

**Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City**

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session**

HOUSE BILL NO. 10679



Introduced by Representative Rolando Ledesma Macasaet

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Rights of Nature Act of 2026 seeks to strengthen environmental protection by recognizing natural ecosystems as holders of legally enforceable rights to exist, regenerate, and maintain their ecological integrity. It establishes a unified framework that complements existing environmental laws by integrating ecosystem integrity standards into environmental permitting, land-use planning, and development decision-making.

The measure requires government agencies and covered industries to adopt science-based ecological safeguards, promotes accountability for environmental harm, and provides legal mechanisms for the protection and restoration of ecosystems. It likewise ensures that these rights complement existing human rights, indigenous peoples' rights, property rights, and sustainable livelihoods.

Ultimately, the bill aims to promote sustainable development by balancing economic growth with the long-term protection and resilience of the country's natural ecosystems for present and future generations.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


ROLANDO LEDESMA MACASAET
Representative, SSS-GSIS Pensyonado Partylist

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**AN ACT TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF NATURE
IN THE PHILIPPINES, INTEGRATING ECOSYSTEM INTEGRITY
STANDARDS INTO THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK, AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR
VIOLATIONS THEREOF**

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines
in Congress assembled:

1 **SECTION 1.** Short Title. — This Act shall be known as the "Rights of Nature
2 Act of 2026."

3 **SECTION 2.** Declaration of Policy — Article II, Section 16 of the 1987
4 Philippine Constitution mandates the State to protect and advance the right of the
5 people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and
6 harmony of nature. While the State has enacted comprehensive, sector-specific
7 environmental laws to regulate human activities, existing legal statutory
8 frameworks focus primarily on resource management, conservation thresholds,
9 and the mitigation of anthropogenic utility. Consequently, distinct and
10 ecologically significant natural ecosystems are not recognized as entities
11 possessing legally enforceable rights, and there is an absence of a unified
12 statutory mechanism requiring public and private actions to explicitly safeguard
13 basic ecosystem integrity.

14
15 To address this legislative gap, it is hereby declared the policy of the State to
16 adopt a holistic approach to environmental governance by recognizing and
17 protecting natural ecosystems as legal entities possessing fundamental rights to
18 exist, persist, and regenerate their vital cycles. This Act shall supplement,
19 strengthen, and guide the interpretation and implementation of all existing

environmental statutes. The enforcement of the rights of nature shall be guided by the following principles:

- (a) Ecosystem Integrity — The interconnectedness of all biotic and abiotic components within an ecosystem must be respected, ensuring that human activities do not disrupt the functional capacity of land, air, water, and biological diversity to sustain life.
- (b) Dynamic Balance and Harmony — Human activities and developmental projects must achieve a sustainable balance with the inherent natural cycles and regenerative capacities of ecosystems.
- (c) Intergenerational and Eco-centric Equity — The utilization of natural resources must ensure both the fulfillment of human society's collective good and the long-term preservation of ecological systems, safeguarding the rights of future generations and the environment itself.
- (d) Complementarity — The recognition of the rights of nature shall complement, and not diminish, human rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and the socio-economic mandates guaranteed under the Constitution.
- (e) Institutional Stewardship — The State, through its instrumentalities, shall serve as the primary guardian of these rights, in active collaboration with indigenous cultural communities, local government units, and civil society.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms — As used in this Act, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- (a) Nature refers to the collective physical and biological systems of the earth, encompassing all living organisms, non-living elements, ecological processes, and the interconnected networks they form.
- (b) Natural Ecosystems refer to distinct, dynamic, and identifiable spatial units composed of communities of plants, animals, microorganisms, and their abiotic environment, interacting as a functional unit governed by climatic, physiographic, and geological factors.
- (c) Ecological Restoration refers to the intentional, scientifically grounded process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed, with the objective of re-establishing its structural integrity, species composition, and ecological functionality.

(d) Environmentally Critical Projects (ECPs) refer to projects or activities high in magnitude or intensity that have a significant potential to cause adverse environmental impacts, as defined under Presidential Decree No. 1586 and its implementing rules and regulations.

