

CO-SPONSORSHIP MEMORANDUM

To: All Legislators

From: Representative Joy Goeben

Senator Steve Nass

Date: Friday, August 15, 2025

RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB 4346/1, **relating to:** prohibiting rights of nature ordinances.

Deadline: **Friday, August 29th at 4 PM**

The “rights of nature” movement, a growing trend across the country, seeks to grant legal standing, and in some cases legal personhood, to nonhuman entities such as rivers, forests, and ecosystems. More than 30 local governments in at least 10 states have adopted such measures, or at least attempted to pass something that would allow the movement to gain ground. Even the city of Milwaukee passed a resolution in 2023 to allow this practice. However, we have seen in other states such as Ohio, efforts to impose this idea have been met with sound criticism, legal challenge, and ultimately a state law banning the practice. Additionally, New York recently introduced the first state-level bill recognizing ecosystems’ “unalienable” rights. Four states including Florida, Ohio, Utah, and Idaho have already passed prohibitions against this concept; if we act, Wisconsin would become the fifth state to stand for constitutional integrity.

Allowing and promoting this ideology represents a dangerous shift in legal precedent. It would allow nonhuman entities to sue in court, threatening property rights, stalling development, and burdening the judicial system. Such measures have already been used, as in Minnesota where wild rice was granted specific legal rights. The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has long held, most notably in *Sierra Club v. Morton* (1972), that only persons or recognized legal entities have standing.

Philosophically, the “rights of nature” concept is incompatible with America’s founding principles. Our Constitution and founding documents affirm that rights are inherent to people “endowed by their Creator” not to plants, rivers, or landscapes. As Jefferson wrote, “The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time,” and Adams declared, “Liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker.”

This legislation is necessary to preserve the integrity of our legal system, protect property rights, and affirm that rights belong to people, not to nature.

If you would like to co-sponsor this legislation, please respond to this email or contact Representative Goeben's office at 9105 or Senator Nass' office at 6-2635 by **Friday, August 29, 2025 at 4 PM**. All co-sponsors will be added to both versions of the bill unless otherwise specified.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill prohibits a city, village, town, or county from enacting a "rights of nature ordinance," meaning an ordinance conferring legal rights to a natural resource to exist, to be protected against pollution, or to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

For further information see the local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.