



TALKING RIVERS

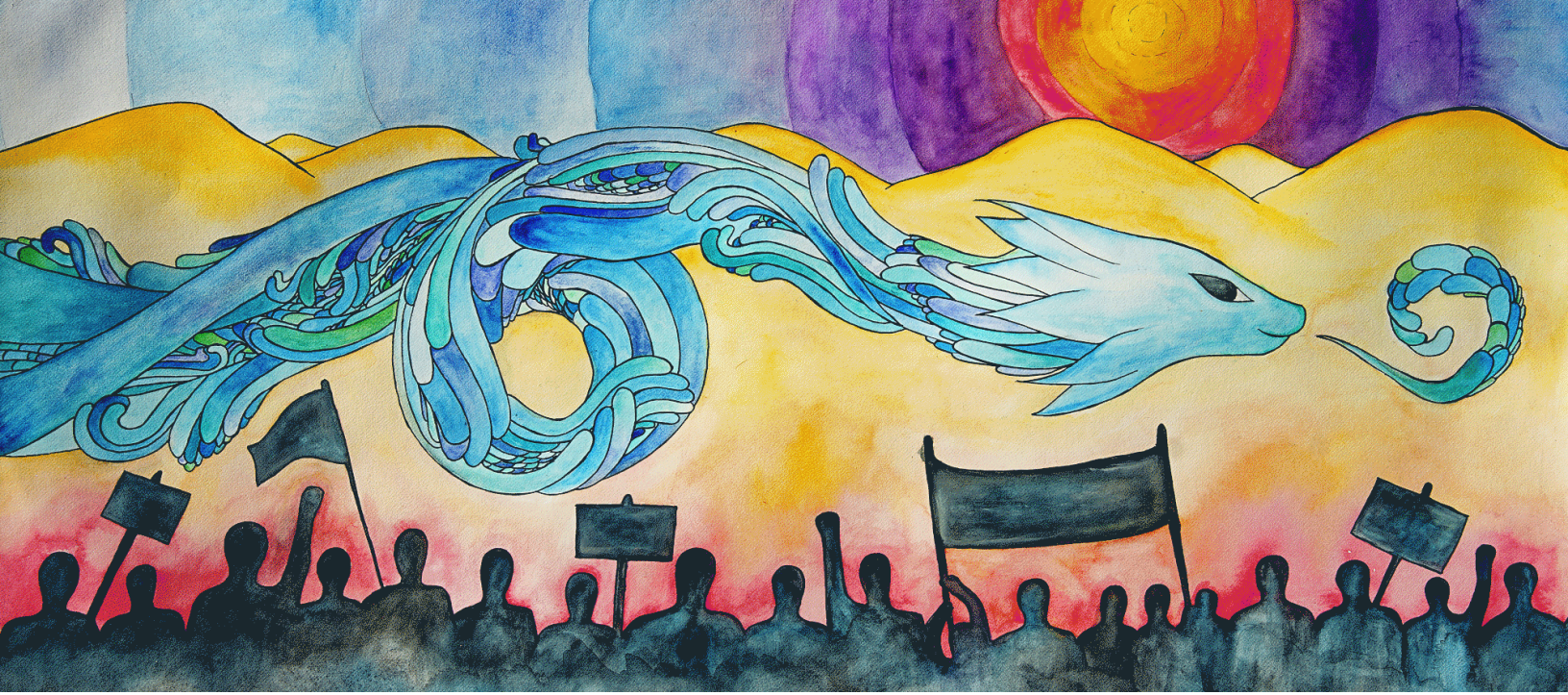
2023 Annual Report

*Rivers have the right to exist, regenerate,
and be **listened to**.*

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The Beginning

Talking Rivers was officially incorporated in February 2023. Acquiring a 501(c)3 status was a vital step in our mission to continue educating communities across New York State about the Rights and Rites of rivers and their ecosystems.

Throughout the year, we ran a series of in person and virtual programs, curated an art exhibition, and conducted numerous workshops and presentations. The local efforts went hand in hand with our endeavors to [strengthen networks of solidarity](#), supporting our allies across our watershed and the world.

On the legal front, Talking Rivers continued to advocate for the Rights of our neighboring Rivers. We are currently establishing partnerships with communities and organizations across the Upper St. Lawrence River and Adirondack Watersheds, to support settler and Indigenous governments who seek to pass local laws that grant rights to rivers and their ecosystems.

Our 2023 Programs

Rivers Have Rights

On Earth Day, [community members came together in Potsdam, NY](#) (Haudenosaunee Territory) to learn about the North Country Rights of Rivers Movement. The event covered how “Rights of Nature” is a vital paradigm shift that can help protect the beloved Rivers, who are part of our communities.



Listening to Water Symposium

Through an art exhibition and a series of ecocentric conversations, the [Listening to Water Symposium](#) celebrated the roles, rights (rites) and responsibilities of the more-than-human world, while repositioning humans in relationship to the ecosystems they inhabit.