(e) Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) refer to areas that are ecologically, socially, or geologically sensitive, requiring special protection and management as defined under Presidential Decree No. 1586 and its implementing rules and regulations.

(f) Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) refer to a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as an organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, as defined under Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as "The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997."

SECTION 4. The Fundamental Rights of Nature — Natural ecosystems, or distinct and scientifically identifiable portions thereof, are hereby recognized as holders of the following fundamental, measurable, and legally enforceable rights:

(a) The right to exist and persist within their natural geographic boundaries;

(b) The right to maintain and regenerate their vital cycles, structural functions, evolutionary processes, and ecological balance;

(c) The right to clean water, clean air, and the maintenance of critical biogeochemical cycles necessary to sustain ecosystem health;

(d) The right to comprehensive ecological restoration in the event of degradation caused by anthropogenic activities or industrial accidents; and

(e) The right to adequate and effective legal representation in all administrative, quasi-judicial, and judicial proceedings affecting their integrity.

These rights shall supplement, and shall not impair or limit, any other right, duty, or remedy available under existing environmental laws, administrative regulations, or Philippine jurisprudence.

A final administrative or judicial finding of a violation of any existing environmental statute—including but not limited to Republic Act No. 8749

(Clean Air Act), Republic Act No. 9275 (Clean Water Act), Republic Act No. 9147 (Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act), Republic Act No. 7586 as amended by Republic Act No. 11038 (Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018), and Presidential Decree No. 1586 (Environmental Impact Statement System) shall constitute a prima facie violation of the rights of nature recognized under this Act.

SECTION 5. Legal Personality of Natural Ecosystems — The legal personality of natural ecosystems, including distinct and identifiable river basins, marine protected areas, critical habitats, old-growth forests, and similar ecological units, is hereby recognized solely for the purpose of enforcing the rights, protections, and remedies provided under this Act. To qualify for protection and enforcement under this Act, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), in consultation with recognized scientific institutions, concerned Local Government Units (LGUs), the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) where applicable, and other relevant government agencies, shall establish clear, objective, scientific, and ecological criteria for identifying and validating eligible ecologically significant natural ecosystems.

In any administrative or judicial action filed for the protection, enforcement, or restoration of the rights recognized herein, the natural ecosystem concerned shall be designated as the real party-in-interest. The recognition of legal personality under this Section shall not be interpreted to confer any liabilities, civil obligations, duties, or financial responsibilities upon the natural ecosystem itself, nor shall it affect the proprietary rights of the State or private landowners over real property except as necessary to enforce the ecological protections mandated herein.

SECTION 6. Obligations of the Government — The State, through its departments, bureaus, offices, and local government units (LGUs), shall ensure that the rights of nature are integrated into all aspects of public administration, resource management, and development planning.

(a) The DENR shall, within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act, develop and incorporate ecocentric evaluation criteria into the review processes for resource extractions, land-use conversions, and environmental permitting. The DENR shall implement early-warning and monitoring systems to prevent irreversible ecological degradation.

(b) The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) shall integrate ecosystem-integrity standards and the rights of nature into the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) and national spatial frameworks.

(c) LGUs shall, in coordination with the DENR and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), align their Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) and Local Development Plans with the preservation requirements of ecosystems within their territorial jurisdictions. LGUs shall submit annual compliance reports to the DILG regarding the ecological status of critical ecosystems within their boundaries.

(d) The Department of Energy (DOE) shall prioritize long-term ecological sustainability by accelerating the transition toward clean and renewable alternative energy sources, implementing strict mitigation protocols for energy projects situated within or near critical ecosystems.

SECTION 7. Obligations of Juridical Persons — The obligations under this Section shall apply strictly to juridical persons engaged in, or applying to engage in, Environmentally Critical Projects (ECPs) or projects located within Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs), as determined by the DENR pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 1586.

