

Dear Friends,

Fall 2022

Has a corporation ever tried to move into your town to frack, extract, and toxify? Have you watched in horror as fertile farmland was bulldozed to build more cornfield-sized warehouses? Is there a push to privatize your town's water system? Maybe where you live, the sense of being under siege comes from the clear-cutting of the forest or plans for a massive hard metal mining operation. As if the ecosystem you live in existed only to be given over to a commercial entity.

If so, you know how hard it is to take a stand and get support from your local government. Even if the town denies the permit, the corporation almost always appeals to the state – of which the town is just a legal adjunct – and with the predictable support of the state, the corporation reverses the will of the community. And then where are you?

It's terrible that it happens this way, but it does. And so **the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, or CELDF**, exists to assist local people in speaking in their own voices for the rights of all human and nonhuman beings to live and to thrive and to flourish from rural towns to cities plagued by environmental injustice.

For 27 years, we've worked to empower the movement for Community Rights and the Rights of Nature. Because people have forgotten they're part of Nature, and reminding them of that truth has the capacity to make good things happen and maybe even to turn things around. In the past year, **CELDF** reached more people than ever. But we cannot thrive alone, and we're writing to ask you to make the most generous gift you can today in support of this work in 2023.

**Your gift will enable CELDF to partner with and advocate for:**

- **more community groups and municipalities** that want to prevent corporations from treating their communities, air, water, and land, as resource colonies and sacrifice zones.
- **more local people** who want to defend their health and the health of their local ecosystems, to get help in navigating government processes, and to advance the rights-based laws that alone promise long-term sustainability.
- **all voiceless, unrepresented lifeforms** that cannot defend themselves or their ecosystems and are vulnerable to even more suffering, ill health, and diminishment.

**With your support, CELDF will deliver:** Democracy Schools and other community-based education; consultation on how to adopt Community Bill of Rights ordinances, municipal charters, and state constitutional amendments that remove barriers to local laws protecting Nature and people; collaboration on scholarly works, digital and in-person arts events, and more to change the conversation; access to alternative systems; and legal drafting and counsel.

Thank you for making your gift in support of our work. We wish you the best for the New Year.

Sincerely,

Stacey Schmader, Chad Nicholson, Kai Huschke, Ben Price, Tish O'Dell, Michelle Sanborn, Terry Lodge

**Turn the page to read an update on our work in OR & PA and About a Victory in Ecuador**

## Oregon

Since 2014, CELDF has provided support to communities in the Pacific Northwest fighting chemical trespass from aerial pesticide spraying, chemical run-off, and a liquid natural gas export terminal and pipeline. CELDF assisted Lincoln and Coos County to draft Community Bill of Rights citizen initiatives banning aerial spraying of pesticides, and establishing a sustainable energy future, respectively. The Lincoln County measure Freedom from Aerially Sprayed Pesticides was adopted. Our work continues in Lincoln, Lane, and Douglas Counties, OR. We are also assisting with community rights efforts in the Portland metro area. We are in ongoing discussions and planning with residents, activists, and elected officials in both OR and WA on instituting rights-based watershed protection laws. These efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

## Pennsylvania

CELDf continues to represent Grant Township in their quest for local control and to protect the environment against an injection well. We have assisted Clara Township to develop a Home Rule Charter, initiated by Concerned Citizens for Clara Township (CCCT) to halt a Roulette Oil and Gas LLC (ROGC) application for a Class II Injection Well Permit. We worked with petitioners in Reading to amend the City Charter in response to unaddressed toxic waste and environmental racism.

New project areas will include consulting with communities in southwest PA around environmental protection. Churchill Borough has been considering implementing a \*Home Rule\* campaign in response to their efforts to resist an Amazon distribution facility. We've also had discussions with groups working to keep fracking out of parks in Allegheny County. Meetings and workshops have been held with the Sunrise Movement in Pittsburgh about divesting Pittsburgh's assets and investments in fossil fuel-related activities and with residents and elected officials in Plum Borough, who are working to resist the siting of a frack-waste injection well.

Statewide, new work includes drafting laws for communities in the Lehigh Valley who are resisting the dumping of municipal sewage sludge on farmland. Several communities in southeast PA have also reached out for assistance in keeping their municipal water and sewage treatment plants public.

## Ecuador

Recently, Ecuador's Constitutional Court breathed life into the words Rights of Nature, ruling in favor of the rights of the Los Cedros Cloud Forest ecosystem and local communities over the rights of a foreign mining corporation. In what is truly a seminal case for the legal rights of nature, the court addressed the precautionary principle, which puts the burden of proof on corporations to show that a proposed project will not harm Nature; biodiversity; the importance of community input into all decision making; and how human rights to clean water and a healthy environment are inseparable from the rights of the ecosystem and Nature. This judicial decision vindicates the vision of an Earth-centered jurisprudence shared by those who framed Ecuador's constitutional language, with input from CELDF, and initiated the Rights of Nature Movement.

