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MISSION AND VISION

Photo/ Michelle Bender

Earth Law Center (ELC) works to transform the law to recognize and protect nature's inherent rights to exist, thrive and evolve.

We do this by building a force of advocates for nature's rights at local and international levels. Our initiatives aim to secure legal rights for rivers, oceans, coastal and land ecosystems.

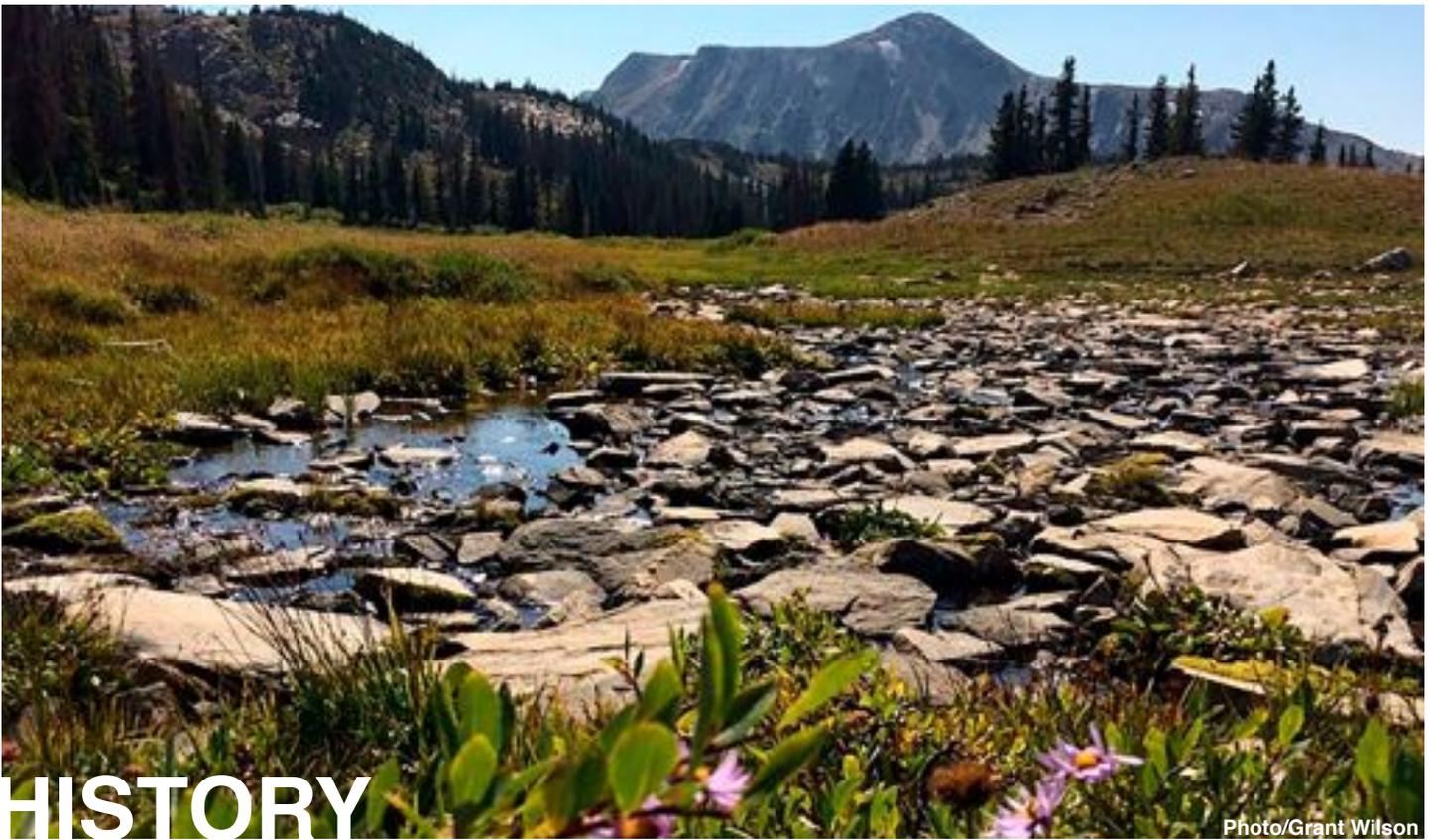
Key initiatives include:

- Securing legal rights for Marine Protected Areas, such as the Patagonian Sea, to protect thousands of species of animals and help preserve its ecosystem;
- Protecting the Magdalena River, Mexico City's last remaining free-flowing river, to enable its restoration and ease pressure on the surrounding environmental resources;
- Fighting for legal protection of the Great Lakes, to ensure they can sustain both human needs and the ecosystem as a whole

We envision a future in which humans and nature flourish together.

Earth Law will give ecosystems the legal rights just like corporations and people have rights. This will enable the defense of nature in the courts—not only for the benefit of people, but for the sake of nature itself. Earth Law argues that humans and nature are not at odds, but are deeply connected and dependent on one another. Formal recognition of nature's inherent right to thrive will enable the restoration of balance in the global environment.

