



THE VALUE OF NATURE

A special edition of The Susquehanna by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund

We are Nature:

Valuing our Needs, Connection, and Responsibility

Changing culture. This isn't a term that normally comes to mind when people think of CELDF. But the truth is, cultural change agents are who we are at the core. Challenging unjust corporate and elite wealth, championing the rights of community-level decision making power, and diving deep in transforming systems of law to acknowledge, secure, and protect the inherent rights of nature, that is what CELDF has embodied for more than twenty-five years.

We know that our existence has come about by outreach, citizen action, and bold governmental bodies to not only propose Community Rights laws, but also to fight to animate those laws. However, at the heart of all of that necessary provocation, advocacy, and action is culture and the recognition that a culture that subscribes to domination, exploitation, and eradication of people, communities, and natural systems is a culture that must be replaced. **That's what makes CELDF, CELDF.**

We try to share what we and our community partners are doing and what needs to be done to break the destructive dominant cultural ways, but in all of that there is the question of what is that new culture? What does that new culture value? We recently came across a publication by The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which discusses a way to conceive of culture, of how change needs to be approached, and most importantly

of how we see ourselves, see Nature, and how that view, that valuing process translates into how we treat each other, treat our communities, and treat the natural world. This isn't our invention but we are using it to guide our work and to bring to you the latest of CELDF within this framework. Perhaps these concepts can be useful to you too. So here are four ways of thinking about relating to the natural world:

- **Living from nature:** emphasizes nature's capacity to provide resources for sustaining the livelihoods, needs, and wants of people, such as food and material goods
- **Living with nature:** has a focus on life 'other than human' such as the intrinsic right of fish in a river to thrive independently of human needs
- **Living in nature:** refers to the importance of nature as the setting for people's sense of place and identity
- **Living as nature:** sees the natural world as a physical, mental, and spiritual part of oneself

Human and ecosystem viability come when we figure out how to orient our culture to be connected to all four parts: Living from, with, in, and as Nature.

This newsletter starts where the dominant culture is currently at, which is largely about how humans have been living from Nature. We'll explore several actions, activities, and collaborative achievements of CELDF



to both move with more grace from how we live from Nature, and also to how we bring in the functions of living with, in, and as nature for the sake of humans, all life, and the planet itself. We see this as not just being about how the conventional view of protecting the environment can be transformed, but also about how this transformation strengthens the civil, social, and economic rights and responsibilities necessary for healthy, just, and viable human communities.

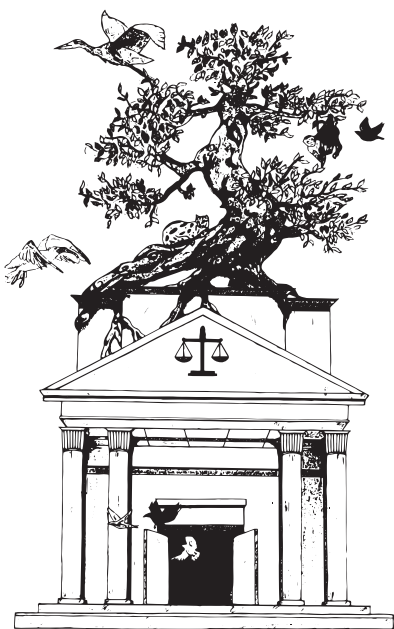
So say it with us: Living from nature. Living with nature. Living in nature. Living as nature. CELDF and you are changing culture for good.



ARTISTS BEHIND CELDF'S NEW RIGHTS OF NATURE LOGO

by Tish

Last month CELDF released a new visual illustration of our work and a new Rights of Nature logo, both done by the artists **Talking Wings — Blake Lavia and Tzintzun Aguilar-Izzo**. Many people were curious to learn more about these artists and so we are happy that they agreed to this interview. CELDF understands that Community Rights and Rights of Nature are about building relationships and connecting communities who share some common values and goals to protect nature and live in harmony together. So thanks to Talking Wings not only for the inspiring and engaging artwork they bring to this movement, but also for sharing their vision and experiences, so together we can continue connecting and planting more seeds



to start more conversations and actions across this beautiful Mother Earth.

