

Welcome!

This resource is for those interested in continuing to learn about the Rights of Nature and offers further learning resources for community members, leaders, and advocates.

For Learners: Please feel invited to access this tool as a whole or by accessing the specific sections relevant to your interests. Navigate the learning path ahead at your own pace and in your own way.

For Facilitators: Whether you are a community leader, housing manager, or advocate, these learning tools offer activities and resources to support facilitating active sessions within your community. For additional support in planning and facilitating workshops, review this Facilitator Guide.

The Use of "Land" in this Resource

"Land" and "Nature" have been capitalized to show respect to her as a living being, and she is referred to as "her" to continue building relationships and acknowledge her role in culture. Acknowledging Land as a living being honours her inherent right to be respected, respects relationships that Indigenous Peoples have held for millennia and recognizes her independent beingness.

A Companion Resource

This learning tool is a complementary resource for the *Rights of Nature* module. All quotes and excerpts are sourced from the module unless otherwise stated.

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Audience Considerations



Workshop delivery will vary by audience. Before selecting learning activities and resources for your session, consider who will be present and what *they* would find most relevant about the topic. Ideally, connect with participants to co-create or review your agenda, and receive direct input on their specific interests.

This workshop has three specific audiences in mind:

1. Chief & Council / Community Leaders
2. Community Youth
3. All Community Members

Chief & Council

Workshop Objective: Exploring how the Rights of Nature can be used as a tool that is recognized by the Canadian legal system to support Nations' stewardship over Land and housing. The workshop centres law and policy, focusing on:

1. Facilitating conversations to strengthen understandings of how Rights of Nature can support Nations in using a Stewardship Title framework.
2. Introducing actionable policy-based solutions that leaders can enact to protect Land relationships and manage housing.

Community Youth

Workshop Objective: Empowering youth to lead environmental advocacy in their community as part of their role as Land stewards. The workshop centres youth as future leaders, focusing on:

1. Introducing ideas about how the Rights of Nature framework supports the well-being of the future.
2. Facilitating discussions on what their advocacy for Land could look like in their communities and the legal tools available to support them.

All Community Members

Workshop Objective: Supporting the reclamation of cultural relationships with the Land and restoration of Nations' governance of Land by recognizing the inherent Rights of Nature. This workshop centres shared values and relationships with the Land, focusing on:

1. Introducing the Rights of Nature as a pathway to strengthen relationships with the Land and improve community well-being.
2. Facilitating conversations on how maintaining and restoring relationships with the Land means shifting away from Land ownership and moving toward Land stewardship.

Workshop Outline

This is a guide to the workshop. It is intended to adapt to the needs, interests, and demographics of participants. The workshop is approximately 1 to 1.25 hours.

Timing	Focus	Notes
~10 – 15 minutes	Session opening	As appropriate, open with local protocols. Introduction to the intentions, guidelines, and safety practices of the space.
~15 – 20 minutes	The Essentials	Moving through each element with a brief description of what it is and why it is important. This section should explain the idea of Rights of Nature, legal personhood, and how it connects with Indigenous governance.
~10 – 15 minutes	Facilitated Learning Activity	Select one of the four activities below to facilitate during the workshop (outlined in more detail in the subsequent pages below). When selecting the activity, consider both the audience and intentions of the session. **1.** Mutehekau Shipu (Magpie River), A Legal Personhood Story **2.** Storying the Law – Translating Rights of Nature for Communities **3.** Operationalizing Inherent Law & Territory Governance **4.** Legally Revitalizing Land Relations
~5 – 10 minutes	Emphasizing Terms & Ideas	**Highlight key terms and ideas**, bringing participants back to important key points from the session (i.e., Intrinsic Rights, Stewardship Title, Environmental Juridical Personhood, etc.)
~5 – 10 minutes	Facilitated Dialogue	**Prompt question:** How might a Rights of Nature framework help express your community's relationship with the Land in a way that Canadian law will recognize?
~10 – 15 minutes	Closing	**Emphasis on root takeaways:** • Natural entities hold inherent rights • Rights of Nature provide a framework for Indigenous stewardship to be recognized by the Canadian legal system, strengthening Nations' housing and Land governance **Cultural and/or reflective closing**

Key Workshop Learnings

In the workshop, there are 5 learning points to be emphasized.