Our planet's health depends on a paradigm shift in law. In most countries, nature has the legal status of property. Under this system, the environment has no voice in decision-making and cannot bring issues to court.



ELC was founded in 2009 by Patricia Siemen, a Dominican Order nun guided by the belief that humanity and nature are deeply interconnected and interdependent. This worldview has driven ELC throughout its existence — first, as an organization focused on education and advocacy, and currently, as an organization at the frontlines of transforming environmental law.

While many environmental organizations focus on defending existing laws, ELC is one of the few that's committed to creating them. ELC believes that the health of the planet — and by extension, the health of humanity — depends on granting the same legal protections for ecosystems that exist for people and corporations. This philosophy is rooted in several realities:

- Despite decades of environmental protection efforts, the environment is still degrading — and at increasing rate. Laws are needed to halt this decline.
- The corporate model, and its emphasis on unending growth and profits, is the primary cause of environmental degradation. Because corporations have rights and nature does not, the interests of the former take precedence over the latter. Laws are needed to fix the balance of power.
- Social evolution both shapes and is fixed by legal changes. The law may not be a panacea for environmental problems, but it does set boundaries for the exploitation of the environment.

The belief that humanity and nature are deeply interconnected and interdependent . . . has driven ELC throughout its existence

In 2017, ELC devoted extensive resources to legal action, hiring an additional third staff as Directing Attorney, recruiting 65 volunteers, and enlisting partners to join forces to advance legal initiatives. It expanded its efforts with dozens of legal initiatives including:

- Filing its first lawsuit as part of a California-wide initiative to list over-diverted waterways as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act.
- Creating the Universal Declaration of River Rights for use in rights of nature projects for rivers in the U.S. and Mexico in 2017
- Developing the Earth Law Framework for Marine Protected Areas at the 4th International Marine Protected Area Congress since September 2017

According to ELC, for humans to be able to live on the planet sustainably, 50 percent of all nature must be granted legal rights. ELC believes the most effective way of achieving this goal is through a paradigm shift in environmental law.



Photo/ Michelle Bender

FACTS AND FIGURES

Founded in 2009 by Patricia Siemen, a Dominican Order nun, headquartered in New York City, and active around the world

One of the few environmental legal advocacy groups focused on Earth Law

Dedicated to granting the same legal protections for ecosystems that exist for people and corporations

Partners with local organizations to secure legal rights for rivers, oceans, coastal and land ecosystems

Launched 12 new legal initiatives in 2017, making it one of the most active and prolific environmental law organization. Some of the most notable accomplishments are:

- Creating the Earth Law Framework for Marine Protected Areas to serve as a guideline for adopting Earth Law into marine protected area management
- Creating the Universal Declaration of River Rights for use in rights of nature projects for rivers in the U.S. and Mexico.
- Delivering a call-to-action statement at the United Nations Ocean Conference 2017 and gathering 64 signatories from 32 countries in support of the inclusion of Rights of Nature in Ocean Governance.
- Filing a California-wide lawsuit to list over-diverted waterways as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act, in order to advance the rights of rivers to flow.



Darlene May Lee, Executive Director is a visionary leader with a track record of building sustainable and growing businesses, world-class teams, and strong stakeholder relationships at different levels of an organization.

Available to comment on: **Earth law, rights of nature**
Contact: **Darlene May Lee at dlee@earthlaw.org**

Grant Wilson, Directing Attorney is an attorney who has advanced environmental campaigns in the United States and worldwide. He participated in the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancún, worked on Kenyan National Land Policy, and served as Deputy Director of the Global Catastrophic Risk Institute. Grant earned a degree in Environmental Policy from Huxley College of the Environment at Western Washington University, and a J.D. with a Certificate in Environmental and Natural Resources Law from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon.

Available to comment on: **Rivers, municipalities, UN Harmony with Nature initiative**
Contact: **gwilson@earthlaw.org or 972-676-8773**

Michelle Bender, Ocean Rights Manager is an environmental law and policy specialist with expertise in ocean and wildlife law, including the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act. Michelle earned her master's degree in Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School and her B.S. in Biology with a Marine Emphasis from Western Washington University.

Available to comment on: **Oceans and coastal regions**
Contact: **Michelle Bender at mbender@earthlaw.org cell 509-218-9338**



PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

Photo/ Michelle Bender

VIDEOS AND AUDIO RECORDINGS

ELC's videos and audio recordings encompass educational features, a One-Minute Talk Series, webinars, and recorded presentations at universities and tribunals. To access these assets, visit the [Education section](#) of its website.

PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

ELC media resources include infographics around issues related to earth law, text of laws it has helped draft and enact, speeches and testimony at major conferences, book chapters and journal articles, reports and fact sheets, and comments and letters on international and state-level environmental issues. To access these assets, visit the [Publications and Media section](#) of its website.

BLOGS

ELC publishes blogs on issues related to the rights of rivers, oceans, lakes and land ecosystems. To access these assets, visit the [Blog section](#) of its website.