

Nature's rights gain some legal standing

Elise D. García | Jan. 16, 2014 Eco Catholic
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The sun warmed our faces as again we began the third day of the Global Rights of Nature summit with a morning ceremony, led by Tom Goldtooth (Dine? and Dakota) and Casey Camp-Horinek (Ponca), expressing gratitude to Mother Earth for the life that animates and sustains us.

"We are in crisis," said Mari Margil, associate director of the U.S.-based [Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund](#) [1], which has helped three-dozen communities in the United States -- [including the city of Pittsburgh](#) [2] -- establish [rights of nature](#) [3]. "Our communities have determined that the best way to oppose fracking or factory farming is by taking matters into their own hands, establishing bans on those practices in their local governments."

"Our environmental laws authorize exploitation of ecosystems. Fundamental systems change is required," said Thomas Linzey, executive director of the defense fund.

In localities where elected officials aren't willing to participate, the fund has pioneered a new form of private land easements where citizens can create rights of nature on their own properties.

"If you get enough land owners putting nature rights on their properties, it leverages power to change," Linzey said.

He and Margil are also working with governments around the world, including in Nepal, where the impact of climate change on melting glaciers in the Himalayas is life threatening.

"We're addressing rights of nature and also rights of people to a healthy climate," Linzey said.

"We need to have a vision of the future. What kind of society do we want?" said economist Alberto Acosta, Ecuador's former minister of energy and mines, and president of the country's Constituent Assembly that enacted the country's 2008 constitution, the first in the world to include rights of nature.

A five-year-old girl played in the courtyard during the morning ceremony offered an opportunity for reflection.

"As we do our work," Goldtooth said, "we need to think of that young grandmother -- and what life will be like for her grandchildren."

[Adrian Dominican Sr. Elise D. García, is the former co-director of [Santuario Sisterfarm](#) [4], an ecology center in the Texas Hill Country dedicated to cultivating cultural and biological diversity. She is attending the [Global Rights of Nature summit](#) [5], which runs through Friday, and will be [blogging](#) [6] updates throughout the week.]

Editor's Note: The *National Catholic Reporter* is embarking on a groundbreaking project to give greater voice to sisters around the world. To learn more about this project or sign up for email alerts visit, <http://ncronline.org/sisters> [7].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.celdf.org/>

[2] <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/pittsburg-bans-natural-gas-drilling>

[3] <http://therightsofnature.org/>

[4] <http://www.sisterfarm.org/>

[5] <http://therightsofnature.org/conferences/rights-of-nature-summit-tribunal/>

[6] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/rights-nature-alliance-holds-ecuador-summit>

[7] <http://ncronline.org/sisters>