CELDf: I had the pleasure of meeting you both when I registered for your Rights of Nature Symposium last March. We obviously know about your amazing talent as artists, but we want to know more about you as humans. Tell us a little bit about your background and how you met?

Blake: I came to Turtle Island/United States from Europe, where I grew up. I have always formed very strong bonds with the environments I was inhabiting, whether in my homeland or in my new home on Turtle Island. I feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the ecosystems I call home and am a part of. Northern New York, Haudenosaunee territory, is surrounded by, and hosts, a large portion of the world's drinking water. This is why I feel particularly responsible for the future of this precious element, which is and always will shape the future of Mother Earth.

Tzintzun: I grew up traveling between Guamare territory, in what is now known as Guanajuato, Mexico and Lenape territory, in what is now known as New York City. Since living most of my young life moving between different cultures and geographies, it is particularly hard for me to conceptualize the meaning of homeland and place. Now finding myself living in a settler community amongst new friends, and before the forests and waters of Kaniatarowanneneh/St. Lawrence River Watershed, I am continually striving to communicate with the environment that hosts me. This process goes hand in hand with my collaboration



Photo by Talking Wings Blake Lavia and Tzintzun Aguilar-Izzo at the St. Lawrence River

with Blake, as together we weave human and natural communities across the region.

CELDf: What kind of organizing have you been involved with over the years and what reflections or learned experiences can you share with us?


Blake and Tzintzun: As part of Talking Wings, we started our environmental organizing work in what is known as Western Massachusetts, specifically Nipmuc territory, when we created a series of art exhibits and one conference that talked about the history of Boston's drinking water and the Quabbin Reservoir. The art exhibits were a collaboration between ten artists who together created an interactive space where the viewer found themselves immersed in the history of the Swift River, the displaced settler communities, and the consequent damming projects. (<https://talking-wings.com/memory-flow-conference>)

After that, Talking Wings embarked on the one-month long "Art, Land and Environment Summit," which took place in Northern New York, Haudenosaunee territory. During this month-long series of events, local environmental actors were brought together to discuss the future of northern New York's environment. The summit was accompanied by an art exhibit that saw artists from the Akwesasne Kanien'kehá ka (Mohawk) Nation, and a Mazatec collective from what is known as Oaxaca, Mexico, come together to talk about the

history and the culture of their ecosystems. (<https://talking-wings.com/ncalesummit>)

Two years later we helped organize the "North Country Rights of Nature Symposium," which revived the previous conversations by introducing the ecocentric perspectives and ideas brought up at the summit. The purpose of the symposium was to begin a local conversation about what "Rights of Nature" legislation would look like if applied to the local waterways. The event included voices from what is known as the Adirondack Mountains to the Akwesasne Nation and was moderated by a team of youth from the involved communities. After this youth-led event, "Rights of Nature" became a topic of local interest. Community members were inspired to join with the Symposium's youth organizers to write local legislation and petition local settler towns to pass Rights of Nature law. (<https://talking-wings.com/noco-rights-of-nature-symposium>)

At first, we didn't consider ourselves activists or community organizers. In our minds, we were artists who wanted to share the hidden stories that were violently obscured by a colonialist and capitalist society. However, through our work, we realized that every new story told, every new artwork created, planted a seed, from which beautiful possibilities grew, many of which we hadn't foreseen. In this way, we moved from delving and exploring past environmental violence, to actively organizing and fighting for a better



future. With settler and Indigenous communities in our region now collaborating to honor their shared roles and responsibilities towards the region's waterways, we are very aware that art and conversation are vital catalysts in the process of radical ecocentric change.

