



COMMUNITY
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"Gravity and Grace, Analogous Desires" by Andrea Bowers.

living in nature

2024 LIVING IN NATURE

Living in nature. For CELDF it's about a deep dive into right relationship and the transformation needed for humans to realize that they are living from, living with, living in, and living as nature. The challenge to revitalize our relationship with nature is happening in every community because the threats to every community's resilience are increasing every day.

This year's living in nature theme emerges from our [Truth, Reckoning, and Right Relationship with the Great Lakes gathering](#), the release of CELDF's "[Wouldn't You Say?](#)" book, our time in the Amazon with the Sarayaku people, and the launch of a rights of nature continuing legal education series, among other projects, presentations, and community support efforts.

CELDF's End-of-Year Newsletter is a highlight of 2024 and a sneak peek at our plans for the future. So enjoy the articles, factoids, features, and spotlights of the people who make CELDF the powerhouse that it is. We hope this CELDF snapshot helps you hold close and value even more what it means to be living in nature.



Living in right relationship with wetlands –
Lane County, Oregon

Greg Shine, BLM Oregon

SOWING SEEDS OF CHANGE BY SHARING IDEAS

CELDF has been quite busy this year spreading the word. We are very grateful for those opportunities, the support we've gotten from those who have hosted us, and of course the donations to CELDF that make it all possible.

Here is a sampling of the gatherings and groups that hosted us in 2024:

- **Honolulu, Hawaii** Earth Rights Day event at the Capitol
- **Lake Superior, Michigan** [Protect the Porkies Townhall](#) — [The Great Lakes Bill of Rights](#)
- **Corvallis, Oregon** [A Truth & Reckoning with Water](#): Ending an Abusive Relationship keynote address at Oregon State University water symposium
- **Cherokee, North Carolina** IEN's Protecting Mother Earth Conference
- **Nantes, France** [Towards an international network of rivers and other elements of nature \(IREN\)](#)
- **Cleveland, Ohio** [Truth, Reckoning and Right Relationship with the Great Lakes](#), at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland
- **Sussex, United Kingdom** Sussex University and Rewire Earth joint project on The Language of Sustainability
- **Rural Washington** Achieving Right Relationship will Require Resistance + Resilience presentation series in Stevenson and Newport, Washington
- **Denver, Colorado** The Universe and Human Stupidity: Proving Einstein Wrong about Changing Our Relationships to Animals and Plants talk at the University of Denver Sturm Law School
- **Niagara Falls, New York** [The Annual Conference of the Peace & Justice Studies Association](#)
- **Sarayaku Territory, Ecuador** NYU's Law School's More Than Human Life Project - [4 Day Conference](#)
- **Detroit, Michigan** Freshwater Workshop Groundwater Governance in the Michindoh Aquifer at the North American Indian Association of Detroit

Truth, Reckoning, and Right Relationship (TRRR) with the Great Lakes Cleveland, Ohio

CELDF has always been a truth-teller. We've also experienced how some of those truths take time to reckon with. But it's in those moments where potential lies to do something different, something more in line with what is actually needed vs. what we may be conditioned to believe is possible.

In April, we continued what we started last October at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in a chorus of truths about how our culture and personal connections to the Great Lakes and nature have had serious impacts. At the [Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland \(moCa Cleveland\)](#) we engaged with more reckoning and connections that pointed in the direction of right relationship. It was an extraordinary two days with old and new friends using a structure of grounding, exploring, connecting and moving forward all inside the frame of relating to others, both human and nonhuman.

CELDF is using the TRRR framework from these experiences to design a guidebook for communities to host their own gatherings and as a way to approach community organizing as a whole. Stay tuned for more in early 2025.

EXPLORE TRRR VIDEOS ON
CELDF'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL



Making connections at the TRRR gathering in Cleveland

Protecting Mother Earth Conference

Cherokee, North Carolina

Rights of nature has made its way into 44 countries around the world. It's an extraordinary achievement considering that the practical implementation of legal rights for nature was made visible less than 20 years ago by CELDF.

CELDF's Executive Director, Kai Huschke, was provided an opportunity by the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) to be a champion for the potential of rights of nature and its protector as part of a four hour discussion at the [Protecting Mother Earth Conference](#). CELDF understands how Rights of Nature can be an acceleration and bridge towards more traditional ways of First Peoples to assert customary practices and for all communities the ability to self-determine.

Peace and Justice Studies Annual Conference

Niagara University, New York

CELDF's Consulting Director, Tish O'Dell led a 2-hour workshop entitled "What We Do to Nature, We Do to Ourselves". The location of the conference, so close to the horrific environmental disaster of Love Canal, is a living example of the title.