1. Introduce that natural entities like rivers, mountains, and Land have their own right to exist and thrive.
2. Reflect on how Rights of Nature is a pathway for Nations' relationships with the Land to become recognized and respected by the Canadian legal system.
3. Explore how land entitlement can move away from ownership models towards stewardship models.
4. Acknowledge how Indigenous Nations can act as guardians to protect the environment, while maintaining traditional relationships with the Land.
5. Recognize common tools in Rights of Nature frameworks to see how this approach can strengthen Nation housing and land governance.

Activity: Mutehekau Shipu (Magpie River), A Legal Personhood Story

Learn about the first legal personhood case in Canada and reflect on how her story may carve pathways for upholding the well-being of the Land for future generations.

Meet Mutehekau Shipu

She is a river known for her large white-water rapids, 23-metre-high waterfall, and the way she weaves between the ancient boreal forests as a 300-kilometre ribbon. She is located on the Quebec-Labrador border, where she is tied to the culture and identity of the Innu Ekuanitshit. In February 2021, she was recognized with legal personhood and as possessing inherent rights.

Her Legal Personhood Story

Beginning in 2009, Mutehekau Shipu was facing ongoing threats from industrial and commercial development, while Hydro-Québec began reviewing areas of the river for potential hydroelectric damming. This dam risked permanently altering the ecosystem.

For years, these concerns continued to build, resulting in the formation of the Mutehekau Shipu Alliance in 2018. This alliance was made up of the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit, the regional municipality, and Quebec-based conservation groups. Together, they collaborated to combine Indigenous worldviews with colonial legal frameworks to pioneer the Rights of Nature framework.

After two years of collaborative research and drafting, the Mutehekau Shipu Alliance issued a joint declaration on February 23, 2021, granting Mutehekau Shipu legal personhood. This status granted the river specific legal rights, including the right to flow and be free from pollution.

To ensure this declaration was upheld against ongoing threats, the alliance established a system of Indigenous Guardians to monitor the river's well-being and designated official legal representatives to be her voice in consultations and courtrooms. The Alliance designed systems to ensure that her rights were upheld and protected.

The legal personhood status of Mutehekau Shipu only extends to the waterway. Current efforts are working to expand these rights to the broader watershed.

Reflection Questions

1. The alliance brought together Innu traditional laws and local municipal laws. In your view, what are the advantages and potential drawbacks of using Crown legal tools to protect Land and territory?
2. Giving a river legal rights on paper is only the first step. What real-world structures and support would you put in place so that Indigenous Guardians have the power to actually enforce the Rights of Nature?
3. Right now, legal personhood only covers the river, not the surrounding forests or tributaries. If you were planning for the long-term future of the community, how would you go about expanding these protections to the whole watershed?

Case Source:

Mutehekau Shipu's story is adapted from Canadian Geographic (Nerberg 2022).
Read her full story at: CanadianGeographic.ca.

Activity: Storying the Law – Translating Rights of Nature for Communities

Reflect on how legal terms can be translated into culturally rooted and actionable stories for generations.

Step One:

Select one of the following legal concepts from the module to focus on.

1. **Environmental Juridical Personhood (EJP):** This legal framework grants Land the same rights as a person under Crown law. This means that the Rights of Nature (including rivers, mountains, waters, etc.) are recognized in colonial courts.

2. **Legal Standing for Guardians:** Human representatives are given legal authority to speak and act on behalf of the Land in colonial courts. Guardians enforce the Land's rights, protect her well-being, and ensure that her interests are upheld by the colonial system.

3. **Stewardship Title:** This legal model replaces the colonial idea of Land ownership and moves away from ideas of Land being for profit, control, and development. Instead of treating Land as private property, Stewardship Title views Land and its governance as a life-long reciprocal relationship, requiring a balance between community needs (like housing) and the Land's well-being.

Step Two:

Take 10-15 minutes to journal, outline, and/or sketch how you would explain your chosen concept to members of your family or community. For example:

- How would you tell the story of a specific river, forest, or animal's rights to thrive and exist?
- How would you describe the Land's inherent and legal rights in a conversation?
- How would a Guardian advocate on behalf of the Land in a courtroom?