CELDF: When did you first become aware of the Rights of Nature movement, what resonated with you about Rights of Nature, and what are your thoughts about Rights of Nature as a means to transform culture and law?

Blake and Tzintzun: We first heard about Rights of Nature in the fall of 2020, when we were invited to attend an event organized by the "International Movement for the Rights of Mother Earth/Nature" (El Movimiento Internacional por los Derechos de la Madre Tierra Naturaleza). While we were fascinated by the concepts presented, we were confused by the language used by the presenters. At the time, we failed to see the synergy between global legal frameworks and the daily struggle of water and earth guardians. There appeared to be a discrepancy between the legal system of settler colonial countries and the worldviews of Indigenous/Original Nations.

Then, by chance, when perusing a used bookstore in Western Massachusetts (Nonotuch Territory), we stumbled upon *Earth Ethics: A Case for Moral Pluralism* by Christopher Stone. It almost felt like the book found us, for it led us into taking a serious look at what Rights of Nature is, and how it can be applied to the "western" legal system. After reading the book and researching the different cases that were occurring around the country and the world, we decided to start promoting the idea in our community.

We have always believed that nature should be respected and honored as a living being, a constellation of communities (humans included) collaborating in a tapestry of interdependent life. Rights of Nature seemed a logical pathway to translate this age-old belief system into "western" law. In general, settler communities have an easier time grappling with the idea that nature should be respected and honored, if we place the concept into a framework that they understand: "legally enforceable rights." We thus saw Rights of Nature as the gateway to a paradigm shift that not only could promote a new way of making environmental law, but could challenge the foundations of the colonial and capitalist concept of

property ownership. Rights of Nature as a movement can be used to teach people that nature isn't a commodity to be bought and sold, but a relative, a member of our community, and a complex entity we are all a part of.

CELDF: Tell us about your work as artists and how do you see that helping to push the movement for change that is needed?

Blake and Tzintzun: From the very beginning of our career and the creation of Talking Wings, we've been using art as a tool to explore historical memory, environmental history, and the social structure of our contemporary society. Art shapes culture and breaks through cultural barriers. It unveils the inner mechanism that shapes the reality in which we all exist. This is why art is such a useful tool in the activist/organizer toolkit. It promotes critical thinking, framing subjects such as science and law under a completely new light.

At Talking Wings, we've often used art to promote environmental awareness and stories of positive change. The climate crisis is overwhelming, and many people are just annihilated by the two faces of mass media: 1. the complete erasure of the climate crisis from contemporary culture, and 2. the doomsday rhetoric. It is easy to become jaded and to give in to either of these narratives. That is why we pair our artistic practice through an ecocentric lens. We focus on the storytellers, whether they be human or others, who are striving to maintain a reciprocal balance with their environment.

All forms of artmaking are storytelling, and through storytelling human and non-human narrators shape meaning, society, and the ecosystems we inhabit. We at Talking Wings consider ourselves co-storytellers in this process. We collaborate with human and non-human communities to share stories of regenerative growth, resistance, and positive change. It is our collective responsibility as global citizens to join in this process, and to learn how to listen to the voices of our non-human communities.

Talking Wings was formed by the artist/community organizer couple Blake Lavia and Tzintzun Aguilar-Izzo. We both graduated from college with art/film degrees and are currently living in what is known as Upstate New York, Haudenosaunee territory, along the banks of the Nikentsà:ke/Grasse River.

CELDF CONTINUES TO PARTNER WITH FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES

Grant Township Continues to Resist

by Chad

Regular CELDF newsletter readers are by now familiar with Grant Township's resistance to a proposed frack waste injection well, beginning back in 2014. During that time, CELDF has been proud to stand with the community through the drafting of several local laws, three court cases, rallies, and community meetings, the hosting of our educational programs including Democracy School, direct action, and countless meetings and phone conversations to discuss new challenges and develop future strategies.

To date, there is no injection well in Grant Township.

