



## CANDIDATE PLATFORM

Candidate for IUCN Regional Councilor, North America and the Caribbean

**Kathryn (Katy) Gwiazdon**

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*Leading with heart,  
Empowering through ethics & equity, and  
Advancing a just governance for conservation*

Executive Director, Center for Environmental Ethics and Law (CEEL)  
US National Committee (USNC), Exec. Committee Member (2023+)  
Chair, Ethics Specialist Group, IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law; WCEL Member (2005+); SSC Member, Inter-Commissional Task Force on Dams (2024+)  
Member, IUCN WCC 2025 Motions Working Group  
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## BACKGROUND

- **UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL GROUNDING** – I have been involved with IUCN since 2005, working alongside global conservation leaders like [George Rabb](#) (former SSC Chair), J. Ronald Engel (founder of the IUCN Ethics Working Group in 1984), Nicholas Robinson, Honorable Sheila Abed, and Justice Antonio Benjamin (former WCEL Chairs), and founding organizations, such as the Paris Muséum nationale d'histoire naturelle (Emeritus Professor Patrick Blandin). I understand the importance of our founding principles, rooted in ethics, peace, and justice, our founding members, and our foundational leaders, and their role in the evolution of IUCN for the protection of life and in our ability to respond to the issues of today.
- **ADVANCING A ONE UNION APPROACH** – as ethics is Union-wide, cross-disciplinary, and cross-sectoral, I have worked with diverse Members, Committees, Commissions, and Secretariat bodies, including past Director Generals, Presidents, and bodies like the Environmental Law Center and the Academy of Environmental Law; as well as leading and assisting Members to advance motions and urgent motions through Congresses and decisions through Council (2008, 2010, 2012, 2021).
- **LEADING AN NGO ROOTED IN IUCN** – my organization CEEL was created to build upon and implement the work of an IUCN Resolution, *Drafting a Code of Ethics for Biodiversity Conservation* (WCC-2004-Res-020). Through it, we created a methodology rooted in bearing witness and building solidarity within and among local communities to raise the evidentiary value of the lived experience, highlight their guiding ethical principles, and address the gap between their values and the law and governance systems which impact their lives. The Biosphere Ethics Initiative and Relato Methodology has been supported through IUCN Council Decisions and Resolution WCC-2012-Res-004.
- **SERVING IUCN GLOBALLY, NATIONALLY, AND LOCALLY** – as an US NGO Member, I have advanced IUCN-adopted Resolutions in the United States and globally, with Member and non-Member organizations; as an Executive Committee Member of the US National Committee, I assisted in the coordination of the 2024 Annual Meeting in Washington DC, *Members at the Heart of IUCN* (as well as assisted with the RCF), and currently am working on the first Strategic Plan of the USNC to be discussed in Abu Dhabi. With WCEL, I have worked across Commissions, in local communities, with global organizations, as well as created and implemented workplans and budgets.

- **SERVING ON BOARDS RELATED TO LAW, CONSERVATION, AND PUBLIC HEALTH** – I serve in leadership and advisory capacities with several boards and NGOs, drafting and implementing Strategic Plans and Projects, including but not limited to the Global Ecological Integrity Group, the International Network for Epidemiology in Policy, the Ecological Law and Governance Association, the Earth Jurisprudence Monitor, the UN Harmony with Nature Program, the International Institute for Ecological Negotiation (INNÉ), the Inter-American Institute on Justice and Sustainability, and the Princeton Prize on Race Relations.
- **RECOGNIZED EXPERT ON THE INTERSECTION OF ETHICS, GOVERNANCE, CLIMATE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND HUMAN SECURITY** – I teach doctorate courses on international law, climate change law and policy, decolonizing international law, human rights, and armed conflict and security at Northern Illinois University College of Law, have been an invited Professor at universities in New Zealand, Brazil, and France, and have been an invited keynote for universities and government and NGO-bodies around the world, including but not limited to the UNGA and the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. In addition, I have published extensively in these areas, most recently [\*The Routledge Handbook on Applied Climate Change Ethics\* \(2023\)](#), [\*Words won't reduce the impact of conflict on nature — what's needed is action\* \(2024\)](#), and [\*Ecological Integrity and International Law: Peace, Public Health, and Global Security\* \(2025\)](#).

#### **APPROACH & ACTION – EACH INTER-RELATED**

- **PLACE MEMBERS AT THE HEART OF IUCN** – in word and action, I will center Members as the Heart of IUCN, in governance, transparency, and information-sharing, and in the selection and implementation of programs and priorities. To strengthen accountability and engagement, for example, I will work to more actively engage Members in Council agendas, ensure that all Council Meetings are accessible (virtual), and move that Minutes include more than summaries, but actions of consequence, such as Councilor votes on issues. I also promise to bring passion to the position – IUCN is an amazing institution, with a unique and powerful history, and I know that we can do better in confronting – with courage and strength – our shared crises.
- **PROMOTE ETHICS & EQUITY FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IN CONSERVATION** – in working to strengthen and implement the mission and vision of IUCN “as a just world that values and conserves nature”, I will act with intention to bring ethics and equity – fairness – in process and substance “to respect and care for the community of life”. In process, I will speak truth to power, work to empower the historically and present-day disempowered, create space to find shared solutions, and bring ethics and equity into decision-making – where everyone has a voice at the table. Ethics is an inquiry into right and wrong, and when responsibility attaches; its power is in its process: inquiry. I cannot tell you the substance that will follow, because it will be co-created, and therefore co-owned, in that process – one led by the Members, and then realized through the assistance of the Secretariat and the DG. To ensure ethics and equity, I will work to strengthen the current Ethics Committee that is housed within the Council, so that it can be a vehicle to address issues related to governance, programs, and Member concerns.
- **COMMIT TO INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE** – our conservation crises cannot be separated from our governance crises, and we must live our principles – as an institution – in order to advance our principles. This is a fundamental understanding in my approach to all issues that impact the communities of life. We cannot separate the harms to humanity from the harms to nature, and neither from the ideals and capacities of responsible democratic self-governance, rooted in human rights and participation of all citizens in deliberations, decisions, and actions. We also cannot ignore the harms to humanity that result from “solutions” to our conservation crises, nor be a part of the continuation of historical systems rooted in unequal power, discrimination, and predation that have led to our present-day crises and tipping points. To this end, I will be supporting action to enshrine our Vision of “a just world that values and conserves nature” into our statutes, because if we fail to ever consider justice, we will fail in our aims to protect the communities of life. It is also important to note that the Ethics Specialist Group is the only Commission Specialist Group that includes IUCN internal governance as part of its workplan. I commit to continuing this work as just solutions for conservation are only possible within a just institution for conservation.