



ALLIANCE
Muteshekau-shipu



**Under embargo until
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For the first time, a river is granted official rights and legal personhood in Canada

Quebec, Canada, February 23, 2021 - The Muteshekau-shipu Alliance today announced the granting of legal personhood to the Magpie River, through the adoption of two parallel resolutions by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality (RCM). The river is thus assigned nine rights, as well as potential legal guardians responsible primarily for ensuring that these rights are respected. This is the first such case in Canada.

The announcement was made in partnership with the International Observatory on the Rights of Nature (IORN), based in Montreal, Canada, which drafted the resolutions in collaboration with the Alliance. The two resolutions, more than ten pages each and crammed with references, rest on multiple legal bases in national and international law and will help protect the river.

The initiative is part of a global movement – particularly active in New Zealand, the United States and Ecuador – to recognize the rights of Nature.

The Magpie River (Muteshekau-shipu in the Innu language) is an internationally renowned river nearly 300 km long. The river is recognized worldwide for its rapids and for whitewater expeditions, most notably by the prestigious *National Geographic* magazine, which ranked it among the top ten rivers in the world for whitewater rafting. The river's protection has received regional consensus, but the plan to declare the river a protected area has been thwarted for years by state-owned Hydro-Québec, due to the waterway's hydroelectric potential.

Quotes:

“The recognition of the rights of Nature is a growing global movement, and Canada is joining it today with this first case,” said Yenny Vega Cardenas, president of the IORN. “The Magpie River represented a perfect test case, thanks to the consensus for its protection from the actors involved and its international reputation.”

“The people closest to the river will be those watching over it from now on,” said Jean-Charles Piétacho, chief of the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit. “The Innu of Ekuanitshit have always been the protectors of the Nitassinan [ancestral territory] and will continue to be so through the recognition of the rights of the Muteshekau-shipu river.”

“This recognition will promote the protection of the Magpie River's ecosystems and allow our local communities to share and preserve their recreational and traditional activities,” said Luc Noël, prefect of the Minganie RCM.

“This is a way for us to take matters into our own hands and stop waiting for the Quebec government to protect this unique river,” explained Alain Branchaud, Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Quebec Chapter (CPAWS Quebec). “After a decade of our message falling on deaf ears in government, the Magpie River is now protected as a legal person.”

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The goal of the Muteshekau-shipu Alliance is to protect and enhance the Magpie River and to recognize its rights. To do so, it is relying on the importance of the river to the Innu and local communities, and on the river’s international reputation and immense recreational and tourism potential. The founding members of the Muteshekau-shipu Alliance are the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit, the Minganie RCM, CPAWS Quebec and the Association Eaux-Vives Minganie.

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