(a) **Corporate Incorporation and Reorganization** — Juridical persons planning to operate ECPs or operate within ECAs shall include a specific corporate policy committing to the respect and protection of the rights of nature in their articles of incorporation or bylaws, upon submission to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

(b) **Ecosystem Integrity Assessment** — Juridical persons operating ECPs or operating within ECAs shall conduct a specialized Ecosystem Integrity Assessment as an integrated component of the existing Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process under Presidential Decree No. 1586, avoiding unnecessary duplication of environmental permitting procedures. This assessment must scientifically demonstrate that the proposed project or activity will not cause irreversible damage to the vital cycles or regenerative capacity of the host ecosystem. The approval of this assessment by the DENR Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) shall be a mandatory prerequisite for the issuance of an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC).

(c) **Annual Ecological Reporting.** — Covered juridical persons shall submit an annual Ecological Compliance and Impact Report to the DENR-EMB, detailing the measurable impacts of their operations on the host ecosystem and the specific mitigation and restoration measures undertaken.

Non-compliance shall be grounds for the suspension or revocation of their ECC or environmental permits, after due notice and hearing.

SECTION 8. Representation and Standing — Pursuant to the constitutional right to a balanced and healthful ecology, any Filipino citizen, acting as a steward and public representative of a natural ecosystem, may file an administrative, civil, or criminal action to enforce the rights or obligations recognized under this Act. Legal representation and standing under this Section shall be harmonized and exercised in full compliance with the Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases promulgated by the Supreme Court.

Upon the filing of a civil action under this Act, the court shall issue an order containing a summary of the cause of action and the specific reliefs prayed for, requiring the publication thereof in a newspaper of general circulation or through official digital platforms. Any interested party, including local communities, non-governmental organizations, or indigenous cultural communities situated within the affected ecosystem, may manifest their intention to intervene within thirty (30) days from such publication, subject to the Rules of Court and the Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases.

SECTION 9. Reliefs — If the court finds that a violation of the rights of nature has occurred, it shall render a judgment in favor of the real party-in-interest ecosystem. The judgment may include the following reliefs:

(a) Permanent or Temporary Environmental Protection Orders (TEPO/EPO) directing the immediate cessation of the damaging activity;

(b) Mandatory injunctions requiring the implementation of a comprehensive, scientifically validated Ecological Restoration Plan at the expense of the defendant;

(c) Monetary awards for environmental rehabilitation, representing the actual and quantifiable cost necessary to fully restore the degraded ecosystem to its pre-damage baseline condition; and

(d) The payment of attorney's fees, litigation expenses, and costs of suit to the citizen-representative or public interest group that prosecuted the case.

SECTION 10. Trust Fund. — Any monetary awards or damages granted by an administrative body or court for the restoration or rehabilitation of an ecosystem shall not accrue to the personal benefit of the citizen-representative or the filing organization. Such funds shall be deposited directly into a dedicated Ecosystem

Restoration Trust Fund established specifically for the affected ecosystem.

The Ecosystem Restoration Trust Fund shall be maintained in an authorized government depository bank under the administrative accountability of the Conservation Committee created under Section 11 of this Act. The fund shall be utilized exclusively for financing the ecological restoration, monitoring, and preservation measures ordered by the court or administrative body. Any legitimate, verified out-of-pocket expenses and litigation costs incurred by the citizen-representative shall constitute a first lien on the monetary award, subject to judicial approval and accounting.

SECTION 11. Appointment of Conservation Committee — To administer the Ecosystem Restoration Trust Fund and oversee the implementation of the court-ordered Ecological Restoration Plan, the court shall appoint a specialized, ad-hoc Conservation Committee for the specific natural ecosystem involved.

The Conservation Committee shall be composed of five (5) members, giving preference to:

- (a) A representative from the host Indigenous Cultural Community or Indigenous Political Structure (IPS), where applicable;
- (b) A representative from a local public interest non-governmental organization or peoples' organization accredited by the LGU or DENR;
- (c) A qualified environmental scientist or ecologist nominated by an accredited academic institution;
- (d) A representative from the DENR regional office; and
- (e) A representative from the host Local Government Unit.

