

# WHAT IF FORESTS HAD RIGHTS?

## RIGHTS OF NATURE

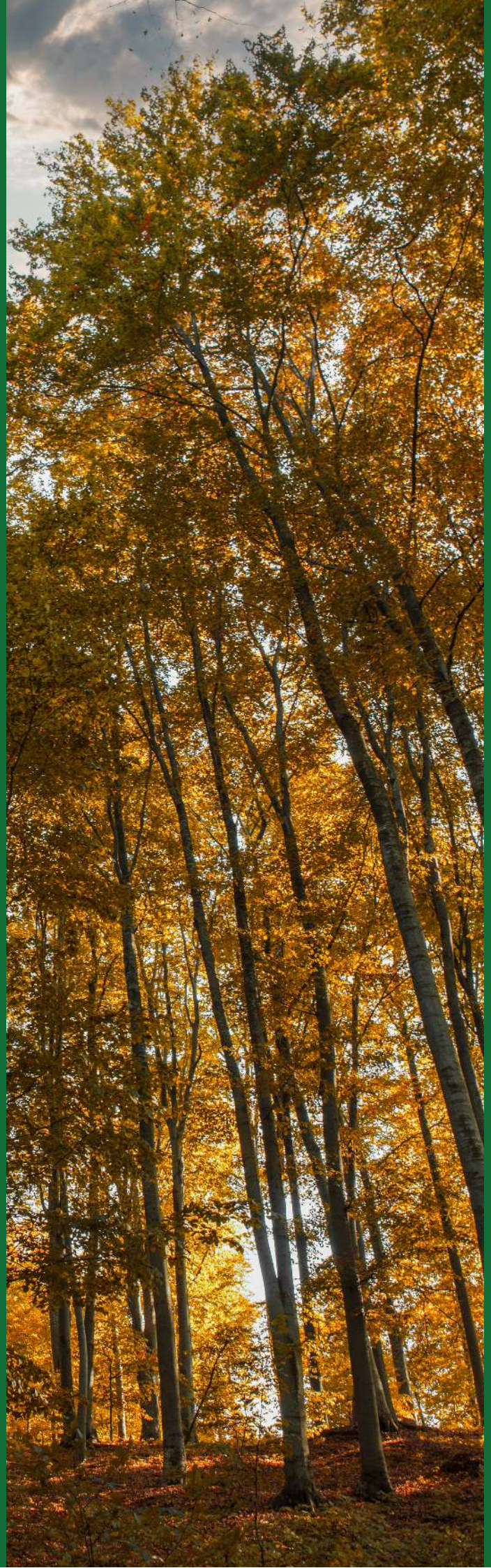
'Rights of Nature' is a concept, or way of thinking about how we can redefine our relationship with the natural world. By building on this relationship with reciprocity and care, we can learn (or remember) how to live in harmony with nature.

## WHO WILL SPEAK FOR THE TREES?

A forest is a living ecosystem - one that provides us with the air we breathe. Forests also play a vital role in our water cycle. **What if forests had the right to exist, to be restored, to evolve, to thrive?** Ecuador was the first country in the world to write the Rights of Nature into its constitution and its people are already using the concept to stand up for their forests. In December 2021 the country's highest court ruled that copper and gold mining in the protected cloud forest Los Cedros was unconstitutional and violated the Rights of Nature. **The forest, as a living ecosystem, has the right not to be destroyed!**

## WILL WE?

We have precious little ancient woodland left on the island of Ireland, and what remains is under threat. Forests such as Prehen Ancient Woodland, Co. Derry and the beautiful forests near Rostrevor, Co. Down are threatened by damaging development. In some places, problems are caused by the farming of non-native trees - such as Sitka Spruce plantations in Co. Leitrim. All of these issues are a consequence of systemic failure of planning and environmental regulation systems across the island of Ireland and the effects on our environment have been catastrophic. Nature and communities have no say. What if Prehen and our other forests had the right to exist and to thrive? **What if we could stand up in court and speak for the trees?**





# HOW COULD WE RECOGNISE RIGHTS OF NATURE IN OUR LAWS, POLICY AND PRACTICE?

There are different spheres in which this can be done - from engagement at **community level**, to changes in laws, policy or even constitutions by **local and national governments**, but also extending to the development of a new **international** rights of nature movement.

On 3rd April 2021 the **community** of Greencastle, Co. Tyrone asserted the rights of community and rights of nature in the face of a mining threat and associated government abandonment of the ancient Green Road. **'People, nature and eco-systems are all part of our community including mountains, hills, rivers, streams, bogs, trees and all living therein.'** The assertion was a powerful message of community empowerment and solidarity with nature.

Taking inspiration from Blue Mountains County Council in Australia, Derry City and Strabane District Council became the first **local council** on the island to declare a motion on the Rights of Nature. Others have followed, including Fermanagh & Omagh, Belfast, Newry, Mourne and Down, and Donegal County Council; the latter being the first Council south of the border to do so. After these historic declarations, the job remains of finding a pathway to embedding the Rights of Nature in local law, policy, planning and practices.

Already **countries** such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Uganda and the state of Oaxaca, Mexico have written Rights of Nature into their constitutions. Nature now has those who will speak for her if threats arise. Of course this isn't the end of the story as big business also has its voice, but nature is no longer silent and governments have been forced to listen. The **international community** has also recognised rights of nature and the Rights of Nature movement is sweeping the globe. Organisations such as Centre for Democratic and Environmental Rights (CDER) and the Global Alliance for Rights of Nature (GARN) are helping communities, councils and states take a stand for nature. The United Nations are also taking steps forward - in 2009 the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on 'Harmony with Nature'. There are also advances in the global call to make ecocide an international crime.

**For more information and resources, visit [www.ejni.net/rights-of-nature](http://www.ejni.net/rights-of-nature) or email [Lynda@ejni.net](mailto:Lynda@ejni.net)**

international  
countries

council

community

