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Year in Review

by Executive Director – Thomas Linzey

This year, an unprecedented number of communities and grassroots groups contacted us for help to protect the places where they live. Collectively, they've decided that they're no longer willing to accept the status quo. They're no longer willing, for example, to live under a structure of law in which corporations have the "right" to frack, but communities don't have the right to say "no" to fracking.

Our work is growing, and with your support, CELDF is now working in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, New England, the Pacific Northwest, the Rocky Mountains, and beyond – organizing at the grassroots, and building toward state and federal level change – to secure rights to local, community self-government, rights to water and a healthy environment, and elevating community and nature's rights over corporate "rights."

What we started nearly 20 years ago, working with rural Pennsylvania communities to stop threats to the local environment – has now blossomed into a national democracy movement. Today we have community organizers working in states across the country, statewide Community Rights Networks in seven states, and we recently launched the National

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Historic First Meeting of the National Community Rights Network

On October 16-18th, in Seven Springs, PA, CELDF hosted an historic meeting to launch the National Community Rights Network (NCRN), and begin the work to build the NCRN's infrastructure to advance Community Rights at the state and federal level.

Twelve delegates attended the meeting, representing seven state-level Community Rights Networks (CRNs) established over the last four years: Pennsylvania, Washington State, Oregon, Colorado, Ohio, New Mexico, and New Hampshire. Each of these states has advanced Community Rights locally, and is working to expand those rights across their respective states. Establishing the NCRN is the first step in advancing Community Rights nationally.

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Mission Statement

Building sustainable communities by assisting people to assert their right to local self-government and the rights of nature.

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(Year- from pg. 1)

Community Rights Network. This has only been possible with your support.

Key highlights from 2014 include:

- Communities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and California adopted our Community Bills of Rights laws establishing community and nature's rights. These laws ban fracking, unsustainable energy development, and other threats as a violation of those rights. In addition, they eliminate corporate constitutional "rights" when those "rights" interfere with the rights of people, communities, and nature.

- We filed a first-of-its-kind class action lawsuit in Lafayette, CO, to enforce Colorado residents' right to adopt local bills of rights that ban fracking. Citizens joined with us to file suit against both the oil and gas corporations and Colorado state government, which together are forcing fracking into communities.

- CELDF provided legal counsel to communities in New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and other states to help them defend their local Bills of Rights from corporate attacks, including their right to say "no" to fracking.

- We worked with our Colorado Community Rights Network to draft and introduce the first-in-the-nation Community Rights state constitutional amendment. We're now working with our Networks in other states to draft statewide amendments.

- CELDF hosted the inaugural meeting of the National Community Rights Network, bringing our state Community Rights Networks together into a national organization. The national Network is partnering with CELDF to accelerate our grassroots organizing and drive state and federal level change.

- CELDF expanded its international Rights of Nature work, partnering with groups in India to establish rights of the Ganges River, in Australia to stop fossil fuel extraction, in the European Union to draft an E.U.-wide citizens' initiative on Rights of Nature, and in Nepal to codify a Right to Climate in the country's new constitution.

Your support is what makes our work possible. Please make a contribution today to help us continue this work in 2015. Thank you!



Power Politics and Colorado Community Rights



The story of the many proposed state constitutional amendments in Colorado this past year has been one of deception and revelation. Coloradans were left feeling deceived and manipulated by the introduction and then withdrawal of state constitutional amendments regarding fracking that had been proposed by state congressman Jared Polis, the environmental group Food and Water Watch, and the oil and gas industry.

Much chatter and noise was made over whether a deal had been brokered in order to avoid an influx of corporate money into the November election that might harm Democrat chances at the polls. Lost amidst that diversion was the fact that the various fracking amendments were introduced en masse *after* the Colorado Community Rights Network introduced the CELDF drafted Community Rights Amendment to guarantee local self-governing rights on *all* issues affecting the community – not just fracking.

A local TV reporter claimed that “Environmentalists and the governor’s office struck a last-minute deal...defusing a political time bomb that had driven a wedge between liberal and pro-business Democrats...”

The deal that was struck by unelected environmentalists and a partisan-motivated congressman betrayed more than 200,000 voters who signed petitions to place the amendments on the ballot.