The symposium included three virtual events:

Water Guardians East to West



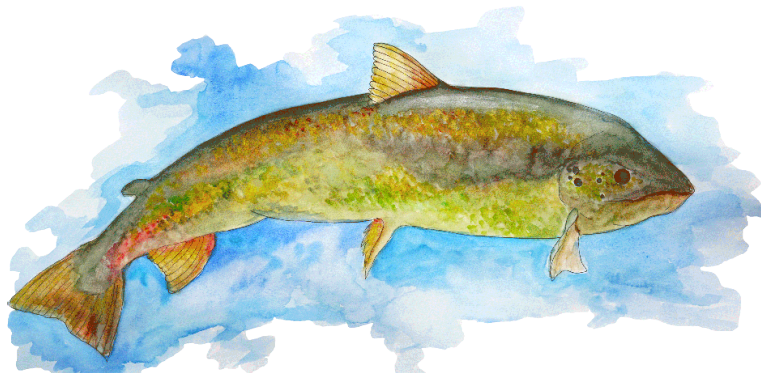
We are connected through our Waters, and if Water is threatened, the repercussions will be felt around the world. Activists from across Turtle Island (what is now known as North America) [joined together to discuss the past, present, and future of Water.](#) The speakers addressed how communities can navigate the current Climate Crisis, while at the same time building networks of solidarity. In addition, they delved into the complexities of the Rights of Nature movement and the necessity of advocating for the Rights of the more-than-human world.



Water Has No Borders



Panelists from across the Great Lakes Bioregion [discussed how to unite across borders](#) and meet the needs of the connecting Waters that bring life to all. Coming from different fields of expertise, including environmental management, freshwater science, and Indigenous Methodologies, the speakers addressed the intricacies of the geopolitical interests that partition the Great Lakes. Together, they grappled with the settler colonial constructs that treat this Bioregion as a mere resource, and contemplated how humans can honor their roles and responsibilities towards the Great Lakes' ecosystems.



The Health of the Raquette River

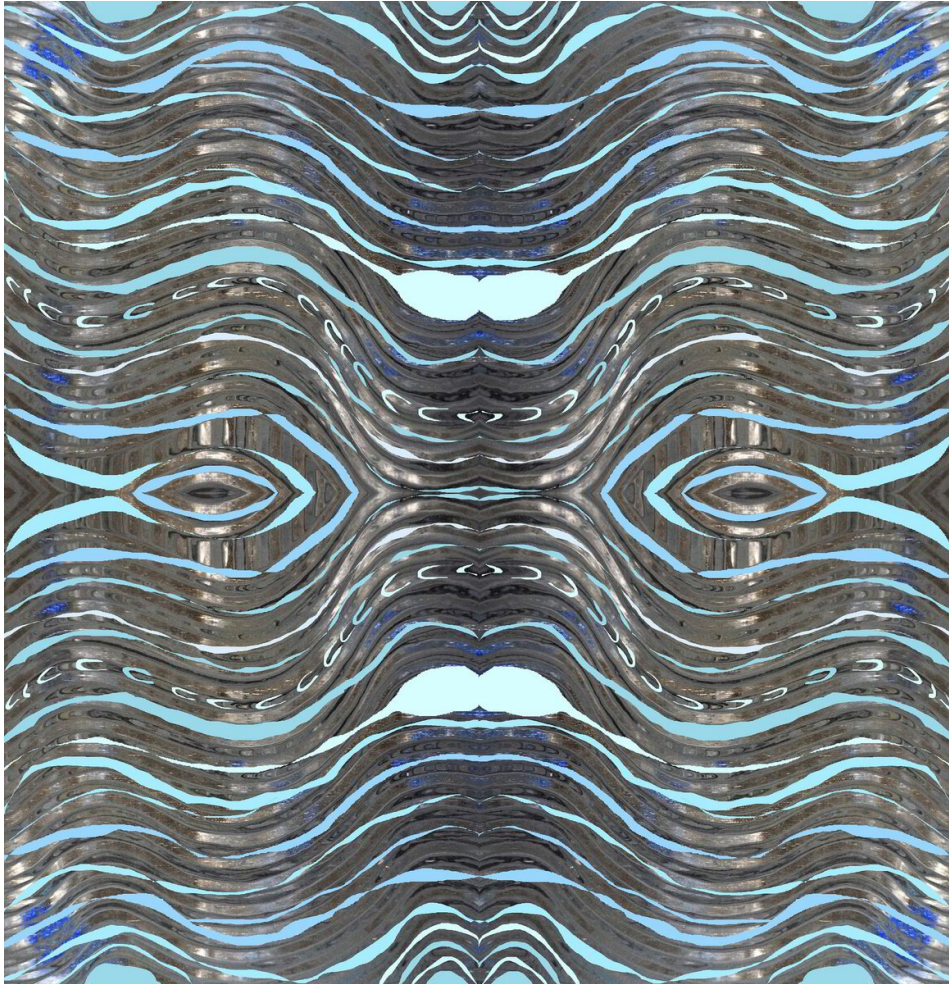


The Raquette River is the beloved heart of many North Country communities. Much like the interwoven network of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, humans are also dependent on the Raquette River for their health and livelihoods. But how is the Raquette River doing? Are they healthy, happy, resilient? How does their health also affect the well-being of all the communities (humans and beyond) that are sustained by their water. During this event, river scientists, policy researchers and environmental educators [joined together to try to answer these questions.](#)



The symposium also featured four in person events and an art exhibit. These included:

Rivers Tell Stories, Rivers Have Rights



Poets and river advocates gathered in the Potsdam Public Library to share poems and stories about Rivers and learn about the Rights of the more-than-human world. From poetry to action, the speakers invited their audience to consider how we can all honor the Rivers we love, and advocate for adopting Rights of Nature law at the municipal level.