The news is not always easy to stomach. The Township has been dragged into federal court twice (the presiding judge held stock in KBR, Inc., a division of Halliburton, before taking the case). The Township is now in state court, after being sued by the PA Department of Environmental Protection. And the PA Commonwealth Court recently ruled against the Township, gutting its democratically-enacted Home Rule Charter. In short, the Township has seen an unholy mix of state and federal courts, government agencies, and oil and gas corporations crash down on the community and attempt to force the people and the ecosystems to receive toxic waste against their will.

And yet the community persists. Furthermore, the news is not always bad and sometimes surprisingly good. We recently worked with the Township to appeal the Commonwealth Court to the PA Supreme Court. Grant Township was recently featured once again in national media, with an article in *The New Republic*, by Colin Jerolmack. And a documentary came out recently that looks at the community's resistance to the injection well through the lens of the eastern hellbender salamander, which resides in the local watershed. (The film is called *Hellbent*, by Annie Roth and Justin Grubb).

Furthermore, looking statewide, more Pennsylvania communities are turning to diverse forms of local community rights activism. Whether it comes to resisting water privatization, fighting against endless warehouse developments, or stopping harmful oil and gas extraction activities, many communities look to

Grant Township's work to inform their own campaigns. There has also now been a constitutional amendment introduced into the state legislature that would legalize the right of local self-government for all communities in the Commonwealth. Because that's what all of this work is about: the ability of people to make decisions about important activities in the places where they live, free from corporate, state, and/or judicial abuse

The story is far from over, and CELDF will continue to support the human and natural communities within Grant Township. Support for their fight is always welcome, including sending letters to the people of the community. Please contact Chad Nicholson (chad@celdf.org) for more information. Please also see our website at celdf.org for a comprehensive overview and history of the case, including press releases, legal documents, media coverage, and more.

People and Planet over Profit - The only way forward for New England

by Michelle

The first local Community Rights-Based Ordinance (RBO) was passed in New Hampshire in 2006. Residents of the Town of Barnstead almost unanimously (only one person voted against it) adopted a Water Rights & Right of Local Self Governance Ordinance at their New England annual town meeting. They did so in response to the multi-year experience of neighboring Nottingham residents wasting their time, energy, and both personal and taxpayer dollars trying to stop USA Springs LLC from



getting state permits to extract, bottle, and sell the community's drinking water in Italy.

Residents of Nottingham to use the state permitting process of submitting personal testimonies, attending state environmental agency hearings, paying for expert studies, and filing expensive lawsuits trying to force USA Springs LLC into obeying the state's laws and regulatory rules. One such study showed that toxic chemicals were being drawn into the local drinking water source from a brown-site over two miles away during drawdown tests performed by USA Springs LLC. After all the valiant efforts of Nottingham residents to show that stealing their drinking water for no other reason than profit was an irreparably bad idea, USA Springs LLC received all state permits.

The residents of Barnstead knew from the experience of Nottingham residents that they did not want to go down the same path. Instead of begging and pleading with state environmental protection agencies to protect the environment, Barnstead residents took matters into their own hands when they legalized the Rights of Nature to exist and thrive, and their collective community right to make local governing decisions without interference from the state when those decisions protect the health, safety, and welfare of all the inhabitants of the community - both human and natural.

Since then, over a dozen RBOs have been passed through the local initiative process, usually during Annual Town Meetings. As success stories spread across New England of RBOs stopping harmful profit-driven energy projects, commercial water extractions, proposed chemical trespasses, and politically driven discriminations, communities in Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts have also passed local RBOs. These RBOs frontally challenge the status quo of corporate claimed "rights" elevated over civil and human rights to protect human beings and the natural ecosystems we depend upon for our health and survival.