Meanwhile, signature collecting for the Community Rights Amendment was held-up in a legal challenge brought by the oil and gas industry, and though the Colorado Supreme Court ruled in favor of the proponents, it was too late to gather the needed signatures.

Tellingly, the measures proposed by Congressman Polis were not legally challenged by the industry, while decision-makers at Food and Water Watch pulled their measure before it passed muster with the state Title Board.

Coloradans are moving forward through the Colorado Community Rights Network to place the Community Rights Amendment on the 2016 ballot.

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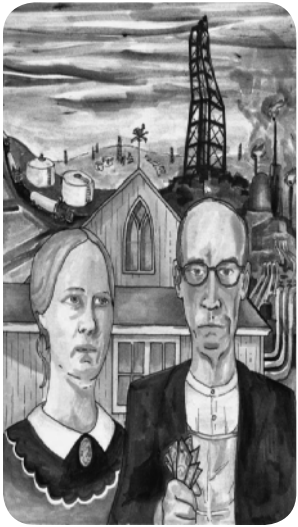
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**Contact Stacey
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Visit Our Website:
www.celdf.org.

Pennsylvania Hot Bed for Community Rights in 2014

The Keystone State has been a hot bed of Community Rights organizing in 2014. From fracking, fracking wastewater injection wells, and pipeline infrastructure projects, to the land application of sewage sludge, factory farming, and GMOs, communities across the state are organizing in partnership with CELDF to ban these harmful activities and secure their rights to clean air, water, and local self-governance.



This year, Grant Township adopted a CELDF-drafted Community Bill of Rights banning frack wastewater injection wells as a violation of rights. Today, communities in Washington, Ridgway, Jay, Spring Creek, and several other Townships, are using rights-based organizing to protect themselves from fracking and related activities, and considering similar CELDF-drafted ordinances.

Residents of Martic, Conestoga, and a half dozen other Townships are organizing around Community Rights to ban a 178 mile proposed gas pipeline project that would cut through public and private lands, disrupting local ecosystems and threatening clean air and water. As well, residents of Susquehanna and Centre Counties are partnering with us to ban toxic sewage sludge; Ayr Township and Fulton County to ban factory farming; and Lancaster County to ban GMOs.

This year, communities in over twenty Pennsylvania counties enacted, or are working to enact, CELDF-drafted Community Bill of Rights ordinances that ban corporate harms within those communities. As the State attempts to expand its reach to strip communities of their right to local self-governance, and continues to issue permits allowing a steady stream of harmful corporate activities to assault our communities,

Pennsylvania residents are deeping their rights-based organizing locally, and are banding together under the Pennsylvania Community Rights Network to work for state constitutional change. The changes that they are working towards will ensure that community rights are superior to corporate “rights,” and that sustainability - rather than corporate harms - becomes the default in Pennsylvania.

Rights of Nature Grows Globally

In 2014, CELDF expanded its international work to advance the Rights of Nature.

Today, environmental laws around the world regulate the use of nature. Yet, as communities in the U.S. and around the world are finding, even when we better regulate activities like shale gas drilling, we’re still getting fracked.

After decades with environmental laws in place, the condition of the environment is worse than forty years ago. From species decline, to ocean acidification, to global warming – the evidence is clear that a fundamental change is needed in humankind’s relationship with nature.

This change is being pioneered by communities and countries advancing a rights-based system of environmental protection. CELDF has partnered with the first communities in the U.S. to establish the Rights of Nature in law, and assisted Ecuador to draft provisions for its new constitution.

Our work continues to grow, including in India to establish rights of the Ganges River, in Australia to stop fossil fuel extraction, and in the European Union to draft an E.U.-wide citizens’ initiative on Rights of Nature.

As well, this fall CELDF is traveling to Nepal to meet with the Nepali constitutional assembly. Our discussions will focus on establishing a Right to Climate – such that human and natural communities have the right to a healthy climate, and the climate itself has the right to be healthy and unpolluted.

Oregon to Follow Colorado's Constitutional Lead

The Oregon Community Rights Network (ORCRN) and its constituent chapters are working with CELDF towards building a campaign to qualify a state constitutional amendment that would secure communities' right to local self-government.



