



Rights of nature, intelligence of plants and their relationship with responsible forest management

Although there are valuable efforts towards responsible forest management, this system still predominantly maintains a disjunctive relationship with forests. Even our own FSC slogan reproduces this view as it states 'Forests for all forever', which is fundamentally framed within an anthropocentric and utilitarian vision of forests, naturalizing the conception that forests exist to meet human needs.

Since 2008, the year in which the concept of the rights of nature first appeared in the Political Constitution of Ecuador, approximately 40 countries around the world have adopted it in some way in their normative frameworks, reflecting the progress of the concept generated by the advocacy of Indigenous Peoples.

The recognition of nature's rights constitutes a milestone in the relationship between human beings and nature, and therefore with forests, because it breaks a tradition of Western society that views nature as something different, distant, and foreign, subject to exploitation.

Author | **Rodrigo Arce Rojas**
Social South Chamber, Individual Member, Peru



Scope and main objectives

FSC make is a global leader in responsible forest management, but it still retains an essence of a disjunctive ontology in its relationship with forests. However, some elements of biocentrism and ecocentrism can also be recognized, such as the protection and conservation of biodiversity, the conservation of critical habitats, the restoration of ecosystems, areas of high conservation value, respect for traditional knowledge, and Indigenous worldviews. This is a good foundation for strengthening the commitment to the rights of nature.

The aim of this presentation is to invite the FSC community to reflect on the scope of the rights of nature and the recognition of the intelligence and sensitivity of plants, including trees.



Innovative approach

The recognition of the rights of nature breaks the anthropocentric tradition of Western society as it involves ceasing to see and treat nature solely as a basket of resources to viewing it as subjects. The rights of nature, as specified in the Political Constitution of Ecuador from 2008, imply:

- The right to exist and persist
- The right to regenerate their vital cycles
- The right to restoration
- The right to biodiversity
- The right not to be polluted

With the current knowledge that we have, it can already be stated that plants see, even though they have no eyes; they hear, even though they have no ears; they digest, even though they have no stomach; they remember, even though they have no brain, among other attributes. That is to say, they have sensitivity. This is possible because plants have a decentralized organization as they must respond to their condition as sessile beings.

Among the multiple manifestations of the intelligence and sensitivity of plants is the communication of trees through symbiotic relationships between roots and fungi and the generation of volatile organic compounds for internal communication within the plant as well as with other plants.

There is a fundamental role of mother trees that act as nodes in the communication 'neural' network. Their elimination directly affects forests. This is something we are not considering in the current forest management system.



Path forward

Even if it is not something evident, the FSC already has several elements of biocentric and ecocentric approaches that have increasingly been emphasized. This can be seen in the Principles of Responsible Forest Management number 6, which talks about Environmental Values and Impacts, and number 9, which addresses High Conservation Values. Likewise, the promotion of Intact Forest Landscapes (IFL) with a landscape approach. This means that FSC policies are approaching the rights of nature, which would be beneficial to adopt explicitly in their policies. This would be a technical, political, ethical, and aesthetic signal that the FSC is committed to the values of respect for life in general, that is, the well-being of humans and the well-being of ecosystems. Working not only to conserve or restore forests but also for the happiness of the forests. Discussing this topic is already important, and a further step would be the presentation of a motion for the next General Assembly.



References

Calvo, F. with Lawrence, N. (2022). *Planta Sapiens: Unmasking plant intelligence* (London: Bridge Street Press).

Chomovitz, D. (2019). *Lo que las plantas saben* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel).

Coccia, E. (2017). *La vida de las plantas* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila).

Coccia, E. (2018). *The life of plants: a metaphysics of mixture*. (Cambridge: Polity Press).

Gagliano, M.; Renton, M.; Depczynski, M. and Mancuso, S. (2014) Experience teaches plants to learn faster and forget slower in environments where it matters. *Oecologia*, 175, 63-72. (DOI 10.1007/s00442-013-2873-7)

Gagliano, M. and Marder, M. (2014) What Plant Revolution would you opt for? *LA Review Books Blog*. [http://philosophicalreviewofbooks.org/?p=42&author=E.%20\(2013\).%20How%20Forests%20Think.%20Toward%20and%20Anthropology%20beyond%20the%20Human.%20\(California:%20University%20of%20California%20Press\).](http://philosophicalreviewofbooks.org/?p=42&author=E.%20(2013).%20How%20Forests%20Think.%20Toward%20and%20Anthropology%20beyond%20the%20Human.%20(California:%20University%20of%20California%20Press).)

Maldonado, C. E. (2016c). "Pensar como la naturaleza, una idea radical". *Unipuri/versidad*, 16 (2): 41- 51. Mancuso, S. y Viola, A. (2015). *Sensibilidad e inteligencia en el mundo vegetal*. Galaxia Gutenberg.

https://www.academia.edu/44359961/Sensibilidad_e_inteligencia_en_el_mundo_vegetal_Stefano_Mancuso_Alessandra_Viola_Por_cortes%C3%ADa_de_la_autora.

Mancuso, S. (2017). *El futuro es vegetal*. Galaxia Gutenberg.

Marder, M. (2013). *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. (New York: Columbia University Press).

Simard, S. (2012a). *En busca del árbol madre: descubre la sabiduría del bosque. Las plantas hablan y ¡no es broma!*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/ciencia/2023/04/los-plantas-hablan-y-no-es-broma/>

Simard, S. (15 jun 2021a). "Mother Trees and the Social Forest" [Video]. YouTube 1h, 7 min. Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydbzrun3apk>