With such local momentum, communities in New Hampshire created the New Hampshire Community Rights Network in 2014 for the purpose of initiating state constitutional change that would preemptively protect the local RBOs. A Community Rights Amendment to the state constitution was first introduced in 2016, followed by a monumental effort in 2018, and then again in 2019. However, the New

Hampshire State Legislature consistently overlooked their constituent voices and catered to the corporate industry lobbyists by voting down placing the Community Rights Amendment on the November ballot. The result has been the denial of voters ever getting the chance to decide whether their collective values should result in enforceable lawmaking.

Not only has the New Hampshire Legislature sided with industry interests, but the courts did so as well in 2021 when the Rockingham County Superior Court overturned Nottingham's Freedom from Chemical Trespass RBO. This reversal ensued from a lawsuit that was the one and only legal challenge to any of the locally binding RBOs in New England. In this case, the presiding judge decided that the mere slight potential for lost profits to a resident home-based businessman of Nottingham, NH, were worth protecting over the health, safety, and welfare of the majority of residents and ecosystems inhabiting the Town.

The only way forward is to withdraw consent to be governed in a manner that disempowers the collective will and values of the inhabitants of any given community. How is this accomplished? That's up to the People to decide. Will it be a peaceful transfer of decision-making power? Are alternative local food systems, independent governing bodies, resident tribunals, and other options the quickest way to achieve the decision-making power necessary to effect change and stop irreparable harm before it occurs. These questions need to be discussed and solutions need to be explored. People and Planet over Profit is the only way forward.





AWAKENING THE LEGAL CONSCIENCE

by Ben

Law is a poor substitute for conscience, but sometimes it's all you've got. CELDF has partnered with communities for over twenty-five years attempting to infuse a sense of humanitarian responsibility into law, to catalyze a paradigm shift away from centrally controlled domination of communities by the entrenched empire of monied corporations, dead-set as it is on accumulating more and more wealth at the expense of our communities and local ecosystems. It's become quite clear that revolutionizing these inhumane priorities demands more than regulatory reform. For lack of a moral compass, rerouting the American legal trajectory that's headed straight for a political and environmental precipice requires systemic change.

The business corporation is a human invention, programmed like a very simple calculating machine to create profit for those who own it. But it has no conscience, and its financial beneficiaries aren't compelled by law to make it behave as if it did. In 2002, CELDF helped a U.S. municipality become the first in recent memory to make a law subordinating the legal privileges of corporations to the constitutional rights of local residents. From that humble beginning, we went after corporate privilege in dozens of municipalities, crafting laws that serve people's needs and respect the natural environment. And we've met blistering opposition. Our partner communities have been sued, and so have our CELDF colleagues, for challenging the prerogatives of wealthy corporations to do as they please. We've exposed the way state preemption is routinely invoked to block communities from protecting themselves and their natural environment from state permitted toxic trespass. We've challenged business as usual at every turn because it's what's killing the planet and making our communities unlivable.

So it was with great satisfaction that friends shared with us the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court's decision in the Los Cedros Cloud Forest case. In December 2021, the Court, made up of a nine judge panel, voted 7-2 to take seriously what had been woven into the fabric of the county's 2008 national constitution: the rights of Mother Earth and the authority of the people

who live within its ecosystems to act on her behalf in protection of those rights. There, in the rainforest of Ecuador, law with a human conscience had finally been constitutionalized and at-last faithfully interpreted by a court of law.

We hosted a webinar discussion about the Los Cedros decision in June of 2022, and made an English translation available on our website. What is clear in the reasoning of the court is that, after many attempts to water it down, a legal interpretation of the Rights of Mother Earth constitutional provisions places human society within the context of Nature, rather than above it. And the Court acknowledged a correct relationship between people and the living world, wherein humans take their sustenance from Nature, but not its ability to survive, sustain its vital processes, and thrive.