Under no circumstances shall any person, officer, or entity responsible for, or complicit in, the violation of the rights of nature be appointed to or participate in the Conservation Committee. The Committee shall submit quarterly progress and financial liquidation reports to the oversight court.

SECTION 12. Rulemaking and Courts. — Actions brought under this Act shall be governed by the Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases and shall be heard and resolved by appropriate courts designated by the Supreme Court pursuant to its constitutional authority over pleading, practice, procedure, and judicial administration.

SECTION 13. Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPP). — A Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation (SLAPP) is any legal action—whether civil, criminal, or administrative—filed against a person, group, or juridical entity with the primary intent to harass, vex, exert undue pressure, or stifle the enforcement of the rights of nature or existing environmental laws. The defendant in an alleged SLAPP may raise this defense by filing a special motion to dismiss at any stage of the proceedings. The court shall set the motion for hearing and direct the plaintiff to show cause why the case should not be dismissed as a SLAPP. The special motion to dismiss shall be resolved by the court within a non-extendible period of thirty (30) days from the conclusion of the hearing. If the court determines the action to be a SLAPP, it shall dismiss the case with prejudice and award exemplary damages, attorney's fees, and full costs of suit to the defendant.

SECTION 14. Territories of Life — The ancestral domains of Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs), formally recognized under Republic Act No. 8371, may be acknowledged as Territories of Life consistent with the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), customary indigenous governance, and the strict observance of the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Ancestral domains so acknowledged shall enjoy the protections and rights granted under Section 4 and Section 5 of this Act, without overriding or diminishing indigenous self-governance, customary laws, or traditional resource management systems. Furthermore, all protected areas established pursuant to Republic Act No. 7586, as amended by Republic Act No. 11038 (E-NIPAS Act), as well as locally declared conservation areas established by LGUs through ordinances, are designated as Territories of Life under this Act.

The Protected Area Management Boards (PAMBs) of E-NIPAS areas and the local development councils of LGUs shall ensure that their respective Protected Area Management Plans, Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs), and local zoning ordinances are fully aligned with the ecocentric standards established by this Act.

SECTION 15. Role of the Indigenous Political Structure (IPS). — The Indigenous Political Structures (IPS) of recognized ICCs/IPs, as mandated by existing law, shall exercise the following duties and functions within their ancestral domains to ensure the protection of the rights of nature:

- (a) Represent the ecological interests of the natural ecosystems situated within their ancestral domains in local development councils and regional planning bodies;

(b) Ensure that the processes for Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) strictly evaluate potential impacts on the vital cycles and structural integrity of local ecosystems before any development project is authorized; and

(c) Collaborate with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to integrate indigenous ecological knowledge, sustainable resource management systems, and conservation values into the localized educational curriculum.

SECTION 16. Allocation of Funds from Other Sources. — The DENR is hereby authorized and mandated to allocate a specific portion of its retained collections from existing statutory funds to support the implementation of this Act. This shall include, but is not limited to, allocations from the Integrated Protected Area Fund (IPAF) established under the E-NIPAS Act, and the environmental fees collected under the Forestry Code and the Philippine Environmental Impact Statement System, subject to standard accounting and auditing rules and regulations.

SECTION 17. Protection of Livelihoods Dependent on the Environment. — Nothing in this Act shall be interpreted, construed, or applied to diminish, limit, or impair the traditional, subsistence, and customary livelihood rights of artisanal fisherfolk, small-scale farmers, and indigenous peoples, provided that their activities are carried out using sustainable, non-destructive, and traditional methods.

These sectors are recognized as primary stewards of nature within their ancestral domains and traditional settlement areas. Any public or private development project affecting their environment or subsistence areas must strictly comply with the mandatory consultation and public hearing requirements set forth under Sections 26 and 27 of Republic Act No. 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991). The affected individuals and community representatives shall be deemed indispensable parties in all consultations, environmental impact studies, and permitting processes relating to the proposed projects.

