

# THE PANTHER

A PUBLICATION OF RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK | SUMMER 2024 | RAN.org



## The **CLIMATE CRISIS** is a **HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS** and **BANK OF AMERICA** is **COMPLICIT**



The climate crisis is inherently and undeniably a human rights crisis. There are five key ways that human rights violations are embedded in climate change:

- » **Extreme Weather Effects:** Climate disasters have an undeniable impact on people's livelihoods and safety.
- » **Funding Fossil Expansion in a Time of Climate Chaos:** The primary human activity exacerbating climate change is the expansion of fossil fuel extraction, transportation, processing, and burning.
- » **Harms to Communities:** Fossil fuel infrastructure build outs cause pollution, create public health hazards, destroy fragile habitats, and erode land rights.
- » **Rights Violations Associated with Fossil Fuel Projects:** Environmental activists and land defenders globally face heightened threats of violence.
- » **Violations of Indigenous Rights and Sovereignty:** Fossil fuel projects often all too often ignore the right to Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and Indigenous Peoples' right to control their lands and territories.

By financing the expansion of fossil fuels at this critical time for the climate, Bank of America (BoA) is complicit in the violation of human rights for millions of people.

In 2023, the hottest year on record, world nations reached a landmark agreement to “transition global energy systems away from fossil fuels.” But instead of strengthening its positions and policies to reflect the scope and severity of the climate crisis, BoA is backtracking on long standing climate and human rights policies and safeguards.

The bank has removed explicit bans on financing coal and Arctic drilling projects and withdrawn from the Equator Principles, which apply fundamental environmental and human rights standards to financing projects around the world.

BoA has poured over \$333 billion into the fossil fuel industry since the Paris Agreement, and over \$33 billion in 2023 alone.

That's why RAN and partners have been showing up at their headquarters in Charlotte, NC for the last several years on the day of their Annual Shareholder Meeting — to call them out on their destructive practices and demand accountability.

There's no denying it, and there's no more time for delay in addressing it. Bank of America must immediately stop financing fossil fuel expansion and get on the path to powering a just energy transition.

PHOTO: Tyson Gifford



# INSURING OUR FUTURE



“Stop Insuring Fossil Fuels!” was the chant resounding around the world during the first-ever Global Week of Action aimed at the insurance industry. From February 26 to March 3, people worldwide—from the United Kingdom to Uganda—gathered to hold insurers accountable for their significant role in the climate crisis.

Much like you need insurance to drive a car, fossil fuel companies need insurance to build and operate their infrastructure. The insurance industry is a critical target sector in the fight against climate chaos. Chubb, Liberty Mutual, and AIG are among the top US insurers behind the methane gas boom in the US Gulf South, where we have been mobilizing with partners to stop future methane buildouts. While these companies tout their commitments to environmental sustainability, they continue to underwrite projects that exacerbate climate change and disproportionately harm marginalized communities, while simultaneously stripping individuals of their coverage.

That’s why RAN has been working tirelessly to call out their hypocrisy.

Our work has resulted in insurance companies adopting new, more rigorous policies and has increased scrutiny on the insurance sector as a whole. And at the beginning of this year, the White House called for a temporary halt on permitting additional methane export terminals.

During the Insurance Global Week of Action, there were over 100 actions across 31 countries, with thousands of frontline community leaders, activists, organizations, and allies taking to the streets calling for just climate action, making it the largest ever grassroots mobilization of the campaign to hold insurers accountable.

The collective power of this worldwide activism has put insurers on notice: several have since made public statements and commitments to modify their harmful practices.

But just because the week is over doesn’t mean we are. We won’t stop until these companies *insure our future*.

PHOTO: Eric McGregor



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**Editors:** Jennifer Berit Wilson, Danielle Farrell  
**Designer:** Toben Dilworth  
**Contributors:** Charlotte Biren, Ginger Cassidy, Melissa Ray Davis, Steph Dowlen, Zanne Garland, Mary Lovell, Emily Selzer, Aditi Sen, Laurel Sutherland

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USA | 415-398-4404 | [RAN.org](http://RAN.org)  
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# FROM THE CANOPY

Ginger Cassady, RAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Charting our Course



The collective efforts to protect our future have reached a critical point. Just this April, the United Nations climate chief declared that we only have two years left to “save the world” and prevent the catastrophic impacts of climate chaos.

At RAN, our network always rises to meet the biggest challenges. Thank you for being a crucial part of that Network.

Last year, we undertook a meticulous process to develop our ambitious five-year strategic plan, and I want to give you a view from the canopy: a high-level look at what is to come over the next five years for Rainforest Action Network.

While the task at hand is significant, we believe a transition is possible — it is already happening — and it must be rooted in justice.

RAN’s core mission, strategies, and commitment to activism are unchanged and more necessary than ever to respond to the scale of ecological and social crises being fueled by profit-driven interests. We have been reflecting on, and assessing, the impact of four decades of challenging corporate power and systemic injustice while considering how our campaigns can evolve to meet the growing urgency of these times.

RAN is uniquely placed among movement allies to build and sustain connectivity between forests, climate, and human rights — often considered separate issues. From distributing cutting-edge research to investing deeply in our frontline and fenceline partnership, we always connect the dots between forests, climate, and human rights, illustrating the need for an intersectional approach to make progress on any one of these priorities.

That is why over the next five years, we are committed to:

### 1. Escalating our Intersectional Campaigns

RAN will work at the nexus of forests, climate, and human rights to target the corporations most culpable for deforestation and fossil fuel expansion on land where Indigenous or traditional communities are opposed to corporate extraction.

