

Rights of Nature Timeline



Rights of Nature have been recognized & respected by various indigenous cultures throughout time. The Western World is just starting to learn and adapt to this reality about the world around us.

2018

India declares legal rights of “Entire Animal Kingdom”

In a court ruling regarding cruelty of horses, it was declared that:

“Every species has an inherent right to live and are required to be protected by law.”

&

“Animals cannot be treated merely as property” existing for human use.

Columbia Supreme Court rules that Amazon Region has Right to “legal protection, preservation, maintenance, and restoration.”

The Court cited a previous court opinion that stated it was “necessary to take a step forward in jurisprudence” to change the relationship of humankind with nature “before it is too late or the damage is irreversible.”

Ponca Nation is First Tribe in U.S. to Adopt Rights of Nature into Law

“We are proud to be moving into the future by honoring our original instructions to respect all life on our Mother Earth,” said Casey Camp-Horinek, a member of the Ponca Tribal Business Council.

New Zealand Recognizes Mount Taranaki has Legal Rights as Person

Mount Taranaki became New Zealand’s 3rd natural entity to be granted rights as a “legal personality”.

2017

1st Rights of Nature Conservation Easement on Hawaiian Islands

Ecosystems and natural communities on eight acres of land on the island of Kaua’i now possess legal rights to exist, thrive, regenerate, and evolve.

New Zealand Water Ecosystem Gains Legal ‘Personhood’ Status

The *Te Awa Tupua Act* was passed. It finalizes an agreement that the national government of New Zealand had reached with the Whanganui River iwi - the local Maori people - to recognize a legal persona for the Whanganui River.

The Whanganui River is no longer property of .. government — the river now owns itself.

Rivers' Rights Recognized

India's High Court of Uttarakhand at Naintal issued a ruling recognizing both the Ganga and Yumana rivers as legal person with rights.

First U.S. Federal Lawsuit Claiming Rivers have Rights

The Colorado River sued the State of Colorado in a first-in-the-nation lawsuit requesting that the U.S. District Court recognize the river's rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and naturally evolve

Later, the attorney chose to withdraw the lawsuit due to Colorado's Attorney General threats of sanctions that included financial penalties and disbarment. Such actions against attorneys are becoming a common response to challenge rights of communities and nature.

Mexico City Recognizes Rights of Ecosystems

Mexico City incorporated language into the city constitution which requires a law to be passed which would "recognize and regulate the broader protection of the rights of nature formed by all its ecosystems and species as a collective entity subject to rights."

Rights of Nature, Oregon

Lincoln Co. voters passed a ban on aerial spraying of pesticides. The ordinance empowers residents and the Co. Government to enforce and defend the rights of ecosystems.

2016

Columbia Recognizes Rights of River

Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled that the Rio Atrato possesses rights to "protection, conservation, maintenance, and restoration," and established joint guardianship for the river shared by indigenous people and the national government.

1st Tribal Nation in the U.S. to vote to Adopt RoN into Constitution

The General Council of the Ho-Chunk Nation voted to enshrine the RoN as part of their constitution.

2015

1st Government to Recognize All Animals as Sentient Beings

New Zealand passed the [Animal Welfare Amendment Bill](#) that stipulates that it is now necessary to 'recognize animals as sentient'.

Pope Francis Recognizes Rights of Nature

Pope Francis declared, "A true 'right of the environment' does exist..."

2014

Land Gains Legal 'Personhood' Status

The [Te Urewera Act](#) finalizes a settlement between the Tuhoë people and the New Zealand government. In doing so, the government gives up ownership of the [Te Urewera](#) - a former 821-square-mile national park - and the land becomes a legal entity with "all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person".

2013

European Citizen's Initiative for the Rights of Nature is Launched

EU initiatives allow citizens to present proposals to the European Union government for consideration.

Santa Monica is 1st CA Community Recognizes Rights of Nature

The City Council voted 7-0 to adopt the state's first ever [Bill of Rights for Sustainability](#), directing the city to "recognize the rights of people, natural communities and ecosystems to exist, regenerate and flourish."

This is one of the few U.S. RoN legal/legislative actions not initiated by a community opposed to a specific issue (e.g. fracking). It was initiated by concerns about the health of nature and its inherent rights.

2012 and Beyond

Bolivia Recognizes the Rights of Nature

Bolivia adopted its *Law Under the Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well*, which recognizes the Rights of Mother Earth in statutory law.

Pittsburg is 1st Major U.S. City to Codify Legally Enforceable Rights of Nature

An ordinance recognizing the Rights of Nature was passed unanimously by the City Council in Pittsburgh as part of a ban on shale gas drilling and fracking.

Ecuador Adopts Rights of Nature in Constitution

September 2008, the people of Ecuador voted in support of the proposed constitution, becoming the first country in the world to recognize the Rights of Nature in its national constitution.

In 2011, the Provincial Justice Court of Loja ruled in favor of the Vilcabamba River

The river was a plaintiff, seeking to enforce its own constitutional rights to exist and thrive. The healthy functioning and flow of the river was being impacted by a government road-widening construction project.

1st Written Law that Recognizes Rights of Nature is Passed

In 2006, with the vote of the Borough Council, Tamaqua Pennsylvania became the very first place in the western world to recognize the Rights of Nature in law.

Should Trees Have Standing, 1st Print of Rights of Nature

In 1972 Christopher Stone wrote this article that was expanded into a book. He challenged the fact that trees (and all of nature) are viewed as objects by law and argued that it needs to change. He wrote it to influence the SIERRA CLUB v. MORTON court case.

A U.S. Supreme Court Justice Recognizes Rights of Nature

In SIERRA CLUB v. MORTON, 405 U.S. 727 (1972), Judge William O. Douglas was the one Supreme Court Justice that ruled in favor of the Sierra Club. In his dissenting opinion he asserted that natural entities ought to have standing to sue for their own protection, citing the "Should Trees Have Standing" article.