Participants in the workshop discussed our societal reactionary approach to protecting nature, instead of a precautionary approach, which perhaps should be expanded to include some difficult self-reflection. The Rights of Nature Movement was discussed as one possible legal approach to changing laws and policies but its greater contribution may be its effects on our thinking and opening up the possibility for conversations about our interconnectedness with nature.



CELDF's Tish O'Dell and Luella Kenny at Love Canal

RIGHTS OF WETLANDS. COMMUNITY RESISTANCE + RESILIENCE OF THE SARAYAKU

Since helping draft the Declaration on the [Rights of Wetlands](#) in 2020, CELDF has had the honor of working with a consortium of groups from around the world, largely led by scientists, in growing both the national policy level and community practice in the frame of the inherent rights of wetlands. One way this is unfolding is through a multi-partner, multi-country, multi-year project funded by the UK's Darwin Initiative to bolster rights of wetlands from the national policy and community levels.

Through this effort, CELDF landed in the Amazon with the Sarayaku People of the Kichwa-speaking territories for a week in September. CELDF's Executive Director, Kai Huschke, and Gillian Davies, from CELDF's partner, the BSC Group, were on hand to expand the work on rights of wetlands as well as participate in a four-day conference organized by NYU's Law School's More Than Human Life Project.

The Sarayaku call what centrally guides them Kawsak Sacha, which translates into the Living Forest.

The Sarayaku serve as an important example of not only how to feed and support a community but also the underlying value system that protects the ecosystems they are a part of. This is what CELDF has been focused on the past several years as we expand our ability to provide Community Resistance + Resilience support to communities in the United States. All of this builds on CELDF's pioneering work which began with the world's first rights of nature law, adopted with CELDF's guidance, in 2006.

Images of everyday life in Sarayaku.



Left: CELDF's Kai Huschke and Agustin Grijalva, presiding judge in Ecuador's Los Cedros case.



"CELDF created bridges, bridges between humans and other people (from rivers to hummingbirds), bridges to the place beyond this destructive system that attempts to devour everything and everyone, bridges between the movements that are fighting to nurture a just and flowering future."

Blake Lavia & Tzintzun Aguilar-Izzo aka Talking Wings

CELDF

30 years and beyond

CELDF has been there and done that a couple of times now over the years and we are at it again, adapting and reinventing how we keep supporting community health by working to upend the system that has put communities in harm's way. Internally we've tracked our nearly 30 years of existence through phases:

PHASE 1 was the period of doing it like everyone else. **Fight the permit** and you'll win. Yet despite winning on paper, the corporate applicant ultimately wins since the rules are conceived by them. The house always wins.

PHASE 2 was our efforts to change the rules to benefit human and other-than-human members of communities with local bills of rights. But despite hundreds of **CELDF-drafted community and nature's rights laws** being adopted in nearly a dozen states, prompted by a multitude of industrial

assaults, there was never an upswell to transform state and federal laws to validate the community rights sought. What did happen was increased corporate litigation, attempts to disbar or sanction CELDF attorneys, and punish communities with the threats of fines. There was also adoption of more restrictive state laws against community empowerment and the **muzzling of free speech by making citizen initiatives** more difficult to run.

PHASE 3 is focused on building out expanded capacity and capability providing community-level resistance and resilience that goes beyond lawmaking. Communities need to address threats in real time. Since local authority to protect human rights and ecological viability is denied to affected communities, tactics including protest and direct action will be needed. So will building stronger mutual aid capabilities and the implementation of citizen assemblies, alternative media systems, local food production, and energy sourcing.

We see this happening through coordination with others. It's an inside-and-outside approach with more emphasis on what communities need to be doing outside of the system, which will also entail a shift in cultural thinking about our connection to the natural world we are part of.

CELDF has a reputation for trailblazing, and with the stubbornness of the American legal system that predictably protects the social and political advantages of the already advantaged, we are ready to flip the script as we enter our 30th year in 2025. Through CELDF's consultation, education, and community resistance + resilience program areas, together we can best build out the needed community network and continue to be the leader and agitator we have always been for systems change and the good of the whole.



LOOK WHAT'S NEW! A GREAT GIFT IDEA!

CELDF's *Wouldn't You Say?* book is now available for pre-order! Over the last two years, CELDF has been challenging readers with its *Wouldn't You Say?* blog series to think about everything from the power of legal rights attached to corporate property to the rights of nature, free speech, and community action. Authored by Ben Price, author of *How Wealth Rules the World* and CELDF's Education Director, *Wouldn't You Say?* treats key legal, political, and ethical concepts with an eye to brevity and accessibility. We are convinced this book will be helpful to you and all of the CELDF community.