SECTION 18. Review of the Environmental Impact Assessment System. — Within one hundred eighty (180) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DENR, through the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), shall conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the Philippine Environmental Impact Assessment System (PEIASS). This review shall modernize the system to explicitly integrate ecosystem-integrity standards, cumulative impact assessments, climate resilience profiles, and the rights of nature into the evaluation guidelines for all project categories, ensuring that no project is granted

an ECC if it meets any of the following scientifically established thresholds:

- (a) Causes irreversible ecological degradation;
- (b) Significant impairment of fundamental ecosystem functions;
- (c) Substantial loss of critical biodiversity; or
- (d) Breaches scientifically established ecological carrying capacities.

SECTION 19. Education — The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall, in coordination with the DENR, integrate the concept of ecocentric environmental governance, sustainability science, and the recognition of the rights of natural ecosystems into the core curricula of all primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions within one (1) year from the effectivity of this Act.

SECTION 20. Enforcement and Implementing Rules and Regulations. — The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, in coordination with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and representatives from accredited environmental public-interest organizations, shall promulgate the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of this Act within ninety (90) days from its effectivity.

SECTION 21. Appropriations. — The amount necessary for the initial implementation of the provisions of this Act shall be charged against the current year's appropriations of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SECTION 22. Prohibited Acts. — It shall be unlawful for any person, public officer, or juridical entity to:

- (a) Knowingly undertake, authorize, or execute any activity or project that directly causes irreversible ecological degradation, systemic collapse, structural disruption, or permanent alteration of the vital cycles and regenerative capacity of a natural ecosystem;

(b) Execute, approve, or issue administrative permits, clearances, or ECCs for projects in knowing violation of the ecosystem integrity standards established under Section 7 and Section 18 of this Act;

(c) Obstruct, prevent, or harass citizen-representatives, indigenous communities, or public officials lawfully enforcing the rights of nature under this Act;

(d) Falsify, conceal, or misrepresent environmental data, assessments, or information submitted under the regulatory procedures of this Act;

(e) Knowingly violate specific terms, conditions, or mitigation rules imposed under Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs) issued pursuant to this Act;

(f) Fail or refuse to comply with lawful restoration, rehabilitation, or cease-and-desist orders issued by competent administrative bodies or courts; or

(g) Retaliate against, threaten, or penalize citizen-representatives, whistleblowers, indigenous communities, or environmental defenders acting in good faith to uphold or implement the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 23. Penalties — The following penalties are hereby imposed for violations of Section 22 of this Act, subject to due process and constitutional protections:

(a) Criminal Penalties — Any natural person who commits any of the prohibited acts defined under Section 22 shall, upon conviction by final judgment, be punished by imprisonment of not less than one (1) year nor more than three (3) years, or a fine of not less than Five Million Pesos (P5,000,000.00) nor more than Ten Million Pesos (P10,000,000.00), or both, at the discretion of the court.

(b) Liability of Juridical Persons and Corporate Officers. — If the offender is a juridical person, it shall be sanctioned with an administrative fine of not less than Twenty Million Pesos (P20,000,000.00) and the immediate revocation of its business permits, licenses, and operational clearances. The penalty of imprisonment prescribed in subsection (a) of this Section shall be imposed directly upon the directors, officers,

managers, or responsible corporate personnel who authorized, tolerated, or knowingly permitted the unlawful act or omission.

(c) **Liability of Public Officials.** — If the offender is a public officer who issues permits or approvals in knowing violation of this Act, or who fails to execute mandatory enforcement duties, they shall, in addition to the criminal penalties prescribed herein, suffer the penalty of perpetual absolute disqualification from holding public office and forfeiture of all administrative benefits.

(d) **Foreign Nationals.** — If the offender is a foreign national, they shall be immediately deported after serving the sentence of imprisonment and paying the applicable fines, without need of further deportation proceedings.

SECTION 24. Separability Clause. — If any provision, section, or part of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remaining provisions, sections, or parts not affected thereby shall continue to remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 25. Repealing Clause. — All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, administrative orders, rules, regulations, or parts thereof which are contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby amended, modified, or repealed accordingly. This Act shall be construed as supplemental to, and supportive of, all existing environmental and social justice statutes.

SECTION 26. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the Philippines.

Approved.