Here in the U.S., we've worked diligently on a parallel path, crafting new approaches to saving our forests, water, mountains, and the diversity of fellow living beings in whose midst we dwell. Seeking environmental justice for marginalized people in Reading, Pennsylvania, where developers plan to pave-over and repurpose superfund sites laced with radioactive toxins for low income housing, we've assisted residents attempting to amend their city charter to include an environmental advocate and a local ecosystem court to intervene on behalf of the community and environment. In Buckingham County, Virginia, CELDF is working with local activists to enact a similar law that would require a gold mining corporation to produce proof that their extractive processes have been executed safely in at least one other location, before permits will be issued.

We understand our collective obligation to make law speak with moral conviction and not just with an eye toward economic priorities. That's why we persist. That's why we find inspiration in the communities and people who seek our help and take action. Despite the many challenges confronting our hometowns and local environments, there is hope. Communities of conscience know what must be done. We are encouraged.

SALMON IS HEALTHY FOR “US”, RIGHT?

by Tish

Maybe the answer to that question seems an obvious YES, but let's delve a little deeper through the lens of a community in NW Ohio.

First, we need to define who “us” is. Do we mean the humans who live in the community where the largest land-based Genetically Modified Salmon (GMO) factory in the world has been proposed? Do we mean the humans across the nation and world who may be consuming the produced salmon? Do we mean the corporation and its bottom line? Lastly, is it important for us also to consider the local watersheds and ecosystems health as an inherent part of “us,” of who we are?

The Village of Pioneer is a small community in NW Ohio. Along with many others in a three state region, it relies on the Michindoh Aquifer for all the water needs of what amounts to over 400,000 human residents of the watershed. Enter the community, a corporation, AquaBounty (AB), of Massachusetts. With the proposed establishment of a large GMO salmon factory, AB promises to bring jobs and economic growth to Pioneer. And all AB will require

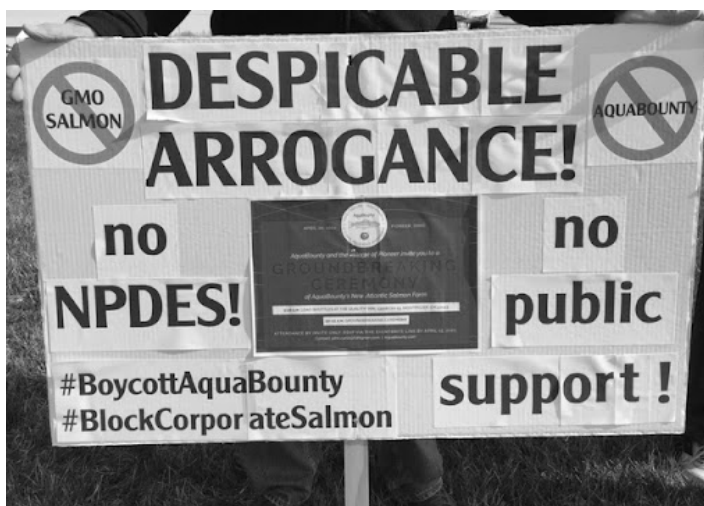
is new roads, more electrical infrastructure, and, oh yeah, the withdrawal of over 5 million gallons of water from the Michindoh Aquifer every single day.

“Can the Aquifer handle that,” ask the people? “No one really knows,” answer the “experts.” We can do computer models. We think it should be ok.

Hmmm, maybe this won't be so healthy for the communities if this project drains the aquifer.

“What about the waste from this facility?” ask the people. The tanks need to be changed daily, we all know fish poop a lot, and we also know this factory is set to produce over 22 million pounds (10 million metric tons) of GMO salmon per year. So that's a lot of poop. What amount of waste will be discharged into the St. Joe River, which flows to the Maumee River, which flows right into Lake Erie? Will it be spread on fields as fertilizer? We have all heard about Lake Erie's problem with toxic algae blooms caused by too much poop from all the animal factories in NW Ohio every year. Will it be healthy for the Rivers and Lake Erie to have another 3 million gallons of more poop flushed or spread into the watershed every day? No one has an answer.





