

CELDF

MID-YEAR IMPACT REPORT 2025

30th

ANNIVERSARY

GREAT LAKES. THE BIG APPLE. DUTCH WINDMILLS + WETLANDS.

CELDF - as a world leader of rights of nature and systems change - is frequently invited to different parts of the globe in support of frontline campaigns. So far this year that has brought us to Toronto, Canada, New York City, and the Netherlands. CELDF's Tish O'Dell presented on New York's Great Lakes and State Waters Bill of Rights state legislation to attendees from Canada, South America, and the United States, including representatives of various tribes. The event Tish presented at in early March was the [Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature's](#) 6th International Rights of Nature Tribunal and Symposium held in Toronto.

A week later CELDF landed in New

York City to participate in NYU Law School's [More Than Human Life \(MOTH\) Project's](#) academic conference and Festival of Ideas. CELDF's Ben Price participated in an invite only portion of the event with others from around the world where he presented a paper entitled, "From Public Trust to Trust the Public Doctrine", as well as being on a panel speaking on rights of nature to NYU law students.

Meeting in the Netherlands also in March, CELDF's Kai Huschke co-authored a peer-reviewed journal article on the [rights of wetlands](#) that will be published in early 2026. Fellow authors came from the UK, US, and India, all long-time CELDF partners in advancing rights of wet-



Rights of wetlands advocates, including CELDF's Kai Huschke (far right), meeting in the Netherlands

lands globally. Kai also met with and interviewed [Jessica den Outer](#) from Stichting Rechten van de Natuur and former politician and civil rights activist [Lilianne Ploumen](#) who has become a strong advocate for rights of nature in the Netherlands.

CAN YOU HANDLE RIGHT-RELATIONSHIP?

At CELDF we are truth-tellers, innovators, activators, and collaborators working to usher in an era of right-relationship between people and the natural environment. Our support of frontline communities, the ability to innovate, and make an impact makes CELDF formidable. With the combination of our amazing 30 year track record and steady donations, we believe deep change is possible. Investing in CELDF is an investment in the possible.

THRIVING INTO THE FUTURE

Over the next 5 years CELDF needs to raise at least \$5 million to connect, educate, activate, and support people and communities. The faster the funding comes in, the faster the evolution of community resistance + resilience grows. **CELDF needs your financial support today in order to better transform tomorrow.**

30 YEARS OF CELDF

1995 **The Experiment Begins** CELDF is launched to help communities protect themselves via conventional environmental law.

2002 **What Rights?** CELDF helps [Licking and Porter Townships](#) in Pennsylvania to draft and adopt the country's first local laws directly challenging corporate "rights."

COMMUNITY RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE: WE NEED BOTH

The environmental movement is failing, in large part, because the vast majority of the world's legal systems make sustainability illegal. Recognizing this, CELDF has worked in partnership with hundreds of communities to change the way the U.S. legal system defines [nature as property](#) and the shield and sword manner that U.S. courts protect corporate rights. To do this, CELDF advised these communities to instead write and enact bold and unapologetic local laws stripping corporations of rights they never should have been granted, along with uplifting and honoring the rights of nature instead.

Unfortunately, [under American law](#), laws stripping corporations of rights and granting rights of nature are unconstitutional and illegal. This did not come as a surprise. CELDF engaged

in these actions because they believe that people have the inherent right to self-determine as well as to demonstrate how the legal system operates. Provoking unjust decisions from the



system creates signposts and signals for driving more people toward the necessary confrontation between communities and the dominant structure of law.

CELDF believes the time has come to insist that communities learn how to protect themselves. To do this,

CELDF announced the launch of its Community Resistance & Resilience program in April. The program will provide resources and support for communities ready to move beyond traditional legal tactics to more confrontational tactics, community organizing know-how, media help, skill-sharing, direct action training and coordination, and legal aid when the system inevitably retaliates.

