

WHAT IF RIVERS 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 WATERS?

Rivers are essential to life, playing an essential role in Earth's hydrologic cycle, as well as providing habitat for a huge diversity of species. Rivers support humans by providing food sources, livelihoods, water for drinking and sanitation, and much more. However, many rivers on the island of Ireland are polluted and dying. **What if rivers had the right to flow, to be free from pollution, to be restored, to thrive?** An increasing number of countries now recognise the rights of their rivers - including India, New Zealand, Colombia, Bangladesh and the United States. An international coalition has penned the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers. **If the forests are the Earth's lungs, the rivers are her arteries - they should be free to flow!**

WILL WE?

Communities are already calling for the Rights of the Foyle and the Rights of the Shannon - rivers so precious to us yet at threat from mining, industrial agriculture and other forms of extractive capitalism. The rights of nature movement in Ireland is connecting with other communities across the world who have achieved rights for their rivers. **Could the next step be to recognise the rights of rivers on our island?**



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 or email Lynda@ejni.net