Step Three:

Take a few minutes to reflect on your relationship with the Land, her rights, and the legal frameworks shared to protect her.

1. How does the shift from "Land ownership" to "Land stewardship" change how you think about housing and development?

2. How do your personal and/or cultural values align with the Rights of Nature framework?

3. What is one way you can commit to sharing these ideas with others in your family and/or community?

Activity: Operationalizing Inherent Law & Territory Governance

Engage with how Indigenous communities can use Rights of Nature frameworks to translate traditional laws into present-day governance tools.

Why Rights of Nature Matters for Communities

Crown law treats Land as property, something for humans to own and extract from. Rights of Nature, instead, shifts this mindset by recognizing Land as a relative with inherent rights to well-being. This shift is important because:

1. Instead of following the standards of the exploitative colonial property system, Indigenous Nations can use their own teachings, oral histories, and traditional laws as the standard for protecting their territories.

2. Indigenous communities can set boundaries on what the Land's well-being looks like, rather than negotiating what is "acceptable damage" to the Land for the completion of industrial and corporate development.

3. The Guardian system of Rights of Nature turns traditional Nation stewardship into formalized legal protection, providing the authority needed to defend the Land's rights in court.

4. Legally protecting Nature and reclaiming the relationship to her as a living relative ensures that she will continue to be well for future generations.

Comparing How the Land is Viewed

Complete this chart to compare colonial and cultural views on relationships with and responsibilities to Nature.

Select an element of nature that is significant to your territory and/or community.	What relationship does this relative have to your community's culture, history, or daily life?	How do colonial systems view this element of Nature?	What legal rights would your community want to give this element?
Example: stɑl'əẇ (Fraser) River	Sustains life and is an ancestral travel route.	Travel route for shipping; requires fishing permits.	The right to be preserved, and to her natural cycle.

Reflecting on Real-World Application

1. If your community created a declaration to protect a local river, forest, mountain, or element of Nature as a living relative, what are 1-2 rights that she must have?

2. When discussing projects on a traditional territory, how does presenting a concept such as "this river is our living relative with rights" give Indigenous Nations stronger positions in honouring Land relationships?

Activity: Legally Revitalizing Land Relations

Read the following quotes from the *Rights of Nature* module and use them to reflect on how Guardians of the Rights of Nature can uphold traditional stewardship to protect Indigenous Nations' territories.

Many Indigenous Peoples and Nations are seeking a renewed relationship with the natural world, one which embodies the understanding that humans and nature do not exist separately. This relationship is distinct from colonial ideas of land ownership, which tend to focus on control and profit.

Context:

Shifting from colonial ownership to relational stewardship replaces the impulse to control territory with a responsibility that protects Land's health for future generations. Rights of Nature is both a legal and cultural shift, moving from colonial perspectives that objectify and extract from the Land, to an Indigenous relational lens that values Land as an independent being.

Reflections:

1. When external developers or government officials challenge a Nation's authority and claim they own the Land, how can we speak to this mindset to explain why protecting the territory as a living relative matters more than profit or control?
2. How can we model to future generations that taking care of the Land is about a living relationship?

In some cases, natural entities are recognized as legal persons, using the same concept that recognizes corporations with legal status. This can provide legal standing for the guardians and stewards of that natural entity, so they may seek stronger legal remedies to harms done to the natural entity. This can provide significant inherent protections for the natural world…

Context: Designating Nature and her elements as legal persons empowers human stewards to represent the Land's best interests, upholding them in court and demanding legal reparations when harm to the Land occurs. Just as corporations are recognized as legal persons in Crown law, now rivers, forests, and ecosystems are too. This gives the Guardians legal standing to defend Land's rights in decision-making and courtrooms.

Reflections:

1. If a potential project threatens a local watershed, how could you direct Guardians to use their legal standing to hold the parties proceeding with the project accountable to the Land and her rights?

2. If a company has already broken the law and harmed the Land, what kind of legal actions should Indigenous Guardians demand to truly repair the damage caused to the Land?

Extended Active-Learning Activity: Mapping Territory as a Living Relative

Duration: 60 minutes

Themes: Active learning, relational Land governance, outdoor learning

Intention: To provide participants with an active way to engage with the theoretical concepts of Rights of Nature. Participants will be asked to map a specific element of Nature and define its natural needs and design how Guardians can speak on Nature's behalf.