Simultaneously, we will work to support, interlink, and uplift community resilience efforts rooted in deep understandings of sustainability, a critique of greenwashing, biocentrism, and the necessity of working for justice and human rights in the face of rising fascism, the breakdown of established systems, and ecological collapse. Sometimes “unlearning” is necessary in order to be creative and [create something new and better](#).

FUNDING KEY CELDF PROGRAMS

COMMUNITY RESISTANCE + RESILIENCE

CELDF has always been about community resistance + resilience; we just never called it that. [CELDF's Community Resistance + Resilience Program \(CR+R\)](#) is all about frontline action. That action requires a robust, connected, and coordinated network of partners to best support the array of community actions that will be necessary for systemic change. To achieve this over the next 5 years **CELDF needs to raise \$1 million** to make CR+R more fully operational.

INFORMATION + TRAINING

Busting myths, fostering effective mobilizations, building skills, and supporting community level action require an intense amount of research, innovation, and execution. Through [CELDF educational materials](#) along with its growing network of partners the organization is becoming a wellspring for teaching and training for transformative change. There are a tremendous number of resources available already with more to come, and **CELDF looks to invest at least \$250K over the next 5 years** to strengthen and advance educational offerings.

2006 **Act Local. Spark the Global** CELDF assists [Tamaqua Borough](#) in Pennsylvania to draft and adopt the nation's first law recognizing the rights of nature and ecosystems. Many note this action as the beginning point of the global Rights of Nature Movement.

2010 **Three Rivers Voices Unanimous Support for Nature's Rights!** CELDF assists the [Pittsburgh City Council](#) to become the first major U.S. City to recognize the legal rights of local ecosystems. The vote was 9-0 in favor.



The Gift by Bonnie Devine

MOVING TOWARDS RIGHT-RELATIONSHIP WITH WATER IN NEW YORK

What if bodies of water were guaranteed legal rights that would criminalize their destruction? What if communities could enact laws that prevented pollution, extraction, and waste-dumping? This would be the case under a new bill introduced into the New York State Assembly by Representative Patrick Burke.

Lake Erie and Lake Ontario provide drinking water to 6.2 million New Yorkers. All told, the Great Lakes provide drinking water for more than 40 million people, contain 95% of all the surface freshwater in the United States, and make up the largest freshwater ecosystem on the planet. But this ecosystem is struggling. According to experts, billions of gallons of raw sewage entering the lakes, increasing toxic algae blooms,

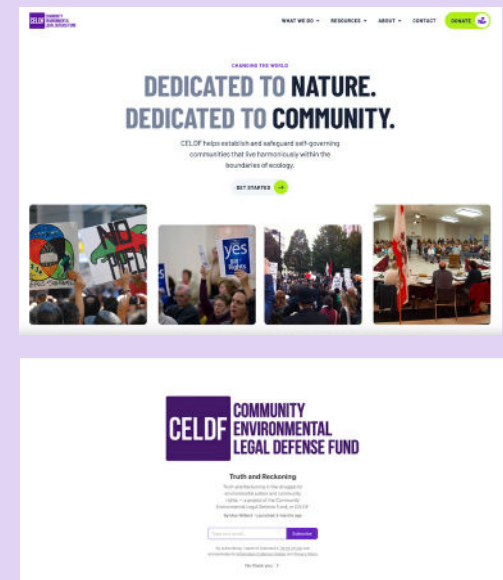
invasive species, global warming, and both historic and ongoing industrial pollution represent serious threats to the ecosystem and human health.

[The Great Lakes and State Waters Bill of Rights \(bill AO5156A\)](#), would recognize “unalienable and fundamental rights to exist, persist, flourish, naturally evolve, regenerate and be restored” for the Great Lakes and other watersheds throughout New York State. CELDF drafted the bill for Representative Burke with input and guidance from community activists, other attorneys, and tribal members. Individuals, organizations, businesses, and experts are being asked to sign on to a list of supporters. To learn more, including how to support the movement of the bill, please reach out to CELDF.

