



Let Justice and Peace Flow

Season of Creation 2023

A Mighty River
Amos 5: 24

ENVIRONMENTAL PERSONHOOD

A global movement, predominantly led by Indigenous communities and environmental groups, is dedicated to strengthening legal protections for rivers and other environmental entities (forests, watersheds, mountains, and ecosystems).

Until recently, nature has been subjected to a property-based ownership system, enabling owners to exploit, degrade, pollute, abuse, and alter the natural world without restraint.

Environmental personhood involves the appointment of guardians who watch over and advocate on behalf of these natural entities. Legislative implementation varies, but its profound impact lies in a fundamental paradigm shift.

Nature is no longer regarded as a mere "object" for exploitation but as a "subject of rights" deserving of respect and protection for present and future generations, both human and non-human.

KEY MILESTONES

2009: Ecuador became the world's first nation to enshrine nature's protection in its constitution and amended its criminal code in 2014 to include offenses against Pachamama (Mother Earth).

2017: New Zealand formally recognized the legal personhood of the Whanganui River.

2018: Colombia's Supreme Court granted legal rights to the Amazon, the world's largest river.

2019: The Bangladeshi Supreme Court extended the same legal status as humans to all its rivers.

2021: Magpie River/Mutuhekau Shipu in Quebec gained legal recognition as a person, with **the right to:**

1. exist and to flow
2. respect its natural cycles
3. evolve naturally, be preserved, and be protected
4. maintain its natural biodiversity
5. maintain its integrity
6. perform essential functions within its ecosystem

7. be free from pollution
8. regeneration and restoration
9. take legal action

ADVOCACY

SCIC has endorsed the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers. To add your individual support, visit: rightsofrivers.org

CONTEMPLATION

The river of justice is fed by the streams of righteousness and compassion. It flows freely when hearts are open to the needs of others -- Mechthild of Magdeburg

How does nature's legal personhood influence your view on environmental protection?

Reflect on the absence of nature in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. How might incorporating nature's rights benefit the environment and future generations?



Column by: Yolande Whalen (Justice Coordinator)