



COP15: Landmark Biodiversity Deal Recognizes Rights of Nature is Vital to its Success

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Montreal, Canada—Negotiators from across the world have adopted a landmark global biodiversity agreement marking the first international agreement to explicitly promote “rights of nature” and “rights of Mother Earth.” The breakthrough came as nearly 200 countries completed their negotiations at COP-15, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference aimed at creating a plan to protect and restore biodiversity through 2030.

The outcome document, called the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), adopts 23 conservation targets as well as guidance for implementation. The framework highlights rights-based protections for Nature in several sections.

- For example, the framework “recognizes and considers ... diverse value systems and concepts, including, for those countries that recognize them, **rights of nature and rights of Mother Earth**, as being an integral part of its successful implementation” (Section C(9), emphasis added).
- Additionally, the framework calls for at least \$200 billion by 2030 to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, including “**Mother Earth centric actions**” that are defined to include ecocentric and rights based approaches that promote the continuity of all living beings and their communities (Target 19, emphasis added).

Delegates from Bolivia championed the inclusion of Rights of Nature and Rights of Mother Earth (terms that are roughly synonymous) with support from Ecuador and New Zealand, while negotiating with countries who originally opposed the text (Argentina, Japan, the EU, and Australia, among others). Opposition largely derived from countries stating that their legal systems do not have similar laws, but ultimately negotiators reached consensus on the final text.

“What we have seen thus far in conservation at the international level is that our values, or how we value Nature, shapes how effectively we protect and restore biodiversity,” said **Rachel Bustamante, Conservation Science & Policy Analyst for Earth Law Center**, who co-led a civil society ‘Rights of Nature Delegation’ advocating for the voice of Nature at COP-15. “Rights of Nature in this international treaty will help encourage a proactive and caring approach to conservation, where society considers the interests and needs of biodiversity beyond the benefits that humans receive. This has certainly been lacking by the majority of decision makers but is fundamental in many Indigenous peoples’ understandings and governance systems. The fact that the treaty now encourages us to learn from and work with differing value systems demonstrates leaders are willing to utilize new tools to prevent further biodiversity loss.”

In addition to support for the Rights of Nature, one of the major outcomes of the framework is support for 30x30, a commitment to preserve 30 percent of all land and seas by the year 2030. This is backed with strong language to ensure protection of Indigenous rights, a concern of many for implementing protected areas without infringing on traditional territories. Some [civil society groups](#) pushed for 50x30, arguing that the [Global Safety Net report](#) and other scientific sources conclude that 50% global protection by the year 2030 is needed to protect biodiversity and reverse climate change.

Globally, Rights of Nature is now recognized at some level of government in about 30 countries. For example, in 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to constitutionally recognize the “Rights of Nature,” thereby granting basic rights to Nature, just as humans possess rights. Just this year, [Panama](#) nationally recognized the Rights of Nature, Spain recognized the [Mar Menor](#) saltwater lagoon as a legal entity with legal rights, and [two local townships](#) in Washington State recognized the rights of the Southern Resident Orcas in an important step toward protecting the endangered species and their habitat, the Salish Sea.

This news is a tremendous victory for groups involved, who have been collaborating for three years to encourage the inclusion of Rights of Nature language in the post-2020 framework. Their efforts [received support](#) from approximately 200 organizations and individuals from over 40 countries.

Additional Quotes

Vera Urtaza, co-founder of Keystone Species Alliance, is equally excited about the adopted text, stating she acknowledges that “one way to get closer to achieving the Paris Agreement goal of staying ‘well below 2 degree Celsius” is to acknowledge that Nature has rights, that we share this planet with 8.7 million known species and that it is our duty to change course to avoid our own extinction. We are Nature, and we need to respect and honor life on Earth.

“Inclusion of the Rights of Nature in this international biodiversity agreement is a watershed moment for the movement on one of the world’s biggest stages,” said **Missy Lahren, Board President at Earth Law Center**. “This victory will also help propel the Rights of Nature and other ecocentric law movements into new jurisdictions as well as within other international treaties.”

“I have the greatest respect for the hard work of everyone involved, who worked on this framework to find the right words that honor the needs and wishes of not only the biodiversity treaty parties, but also Mother Earth’s own needs and wishes,” said **Doris Ragettli, Co-Founder, Rights of Mother Earth**. “In particular, I am thrilled by the agreement’s commitment to enhance Mother Earth centric actions, including by Indigenous peoples and local communities,” she added.

“This is a first and very important step towards a new ethic based on an understanding of humans as a part of nature, not separate from it. The next challenge is the implementation, which needs supporting and binding legal frameworks.” **Pella Thiel, End Ecocide Sweden**.

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Earth Law Center (www.earthlawcenter.org) advances Earth-centered laws and movements across the world. They have expertise on the rights of ecosystems, animals, future generations, and other "voiceless" entities, in addition to other “Earth law” movements. Last year, ELC published the first law school textbook on Earth law, “[Earth Law: Emerging Ecocentric Law – A Guide for Practitioners](#).”

Rights of Mother Earth is a global movement and campaign for the adoption of a Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth by the United Nations, to complement the Human Rights Declaration. Please sign and share the petition at: www.RightsofMotherEarth.com.

End Ecocide Sweden (<https://endecocide.se>) is the Swedish representative of the global Stop Ecocide International campaign to include ecocide as a crime at the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

Keystone Species Alliance (<https://keystonespeciesalliance.org>) works to develop and advocate for legislation, regulations, and government programs to improve the environment and protect keystone species through public awareness and public policy to implement new standards for protection by recognizing the significant carbon cycle, water cycle and nitrogen cycle contribution of keystone species.

International Observatory of Nature Rights (www.observatoirenature.org) offers legal advice and support in enacting bills, public policies, and peaceful interventions in legal proceedings by representing our partners in defending the rights of Nature.

Photos here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DmFbJu0LuTZIC4KdKmbCUU-92x6Yj7ny?usp=sharing>