



# Rights of Wetlands

**Wetlands, as Nature, have an intrinsic right to exist and flourish in a healthy, fully functioning state.**

## Rights of Nature<sup>1</sup>:

Nature has rights, just as people do

Nature has intrinsic rights to exist, to have a place to exist, to thrive/flourish, and to regenerate/participate in Earth's processes

Nature has inherent rights, not just to benefit people

## Transforming Our Relationship with Wetlands

The Rights of Nature paradigm transforms the human-wetlands relationship from one of exploitation, extraction, and depletion to one that recognizes the rights and living beingness of wetlands, thereby embodying a relationship based on reciprocity, kinship, and gratitude and re-establishing a healthy, sustainable future aligning culture and governance with ecological and climate reality.

**“Transformative change in all parts of society and our economy is needed to stabilize our climate, stop biodiversity loss and chart a path to the sustainable future we want.”**

Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Chair Ana Maria Hernandez Salgar (2021)

## Ecologically sustainable development requires<sup>2</sup>:

- Living in harmony with Nature rather than exploiting and dominating
- Humans are part of Nature, rather than separate and superior
- Consistency with the scientific laws governing how natural ecosystems function (a.k.a. “Deal with reality, lest reality deal with you”)



To learn more: [www.rightsofwetlands.org](http://www.rightsofwetlands.org)

## Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands<sup>3</sup>



## The right to...

- 1 Exist.
- 2 Their ecologically determined location in the landscape.
- 3 Natural, connected, and sustainable hydrological regimes.
- 4 Ecologically sustainable climatic conditions.
- 5 Have naturally occurring biodiversity, free of introduced or invasive species that disrupt their ecological integrity.
- 6 Integrity of structure, function, evolutionary processes, and the ability to fulfill natural ecological roles in the Earth's processes.
- 7 To be free from pollution and degradation.
- 8 Regeneration and restoration.

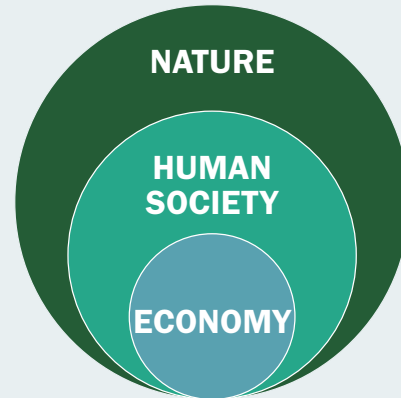


## Rights of Nature is transformative as it embeds human societies within ecosystems.

### Current Sustainable Development<sup>4</sup>



### Rights of Nature<sup>5</sup>



### Key Messages

- Achieving the future well-being and sustainability of life on Earth requires rapid and transformative change.
- Recognizing, implementing, and ensuring Rights of Wetlands is a critically important transformative change towards aligning human activities with ecological reality.
- Humans have an ethical duty to recognize the Rights of Nature, including the Rights of Wetlands and other elements of Nature to exist, to have a place to exist, and to fully participate in the Web of Life.

### Healthy wetlands can't exist without all 8 rights.

- Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are leaders in recognizing the Rights and living beingness of Nature and the role and responsibilities of humans as members of the Web of Life.
- Legal structures for applying Rights of Nature exist, and they apply to Rights of Wetlands.
- Local communities can themselves take, and are taking, actions to change their relationship with wetlands.
- Rights of Wetlands can be promoted and supported through cultural, educational, legal, and wetland management strategies.

### Why Now?

We are at a crossroads. Despite wetland conservation and restoration efforts, wetland loss and destruction continue, with

**35%** of global wetlands<sup>6</sup> lost since the 1970s<sup>7,8</sup>.

Wetland loss and destruction contribute to climate change and biodiversity degradation and loss. Existing approaches to conservation, restoration, and sustainable development have failed to shift the human-Nature relationship or halt consumption-oriented human behavior that has led us to the brink of catastrophic climate destabilization and brought on the 6th mass extinction, all of which is happening more rapidly than anticipated. We have little time left to change course so we must act now.

### A Path Forward

For millennia and across cultures, people have recognized the Rights of Nature and elements of Nature as members of the Web of Life<sup>9</sup>. The separation of humans from Nature and placing of humans above Nature has led to the current wetlands, biodiversity, and climate emergencies, with destructive and extractive use of wetlands and other elements of Nature, creating the emergencies. Alternatively, when humans are understood as being part of Nature, with wetlands and Nature having Rights, the human-Nature relationship is based on reciprocity, gratitude, and balance, including ethical responsibilities that people have towards Nature, as many Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) demonstrate and have demonstrated over time.

1,2,4,5 Kauffman, C. M. & Martin, P.L. 2021. *The Politics of Rights of Nature: Strategies for Building a More Sustainable Future*. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA.

3 Davies GT, Finlayson CM, Pritchard DE, Davidson NC, Gardner RC, Moomaw WM, Okuno E, Whitacre JC, 2020. Towards a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands. *Marine and Freshwater Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1071/MF20219>

6 Including both inland/freshwater and coastal/saltwater wetlands.

7 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 2018. *Global Wetland Outlook: State of the World's Wetlands and their Services to People*. Gland, Switzerland: Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

8 Where data is available.

9 Supplementary material in Davies GT, Finlayson CM, Pritchard DE, Davidson NC, Gardner RC, Moomaw WR, Okuno E, and Whitacre JC. 2020. Towards a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands. *Marine and Freshwater Research* 72(5) 593-600. <https://doi.org/10.1071/MF20219>