Listening to Water Exhibition



Photo by Teya Shrady

The [*Listening to Water Exhibition*](#) followed the rivers and streams that flow from the Adirondack Mountains to their confluences with the Kania'tarowanen'hne, translated from the Kanien'keha (Mohawk) as the Great River, also known as the St. Lawrence River.

Traveling through and with these waters, a group of artists, researchers, and traditional knowledge holders collaborated to share the voices of Rivers and their more-than-human guardians. The exhibition explored the roles, rights, and responsibilities of the various communities that make up these Northeastern watersheds.

From the Freshwater Mussels that clean the currents, the American Eel that weaves together streams and oceans, the Trees that shape the weather, and the Butterflies that travel from Flower to Flower, these “guardians” do their part to keep the watershed flourishing.

To tell the guardians’ stories, the exhibition features collaborations between scientists and artists, different methodologies and disciplines converging into acts of ecocentric storytelling. Together the storytellers attempted to leave space for Water and their more-than-human guardians to speak.



Photo by Teya Shrady

Rights of Nature Presentations

Throughout the year, the Talking Rivers core team presented at conferences, seminars, working groups and symposiums across the region and internationally. These presentations included:

~ **Cultivating Climate Justice**, 2023 Social Justice Initiative, Unitarian Universalist Church of Canton, Canton, NY, USA

~ **Rights of Nature: A Timeless Concept whose Time is Now**, River Symposium, Cornwall, ON, Canada

~ **Art and Climate: A Climate Solution Conversation**, Wild Center, Tupper Lake, NY, USA

~ **Rights and Rites: Our Duties and Obligations to Nature** - A Humanities New York Community Conversation, NY, USA

~ **An Introduction to Rights of Nature: Exploring Rights for Great Salt Lake**, Save Our Great Salt Lake, UT, USA

~ **Rights of Nature Panel**, Climate Governance Variability in the Great Lakes RCN Annual Meeting, Duluth, MN, USA

~ **Rights of Rivers and Soil, Food Justice Summit**, Feedback: Food is Health, Wild Center, Tupper Lake, NY, USA

~ **Talking Rivers Online Workshop**, Towards a Post-Extractive Culture, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Sacred Contract

Talking Rivers was invited to be part of a collective of five organizations, who are embarking on a groundbreaking initiative to liberate land from the concept of ownership. Under the name of [Sacred Contract](#), this collective hopes to create a legal pathway for Land to own themselves, offering title holders the opportunity to become part of a process of healing and reconciliation. The other organizations include: the [Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights](#) (CDER), the [Center for Ethical Land Transition](#), [Regenerative Earth](#), and [One Light Global](#).

Members of Talking Rivers team served as the group's facilitator and [produced an animated video](#) to introduce people to the concept and the group's mission. In addition, the Talking Rivers team played a pivotal role in shaping the vision and ethical foundations of Sacred Contract, as well as structuring a *guardianship* model to represent Land's voice.



On The Horizon in 2024



We Are all in this Together Symposium

The [*We Are all in this Together Symposium*](#) (February - April, 2024) seeks to reposition environmental stewardship and humanities disciplines within an eco-centric framework. Through a series of three virtual events, we are planning to explore the concepts of land “ownership” and the importance of honoring nature’s more-than-human guardians.

The events will first address the settler colonial history, which has brought us to this point of crisis. Then, we will invite the speakers to explore alternatives that honor the needs and interests of all ecosystems. The events include, [*Deconstructing Ownership*](#) (Feb 28th), the [*Spirits of Nature*](#) (March 19th) and [*Who Looks After Water*](#) (April 9th).

Listening to Rivers Series

The *Listening to Rivers Series* will focus on the threats that the Rivers and their ecosystems face, as well how humans can protect the waterways that bring life to their communities. The events will be accompanied by community conversations, in which community members of all ages and political ideologies can join to discuss human and environmental needs. The first scheduled event will be:

Microplastics in the Raquette & Grasse Rivers

Microplastics are everywhere. These tiny pieces of plastic, smaller than 5mm in length (0.20 inch), have been found in the water we drink, the food we eat, and even our very own blood. Want to know how this affects the North Country? Dr. Abul Baki Is doing groundbreaking research about microplastic pollution in the Raquette and Grasse Rivers.



Thank **you!**

We are so grateful for your support and collaboration. Thank you for taking the time to read what we've been up to this past year. We hope that we can stay connected in the coming seasons. You can visit our website and subscribe to our newsletter [here](#).

If you'd like to collaborate, we'd be thrilled to chat and explore. Please reach out to us at: talkingrivers@riseup.net