Similar to the Colorado Community Rights Network initiative in 2014 (read more at cocrn.org), the ORCRN is taking action in the face of the systematic usurpation of inalienable rights of communities to make local self-governing decisions to protect clean air and water, a healthy environment, and create sustainable food, energy, and other systems.

The ORCRN is meeting this fall to finalize details and determine a timeframe for launching a statewide constitutional amendment campaign.

For more information, contact the Oregon Community Rights Network - www.facebook.com/ORCRN.

Community Rights Expanding in New Hampshire

After several years of rights-based organizing in partnership with CELDF, and more than a dozen communities adopting CELDF-drafted Community Rights ordinances at Town Meetings, the Community Rights Movement in New Hampshire is today engaged in a call for state constitutional change that recognizes the rights of whole communities – human and natural residents – including the right to clean air and water, the right to exist and flourish, and residents' right to local self-governance.

To that end, the New Hampshire Community Rights Network (NHCRN) is proposing a state constitutional amendment to advance community rights from the local, to the state level, in order to codify those rights for all communities in the state.



While rights-based organizing advances to the state level, several Towns across the State are working with CELDF to expand Community Rights locally. New Hampshire Towns are engaged with CELDF to enact, enforce, or defend Community Bills of Rights Ordinances covering a myriad of issues:

- Western New Hampshire Towns are considering rights-based ordinances to guarantee free and fair elections;
- Barrington is conducting education and outreach as they prepare to run their Community Bill of Rights banning unsustainable resource extraction at Town Meeting in March 2015;
- Nottingham prepares to protect their community using their 2006 Community Bill of Rights banning commercial water extraction, as USA Springs attempts to sell their property, marketing it as a “potential water bottling plant;”
- Alexandria residents ready themselves to protect their community from industrial wind by leveraging their Community Bill of Rights Ordinance banning unsustainable energy projects, which was adopted at Town Meeting in March 2014;
- Several Towns facing gravel mining proposals and the reopening of granite quarries are working towards rights-based solutions for the coming year.

We celebrate the growth of Community Rights in New Hampshire this past year, and anticipate an exciting year ahead.

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Ohio Fall Elections: Courage, Tenacity, and Victory

In November, Athens, OH, voters approved their CELDF-drafted Community Bill of Rights banning fracking and frack waste disposal by an astounding 78%. According to Dick McGinn, spokesperson for the local community group backing the measure, "With this overwhelming demonstration of support, Athens residents are sending a clear message to the oil and gas industry and to the state of Ohio: We have a right to clean air and water. We have a right to local self-governance. And there will be no fracking or frack waste disposal within our city."



In Youngstown, OH, residents have proven themselves tenacious and steadfast, qualifying for the fourth time their Community Bill of Rights banning fracking. For two years, they have been repeatedly and overwhelmingly outspent. This election cycle, their opponents – local elected officials, both political parties, unions, and the chamber of commerce – outspent residents 20-to-1, sending public mailers and leveraging local media against the Bill of Rights.

Undeterred by their loss, the Youngstown community plans to continue their partnership with CELDF and move forward. "We don't lose until we quit, and why would we quit this civil and environmental rights movement, a movement so important and vital for our children and the future of all living things?" stated Susie Beiersdorfer, a leader in advancing Community Rights in Youngstown and beyond.

In Kent and Gates Mills, OH, our community partners worked hard to advance Community Rights and protect themselves from fracking. In response, local government officials and law directors propagated fear through disseminating misinformation. Despite the opposition's distortions, residents continued to advocate for Community Rights throughout their campaigns,

(Ohio - from pg. 6)

demonstrating determination and commitment, and today are evaluating next steps.

Almost 10,000 Ohio residents cast their vote in support of Community Rights on November 4th, taking the first step to elevate rights to clean air, water, and local self-governance, above the claimed rights of corporations and state pre-emption.

(Historic - from pg. 1)

Over the two and a half day meeting, delegates seated the Board of Directors, reviewed the status and strategy of each of the state CRNs in advancing state-level change explored, how local and state level Community Rights can help build momentum for driving those rights nationally, and what is necessary to achieve federal constitutional change.

For more information on the NCRN, visit www.facebook.com/NATCRN.

*My elders have said to me that the trees are the teachers of the law.
As I grow less ignorant I begin to understand what they mean
- Brooke Medicine Eagle*

Yes, I support the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund!
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