



# India Grants Glaciers Legal Personhood In Effort To Protect Them

Is this the height of insanity or a carefully crafted assault on humans in general? Eco-radicals have been waging a war against humans for years now, and it is a global phenomenon. In their view, humans have no higher standing than a river, a glacier, an ant or a rattlesnake. □ TN Editor

An Indian court granted Himalayan glaciers status as “legal persons” on Friday in a new conservation strategy that seems to be gathering momentum quickly.

Less than three weeks ago, New Zealand granted similar status to a river - the Whanganui. Just days later on March 20, India followed suit for the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. Now the Gangotri and Yamunotri glaciers as well as waterfalls, forests, lake, meadows and other

environmental features in the area have all been granted legal rights as “living entities.”

The glaciers are among the largest in the Himalayas and feed into the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. However, they are receding at an “alarming rate,” the judges said according to *Press Trust of India*, with the Gangotri glacier shrinking more than 2,800 feet in about 25 years.

“The rights of these entities shall be equivalent to the rights of human beings and any injury or harm caused to these bodies shall be treated as injury or harm caused to human beings,” Uttarakhand’s highest court said in its ruling, according to *AFP*.

The legal rights afforded these natural resources are not the same as human rights. However, it does give them legal standing to sue or be sued. Additionally, the court-assigned “legal guardians,” which represent the new persons, will not need to prove that damage, such as pollution, is harming humans - only that it is harming the river or other legal entity.

“I know the initial inclination of some people will say it’s pretty strange to give a natural resource a legal personality. But it’s no stranger than family trusts, or companies or incorporated societies,” Chris Finlayson, New Zealand’s treaty negotiations minister, [told BBC](#) when the Whanganui river was granted its legal person status.

For these newest legal persons, there is an added cultural component to their new legal statuses: The three rivers and two glaciers are all considered sacred by the local people. New Zealand’s Maori people actually call the Whanganui river their ancestor. They have, therefore, been fighting for legal protections for the river since 1873, in what *The Herald* [noted](#) as “one of New Zealand’s longest running court cases.”

Although the decisions are being heralded as a “[unique approach](#),” they are not without precedent. Nearly six years ago, [Bolivia](#) became the first to grant all nature equal rights to humans. [Ecuador](#) did the same shortly after, and in 2013, New Zealand granted legal person status to the Te Urewera National Park.

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