

JOIN US - Campaign to Secure Legal Rights for the Great Lakes



- There is a growing movement in the U.S. and worldwide to recognize and enforce fundamental rights for nature.
- Establishing legal rights for the Great Lakes would provide long-lasting protection for this unique, important ecosystem

Legal Rights for Nature Background

- Following in the footsteps of other rights-based movements, such as women's suffrage and gay rights, comes a movement to recognize the rights of nature.
- Whereas our current legal system treats nature as property, a nature's rights paradigm ensures basic rights for ecosystems and species.
- Indigenous peoples have always recognized the rights of nature, and the nature's rights movement honors that perspective and creates tools to bring this paradigm into modern law.
- In recent years, governments and judiciaries worldwide have finally started to integrate the rights of nature into our legal systems.

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Recent Rights of Nature Victories

- Worldwide, waterways such as the Whanganui River in New Zealand, Ganga (or "Ganges") and Yamuna Rivers in India, and Atrato River in Colombia have been recognized as legal entities possessing rights.
- In the United States, some three-dozen cities and towns have passed laws recognizing nature's rights and, oftentimes, the related human right to a healthy environment.
- In 2013, Earth Law Center (ELC) helped Santa Monica become the first West Coast city to pass such a law, which focused on sustainability.
- Global bodies (e.g., the International Union for Conservation of Nature) have also joined the movement.

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Rights for the Great Lakes

- We are now building support for a campaign to recognize and implement legal rights for the Great Lakes, with a focus on defining and achieving aquatic "health."
- The Great Lakes, which contain about 21% of the world's fresh surface water, are under threat from contamination, invasive species, habitat destruction, and more.
- A legal right to health for the Great Lakes could be implemented through specific metrics and timelines for these metrics to be achieved.
- A law establishing rights for the Great Lakes would also allow citizens to serve as guardians of nature and enforce its inherent rights.

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