tish O’Dell, CELDF Community Organizer

CELF has been with Toledoans for Safe Water every step of the way, from helping to draft the groundbreaking legislation known as the Lake Erie Bill of Rights, pushing back against ballot access challenges, and finally getting LEBOR passed. CELDF continues to be crucial in ongoing legal battles involving LEBOR, and in fighting for not only our rights as humans to access clean drinking water, but for Lake Erie’s right to exist and flourish in its natural state.

Hilary Tore, Toledoans for Safe Water

CELF gave us a seat at the table and to show that we had the authority to fight for the unalienable right of self-government in our community. CELDF’s commitment and knowing that the community is as strong as those who invest in it. May the bridges we burn light the way. Thank you CELDF. We could not have gone as far as we have done without your support and caring concern for our health, safety, and the right to control our own destiny.

Judy Wanchisn, Grant Township Pennsylvania
Thanks to the generous support from our donors and funders and the hard work of our staff, partners, and collaborators, our total revenue for the 2020 fiscal year was $387,709.

In spite of the lockdowns initiated throughout the country due to Covid-19, 100% of our expenditures were used to build new relationships, support our community partners and state networks to expand regionally, nationally and internationally the movements for Community Rights and the Rights of Nature.
RECOGNIZING NATURE’S RIGHTS: HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR RIGHTS OF NATURE WORK

2006, Tamaqua Borough, Pennsylvania
By removing constitutional powers of corporations within the borough, by recognizing and enforcing the rights of residents to defend natural communities ecosystems.

2008, Ecuador Constitution
Nature, or Pacha Mama...has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes... Nature has the right to be restored.

2010, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Residents of the City shall possess legal standing to enforce those rights on behalf of those natural communities and ecosystems.

2013, Mora County, New Mexico
Natural communities and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems, possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within Mora County against oil and gas extraction.

2017, Lafayette, Colorado
All residents and ecosystems of the City of Lafayette possess a right to a healthy climate.

2018, Ho-Chunk Nation
Ecosystems, natural communities, and species within the Ho-Chunk Nation territory possess inherent, fundamental, and inalienable rights to naturally exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve.

2019, White Earth Band of Ojibwe
Manoomin, or wild rice, within the White Earth Reservation possesses inherent rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve.

2019, Denver, Colorado
A “Right to Survive” ballot measure is voted on in Denver, advancing a human rights paradigm compatible with Rights of Nature.

2019, Toledo, Ohio
Governments and corporations engaged in activities that violate the rights of the Lake Erie Ecosystem, in or from any jurisdiction, shall be strictly liable for all harms and rights violations resulting from those activities.


2020, Toledo, Ohio
The rights of a specific ecosystem were argued in federal court in defense of the Lake Erie Bill of Rights. Groups and individuals from across the globe show support for the law.

2020, Grant Township, Pennsylvania
The State of Pennsylvania was successfully pressured to enforce a local Rights of Nature law to protect local ecosystems.

2020, Ohio
The American Petroleum Institute comes out in opposition to a federal civil rights case in which CELDF is supporting local communities’ right to vote on qualified local Rights of Nature laws in Ohio.

2020, CELDF’s ongoing work is featured in the award-winning documentary film “Invisible Hand.”