What happens if some of these GMO salmon get flushed out with the waste? We know the corporation says that won't happen, but we have heard guarantees before—from BP Deepwater Horizon, Exxon Valdez, Three Mile Island—all positing operational processes that were deemed completely secure, until they weren't. If any of these GMO fish get into the Great Lakes they will begin eating voraciously as this is how they have been modified, to eat and eat in order to grow twice as fast as the wild salmon. Sounds like only the corporation's bottom line health is being considered. This doesn't sound healthy for the Great Lakes ecosystems though. The Great Lakes Bill of Rights in New York, if passed, would at least be able to hold the corporation liable for harms caused to the Great Lakes in New York.

And, finally, what about for the humans that consume this product? Studies have shown that eating natural wild salmon does have health benefits. But so far, studies on the GMO, factory farm raised salmon do not indicate a healthful product and, worse yet, the industry doesn't think the public has a right to know if they are consuming GMO fish.

Maybe before we only consider the economic prosperity and health of a few, we should broaden our perspective, our analysis, and our laws to take into account all the potential effects of a project. And bottom line, it should be the community members, all of them including nature, that get to decide if the risks to their health are worth taking. Based on public comments regarding the issuance of permits the corporation needs, the people have sent a deafening message to the agencies. (Over 1200 comments were submitted and only 15 were in favor of the project).

Even the Great Lakes spoke out and submitted a comment opposing the project. And yet, the agency approved the permit.

Is mass-produced GMO salmon really healthy for "us"? I guess the answer depends on who decides.

Look for an upcoming support letter that you can sign onto to endorse the Great Lakes Bill of Rights.

Resources:

<https://www.activistpost.com/2022/04/opposition-increases-against-proposed-gmo-salmon-farm-that-would-need-3-5-million-gallons-of-water-every-day.html>

<https://www.greatlakesnow.org/2022/06/salmon-farm-ohio-dnr/>

WE ARE WETLANDS

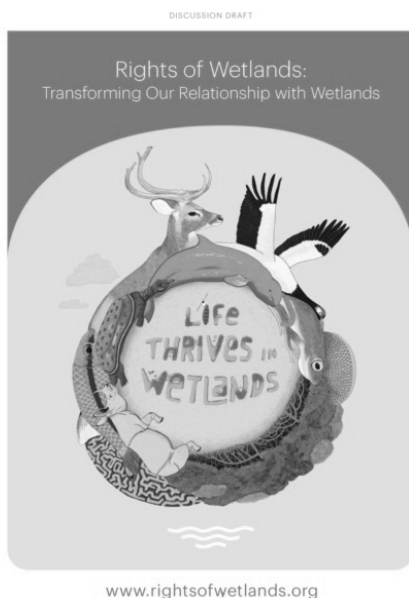
by Kai

It is legally allowable to destroy a natural wetland in the United States. When this happens the destruction is often referenced, by way of a justification, as being "unavoidable." In the context of wetland destruction, this "unavoidability" is about progress. The legal mandates to keep growing economies and earning corporate profits require that development be supported even if, in doing so, critical life forces for humans and other species are put in jeopardy.

However, with the mandate to destroy have also come mandates to create. When a wetland is "filled in"—a nice term for the annihilation of an ecosystem—there comes, at times, the directive to recreate it somewhere else. It seems that, in the quest to grow, there has been some realization, perhaps, that growth for growth's sake alone should not go totally unabated. With that, the basic attributes—at least those that benefit humans—of a wetland should be brought back to life: take life and create a lesser, more simplified version of that life and call it good. Law, as it so often does, rationalizes actions that if really examined could not be justified as normal behavior but would clearly be seen as insane. Bear in mind that this type of wetland loss, in which mitigation (the term they use to allow killing a natural wetland if an artificial one is created) comes into play doesn't address wetland

destabilization due to pollution or loss because of climate change and agricultural practices.