THE NEW CELDF.ORG

CELDf has shed its old skin in order to better support the work of CELDF. The new CELDF.org features the new way we provide direction, guidance, and agitation for community resistance + resilience in the name of right-relationship via three program areas: Consultation, Education, and Community Resistance + Resilience.

CELDf.org is where newcomers learn who we are and what we do, and access materials and people to understand the why of our work. CELDF.org is also a perfect place to move into our many communication platforms like [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), and CELDF's new Substack page [Truth and Reckoning](#). The new CELDF.org is here to better assist in helping spark mobilizations of community empowerment aimed at transformative change.



2015 **We Don't Want Your Toxic Waste**
CELDf and [Grant Township](#) partner in the adoption of the first rights-based municipal charter in the country. Action was done to reinstate a frack injection well ban from an earlier ordinance that was overturned by a federal judge.

2017 **Uniting Around Nature** CELDF and Tulane Law School, host the first [Rights of Nature Symposium](#) in the U.S. with advocates from the U.S., Ecuador, Nepal, Australia, Sweden, and members of the Ponca Tribe, Ho-Chunk Nation, and Navajo Nation.

CAN YOU HANDLE THE TRUTH?



[Can You Handle the Truth?: Essays of Hard Truths Aimed at Right-Relationships with Earth and Each Other](#) is a

diverse collection of published articles and blogs about people and nature written by CELDF staff through a lens of truth-telling.

The book covers activism, environmental concerns, historical reflections, and more along with a foreword by artist and storyteller Robert Shetterly from the "[Americans Who Tell the Truth](#)" portrait exhibit project which has celebrated truth-telling for over 20 years now.

Can You Handle the Truth? is ultimately a call to reexamine foundational principles and beliefs in the interest of future generations in order to move toward right-relationship by way of grassroots solutions instead of reliance on a regulatory regime that regulates activists instead of polluters and impudent slash-and-burn profiteers.

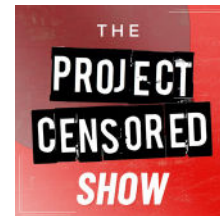
[Order your copy today at CELDF.](#)

CELDF MAKES WAVES IN THE MEDIA

CELDF's work on New York's Great Lakes and State Waters Bill of Rights has made some of the biggest waves of the year for CELDF. Our work has been widely featured in diverse media outlets, including [Rolling Stone](#), [Ricochet](#) (Canada), [Native News Online](#), [Great Lakes Now](#) as well as on the popular podcasts "Positive Leftist News", "Environmental CoffeeHouse" and "Full Circle".

Earlier in April, CELDF's book *Wouldn't You Say? A Collection of Essays About Environment and Community*, written by Ben Price generated a number of interviews, including on [Project Censored](#), a syndicated radio show focused on critical media literacy and both overt and subtle news censorship, which aired on roughly 50 radio stations nationwide.

And, CELDF continues to make splashes, whether it's discussing the new concept of "the right to darkness" with [Salon](#) magazine, or launching our own independent Substack newsletter and podcast, [Truth and Reckoning](#), earlier this year.



RollingStone



**INVEST IN CELDF AND
YOU INVEST IN THE FUTURE.**

**HELP MEET OUR GOAL OF RAISING
\$5 MILLION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS.**



**DONATE
TODAY!**



2019 **The Pebble Ripple Felt Around the World** CELDF drafted [Lake Erie Bill of Rights](#) is adopted in Toledo, Ohio; first law in the United States to secure the rights of a distinct ecosystem Media coverage goes global, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *New York Times*, *NPR*, *Mother Jones*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Daily Show* and many more.

2023 **Tell it Like It Is** CELDF's hosts the first installment of the powerful [Truth, Reckoning, and Right-Relationship](#) gathering at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. Testimonies by students, physicians, former regulators, Indigenous people, and organizers, acknowledge how the culture we have been born into harms both nature and future generations.