TO PURCHASE YOUR COPY TODAY AND ONE FOR A FRIEND, GO TO [CELDF.ORG/RESOURCES/PUBLICATIONS](https://celdf.org/resources/publications) OR SCAN HERE.



CELDF's Tish O'Dell, Marc White (Rid-A-Ii) and Kelly Clark (Kelly's Working Well Farm) during Q+A after screening "What We Do To Nature, We Do To Ourselves" at Case Western University

Donations to CELDF **compensate the people**

who create, inform, educate, train, and support others in challenging as well as transforming the current corporate state system in which we find ourselves. CELDF is CELDF because of the expertise it employs and the projects it undertakes in the name of communities and the ecosystems they are part of.

"I would tell a friend the CELDF TRRR event was extremely pivotal for my understanding of not just nature, but also people and our place in it. The meetings introduced me to so many brilliant people, whose perspectives, personalities, and banter will stay with me for a lifetime."

Will Underwood,
high school student from Cleveland

Big or small. West coast or Northeast. Conservative or liberal. Middle class or poor. Under immediate threat or dealing with legacy harms. It's all about the community and who decides what happens there. That's what CELDF shows up for. And it's your donations to CELDF that make it possible.

CELDF'S TOP TEN

- 1 **Hard to Say; Harder to Do** CELDF's commitment to [truth, reckoning, and right relationship](#), featuring [the Great Lakes](#), was put on display in April and inspired the development of a process to help other communities connect to their own local ecosystems.
- 2 **Read'em and Weep Then Get Busy** - [CELDF's *Wouldn't You Say?*](#) series was printed in book form this fall. A second CELDF book, *Can You Handle the Truth?*, will be released in early 2025. Both books hit hard at our realities, the why's, and what it will take to change course.
- 3 **United We Prevail** A CELDF blog [Tribal Sovereignty, White Man's Reservations, and the Need for Tribal-Municipal Solidarity To Protect Our Collective Future](#) ripped open the truths of tribes and municipalities on the legal contaminants keeping true tribal sovereignty and local self-government from happening and why, working together, that could change.
- 4 **The REAL Amazon** Connecting to more than human life, supporting the inherent rights of wetlands, and a snapshot of deeper community resistance and resilience converged in the Amazon forest of Ecuador in September. CELDF has been enriched with perspectives, ideas, and potential partners.
- 5 **Validation and Gratitude** Over 2024 CELDF has benefited greatly from the generosity of others including a first-time donation of \$25, a legacy gift of \$100,000, a major donor's additional gift of \$2,000, and a planned giving amount of \$82,000. We appreciate it all.
- 6 **So Much Fire, So Much Wisdom** This spring CELDF launched its Partner-Advisor Committee whose members will help build out CELDF's potency and potential with Community Resistance + Resilience. The committee is full of experience, ideas, and desire to change the paradigm. Please welcome: Tzintzun Aquilar-Izzo, Lina Blount, Denzel Caldwell, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, Blake Lavia, Camila Vergara, Debra Weistar, and Max Wilbert. CELDF is lucky to know and work with these caring people.
- 7 **Rights of Nature in France** In November CELDF's Tish O'Dell and Kai Huschke joined rights of nature advocates from Europe, Columbia, Ecuador, and New Zealand as part of an event hosted by The Nantes Institute for Advanced Study in France to discuss the state of rights of nature/ivers and its potential to expand further around the globe.
- 8 **Doing Great work for the Great Lakes** For the last two years CELDF has been working with a coalition of advocates, organizations, and tribal members along with New York State legislature Representative Pat Burke on a [Great Lakes Bill of Rights \(GLBoR\)](#) state law. The effort is moving into its third year keeping a spotlight on the Great Lakes and the need for the law to recognize the rights of these awesome bodies of water.
- 9 **The Grassroots Dirtying the Ivory Halls of Academia** Over the years CELDF has been cited in dozens of academic journals, thesis papers, and law review articles because of our status as a world leader on rights of nature. In the past year alone, CELDF has made itself available to a half dozen academic researchers including a Cambridge thesis paper entitled *Towards a More-than-Human Heritage* and a law review article entitled *The Puzzling Persistence of Nature's Rights* from Harvard.
- 10 **Ohio and Oregon Water Warriors** CELDF salutes ongoing efforts in Cincinnati through the group [CROW](#) to recognize the rights of the Ohio River and longtime community rights champions [Community Rights Lane County](#) whose law-making efforts to recognize the rights of the watersheds in Lane County, Oregon have been nothing short of heroic. Both groups have worked and continue to work with CELDF in their ongoing campaigns.