On the whole the United States has lost 50% of its natural wetlands. In certain regions, largely coastal, the total loss is 85%. Since 1970 alone, 35% of wetlands have been lost globally. What all those numbers mean is that we are drastically reducing the livability and vitality of the planet. We have been living from the planet in a manner that has made the planet itself tired, sick, and on the verge of a full body shut down. To keep it within biologically relatable terms to humans, not only are we stressing the heart (oceans), lungs (forests), and liver (soil) of the planet, but by treating wetlands the way we have, we have also reduced the planet's ability to filter poisons like the kidneys do for the body.



So what is a wetland exactly? The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the global intergovernmental treaty on wetlands, defines wetlands as:

areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.

As you can see, wetlands show up differently depending on where they are on the planet. And beyond cleaning toxins from the water, they assist in flood control, creation of habitat, carbon storage, food sources, and resources for human benefit. Wetlands


are complex systems that host a tremendous amount of diversity. In fact, one third of all threatened and endangered species in the United States call wetlands home. Though artificial wetlands can replicate some of the attributes and characteristics of natural wetlands, they don't come close to measuring up.

Even with increased considerations of the value to the wetlands in that mitigation occurs at times, those actions are based on treating the natural world as a thing, as property. We have not yet attained, at the levels necessary, the assimilation of living with, in, and as nature when it comes to wetlands. When we see a wetland as a thing, an object to merely benefit us, largely the economic us, we are not in harmony with nature for the sake of what nature provides for other species and the other ways that, for example, wetlands benefit humans. Even in the realm of creating artificial wetlands, it is largely about humans living from Nature, such as calling on wetlands to aid in flood control to protect human property or enterprise.

What about the intrinsic rights of wetlands exclusive of human endeavors?

In 2017 a collection of groups and organizations from around the planet, CELDF included, drafted, and posted the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands. There are eight rights:

1. The right to exist
2. The right to their ecologically determined location in the landscape
3. The right to natural, connected and sustainable hydrological regimes
4. The right to ecologically sustainable climatic conditions
5. The right to have naturally occurring biodiversity, free of introduced or invasive species that disrupt their ecological integrity
6. The right to integrity of structure, function, evolutionary processes and the ability to fulfill natural ecological roles in the Earth's processes
7. The right to be free from pollution and degradation
8. The right to regeneration and restoration.



Over the last year, a number of those groups, CELDF again centrally involved, have been drafting a guidebook of sorts that articulates why those rights of wetlands matter and why and how human action at a community and national level is necessary to secure and protect those rights. In November 2021, the draft guidebook made its debut in Geneva, Switzerland at the Ramsar COP14 (annual convention of wetland scientists and advocates along with policy makers from around the globe). Also contained in that draft guidebook are CELDF's Rights of Nature Principles and model Rights of Wetlands law that will be featured at the Ramsar COP14.

The drafting committee for the guidebook spent many hours creating what they did. And the most promising element of that necessary cultural shift, especially in moving from living from nature to living with and as nature, was the vigilant assertion that the work being done was about the intrinsic rights of wetlands. It was not about justifying the "unavoidable" or devising a plan to play frankenstein with ecosystems. It was always acting from a place that asked, "what does the wetland need?"

The culture is changing.



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KEY CONTACTS

COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

Chad Nicholson

chad@celdf.org
207-541-3649

Michelle Sanborn

michelle@celdf.org
603-387-7996

Kai Huschke

kai@celdf.org
509-607-5034

Tish O'Dell

tish@celdf.org
440-552-6774

Ben Price

benprice@celdf.org
717-254-3233

DEMOCRACY SCHOOL & GENERAL INFORMATION

Stacey Schmader
stacey@celdf.org
717-498-0054

CELDf

P.O. Box 360
Mercersburg, PA 17236
Phone: 717-498-0054
Email: info@celdf.org
Web: www.celdf.org



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