Outcomes: Participants will be able to connect with a specific element of Nature as a living relative with inherent rights, map its ecological needs and boundaries, and outline a functional Guardian role to protect Nature's rights.

Materials & Setup

- Paper or sketchbooks
- Clipboards or a solid writing surface
- Markers
- Accessible outdoor gathering area in Nature

Facilitating the Activity

Part 1: Grounding & Observation

- Gather outside, spend a few minutes silently observing Nature
- Discuss as a group the relationship to plants, water, animals, etc. in this specific place

Part 2: Mapping the Land

- Ask participants to sketch a map of the local ecosystem (forests, trees, rivers, grass, mountains, etc.)
- Invite participants to make notes on their maps about natural relationships
    - What does the environment need to thrive, flourish, and regenerate?
    - Where has human activity respected and/or disrespected natural boundaries?
    - What natural rights need to be respected?

Part 3: The Stewardship Role

- Ask participants to gather in small groups and discuss how they would make a Guardian in the Rights of Nature framework care for this space
    - What knowledge would a Guardian need to monitor the Land's health?
    - How and where will the Guardian advocate for the Land?
    - What actions, policies, and laws are needed to support the Guardian?
    - How will the Guardian hold accountable those who harm or disrupt the Land?

Part 4: Sharing Land-Based Visions

- Bring the group back together to share their field sketches and Guardian frameworks
- Lead a reflection on how being in relationship with Land alters approaches to community planning and governance

Summary: The Rights of Nature

The Rights of Nature framework recognizes Nature as a living entity rather than property, providing First Nations with the legal tools needed to uphold Land stewardship rights and responsibilities.

Module Highlights

Colonial legal systems separated First Nations Peoples from the Land by treating her as property. This module highlights how recognizing Nature's inherent rights can restore Land relationships and strengthen Nations' governance over Land and housing.

- **Recognizing the Rights of Nature:** The Rights of Nature is a growing movement to legally recognize that the Land has inherent rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve independently of humans. This means shifting away from colonial views of Land as a resource, toward a reciprocal relationship with the Land through cultural stewardship.

- **The Crown Legal System & Indigenous Law:** The Crown law values Nature for what she provides to humans, protecting her rights only when it serves human interests. This objectification creates a disconnected and broken relationship between humans and the Land. In contrast, First Nations value the Land as a relation whose well-being is inseparably interconnected with us as humans.

- **Flexible & Culturally Affirming Framework:** The Rights of Nature framework becomes a bridge between the differing views of Indigenous and non-Indigenous legal orders. Recognizing the Land as a living being creates opportunities for First Nations communities to develop relationships with the land that honour their distinct histories, values, and traditional governance in a way recognized by the colonial legal system.

Core Concepts & Legal Frameworks

Environmental Juridical Personhood (EJP): This is a legal framework that grants Land the same rights as a person under colonial law. This means that Nature's rights (such as those of rivers, mountains, waters, and whole territories) are recognized in colonial courts, giving Land a voice in legal decision-making processes to ensure her well-being is protected and that she is not harmed.

Legal Standing for Guardians: In the Rights of Nature framework, the Land is given designated human representatives (called "Guardians") to speak and act on her behalf in colonial courts. Guardians enforce the Land's rights, protect her well-being, and ensure that her interests are upheld by the colonial legal system. The Rights of Nature Guardian system provides a legally recognized framework to protect First Nations' stewardship.

Stewardship Title: This term explains the legal model that replaces the colonial idea of land ownership with First Nations' principles of responsibility and reciprocity. Instead of treating Land like private property to be bought and sold, *Stewardship Title* grounds housing and Land governance in a reciprocal relationship – balancing the housing needs of communities with the responsibility to protect and restore the Land for future generations.

Looking Ahead: Envisioning the Future

Rights of Nature is more than a legal theory; it opens a pathway of possibilities. These include:

- **Reimagining Housing:** These frameworks support First Nations to heal from *Indian Act* housing policies, and build towards long-term housing investments that are in alignment with Aboriginal Title.
- **Strengthening Indigenous Governance:** The Rights of Nature and Stewardship Title are tools that empower Nations to develop codes aligned with their own ancestral laws, which will also be recognized by colonial legal systems.

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