CELDF BY THE NUMBERS

Media stories = 600+

Democracy Schools = 300+



Democracy School graduates = 3,500+

Communities partnered with = 500+



Presentations = 2,000+

Documentary film features = 4

Featured in books, articles, law reviews = 100+

Laws adopted = 225+

Amounts sanctioned = \$150,000



Value of pro bono services over the years =
Over \$15,000,000

Average annual CELDF budget
compared to the big enviro groups =
\$750,000 vs. \$170,000,000



CELDF's Kai Huschke sharing chicha with leaders from the Sarayaku

They say it's about who you know.

At CELDF we believe it's about getting to know real people. People who are genuinely committed to systemic change and willing to challenge injustice, while simultaneously boosting real community resistance + resilience. CELDF is all in!



living in nature 2024

Please consider ending your year with a [tax deductible contribution to CELDF](#).

Help us make 2025 a year of local self-determination and the Rights of Nature.



YES, I SUPPORT CELDF! ENCLOSED IS MY CONTRIBUTION OF:

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are tax deductible





living in nature

2024



Neon sign from artist Andrea Bowers installed on the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio

“CELDF is not your conventional environmental organization. It will challenge you to think outside the box, by exploring and questioning the existing system of law; a system which determines who makes decisions for our communities and nature - and why.”

Sherry Fleming,
NW Ohio
Community Resident

Nearly everyday, for almost 30 years now, people have been reaching out to CELDF for help. There is a knock at the door, and without hesitation, we welcome people in with a readiness to listen to what they have to say. We’ve had thousands of conversations leading to system rattling challenges and changes, and established long running friendships with people and organizations from around the world. That willingness to be present, as well as being honest with those thousands of people, are why CELDF has persevered over three decades and why we look to be around for years to come.

Our ability to keep the lights on, the heat turned up, and a welcoming meeting space to engage in gut wrenching conversations (yes many are over Zoom these days) comes because so many of you have been kind enough to help CELDF continue to help others. Thank you for that and to be direct, [please keep those donations coming](#).

Being steeped in the business of helping both people and the ecosystems they are connected to, CELDF has not been the best at asking others to help us. We’ve spent years, and we still believe rightfully so, putting others out front. The people and communities doing the thankless work of challenging deep systemic injustices by standing strong on the grounds of a community’s right to decide, have not only stood up for themselves, but have insisted on the importance of ecosystems to the viability of their communities by calling for, and in dozens of cases, securing [legal rights of nature](#).

Over the last few years CELDF has been featuring the work of other allies and partners via emails, social media, and events like the [truth, reckoning, and right relationship gatherings we hosted in 2023 and 2024](#). We see great importance and value in helping others engaged in challenging injustice and in partnership mapping out strategies that build toward ecological balance through right relationship.

"I had the opportunity to work with community groups in Colorado that were supported by CELDF. I was honored to work with those dedicated individuals and to be a part of an organization that has done so much good in the world."

Colorado Attorney Karen Breslin

In the spring we launched CELDF's Partner-Advisor Committee. This amazing group of eight is a strong symbol of what it looks like when CELDF does ask for help. Through the guidance and partnerships with this group, CELDF is looking to develop an expansive network of ready resources for community level resistance and resilience. It means getting beyond the organizing and legal support CELDF has been traditionally known for and entering other realms of supporting communities, in a coordinated way. It means working with communities to engage in democratic citizen assemblies, mutual aid, heightened protest, and other real time needs. Our partner-advisors are here to help CELDF evolve into a more complete community resource.

CELDf knows that as we grow, as the network of community partners grows and as that growth turns into effective action, pressures will come from the system including shrinking opportunities for funding from institutional money. We also know that we have benefitted in the past from the generosity of a small handful of major donors in a way that other organizations would envy. But the truth is, we are in a different era and for the work of resistance and resilience to be healthy, and sustaining, it will need to be supported by more small and medium sized donations vs. a small handful of major donors.

So thank you to those who have been supporting CELDF for a long time. And an advanced thank you to those new donors to CELDF. [We need your help.](#) And communities and ecosystems all over the planet need our help.

All the best and happy holidays!

CELDf staff

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HOW DO YOU SPELL RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE?

GRANT TOWNSHIP + CELDF

2013 is when this community found out they and the community's water were under threat and the battles began. The local laws passed were challenged, the community was threatened with bankruptcy, CELDF faced sanctions, the State environmental protection agency sued Grant township and Pennsylvania General Energy still has 2 lawsuits against the community in State and Federal courts. Despite all that, the frack waste well has been plugged and the people are still standing their ground.

Grant Township should be listed under the definition of Resistance and Resilience in the dictionary.

WOULDN'T YOU SAY?