### 2. Building People Power for a Just Transition

We believe people power is the only force that can truly compete with corporate power — and drive the ultimate success in achieving our goals and organizational mission. We will prioritize the relational work of sustaining partnerships with frontline and fenceline allies, building coalitions, leveraging resources through our small grantmaking program, sharing our research with the activist community, and supporting direct actions that cannot be ignored.

### 3. Incorporating Racial Justice into Every Facet of our Work

As RAN continues to work in an increasingly global climate movement, it is incumbent on us to reflect the diversity of this movement. We will integrate international and intersectional frameworks into our analysis and infuse principles of a Just Transition toward a people-centered economy that fosters the just, equitable world we seek to build.

I believe we can do it — because I have seen how much we can accomplish together. I look forward to seeing you in the streets.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature of Ginger Cassady in black ink.

Ginger Cassady  
Executive Director





# THE LAFCADIO FUND

In 2022, Rainforest Action Network and the global forest protection movement lost one of our most impactful and admired champions. Lafcadio Cortesi was a brilliant and effective campaigner, cut from an old school cloth where earnestness and face-to-face relationships built the trust that was the pathway to changing hearts and minds.

In memory of Lafcadio and his incredible contributions to forests around the globe, RAN is launching The Lafcadio Fund. On June 22, in conjunction with World Rainforest Day, RAN announced The Lafcadio Fund as a new giving option through our Community Action Grants Program.

All funds raised through The Lafcadio Fund will go to support activists working on Rainforest Protection in Indonesia through The Samdhana Institute, which he co founded in 2003 to help invigorate a “cultural revival” of activists and artists dedicated to preserving the richness of the natural, cultural, and spiritual diversity of Indonesia.

## About Lafcadio

Lafcadio was an enormously effective conservationist and community organizer who had an impact everywhere he worked. His considerable strength was drawn directly from his passion for the work. He always saw the best in people and viewed our adversaries not as enemies but as misguided actors who needed to be brought around to see the light.

In Lafcadio’s eyes, everyone was always just one compelling, heartfelt argument away from doing the right thing. Lafcadio played a major role in bringing RAN’s focus to Indonesia. His many years spent on RAN’s forest team left an outsized legacy that continues to fundamentally influence the work we do together today.

In addition to being a colleague and mentor for many of us, Laf remained a dear personal friend to many who are still at RAN.

Lafcadio was irrepressibly gregarious and professionally prolific, and he left behind a vast international network of allies and collaborators who were touched by his contagious enthusiasm for life and his deep commitment to healthy forests and the communities whose lives and livelihoods were tied to them.

Laf was equally at home on the floor of a hut in a remote Sumatran village as he was across the table from decision makers in a corporate boardroom — but never so much as on a dancefloor, wherever one could be found. Laf was an electric bolt of a human being. His bellowing laugh was a signature trait, and he radiated pure ‘joie de vivre’ — adventurous, charismatic, playful, and cheerful in even the most unlikely circumstances. He was also just about the most fun person ever to be around. From all of us who had the pleasure: Terima kasih pak Laf. You are legend.

If you are interested in giving to The Lafcadio Fund, visit: » [RAN.org/Lafcadio](https://RAN.org/Lafcadio)



# DEFUNDING BIODIVERSITY COLLAPSE



Home to most of the world's biodiversity and key to carbon sequestration, rainforests are critical to climate stability. But these essential ecosystems and the people who depend on them face staggering losses because of the unrelenting expansion of agribusiness and logging.

One of the key tenets in our theory of change is that our campaign strategies — and the targets we choose — must be backed by impeccable, in-depth research and analysis of financial flows to both fossil fuels and forest-risk commodities. **In other words, we follow the money.**

The inaugural *Banking on Biodiversity Collapse* (BOBC) report, launched last year on “Finance Day” at COP28 by the Forests and Finance Coalition (of which RAN is a founding member) comprehensively exposes the major banks and investors behind forest-risk commodity companies that are driving human rights abuses and accelerating deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity collapse — and the failure of their policies to prevent the destruction.

The report finds that by making lofty pledges on sustainability without any real transparency or accountability, financial institutions are enabling bad actors and are complicit in driving biodiversity collapse. In fact, since the Paris Agreement in 2016, banks have pumped a staggering \$307 billion into high-risk forestry and agriculture companies linked to tropical deforestation.

The report also looked at case studies of four corporations — JBS, Cargill, Royal Golden Eagle, and Sinar Mas Group — to

showcase the type of egregious client behaviors that are tolerated and facilitated by banks and investors.

**Systemic solutions are the only answer to the systemic problem of biodiversity collapse.**

The current global biodiversity loss rate is estimated to be 100 to 1000 times higher than the natural background extinction rate — a faster decline than at any other point in human history. As irreplaceable species are lost forever, our intricate global ecosystem grows ever more fragile

RAN and our partners in the Forest and Finance Coalition are calling on governments and the financial sector to adopt five core principles (which have been endorsed by 32 NGOs):

- » Halt and reverse biodiversity loss.
- » Respect and prioritize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, and local communities.
- » Foster a just transition.
- » Ensure ecosystem integrity.
- » Align institutional objectives across sectors, issues, and instruments.

**We must act now to defund biodiversity collapse.**

You can read the full report and learn more on the Banking on Biodiversity Collapse landing page: [forestsandfinance.org/banking-on-biodiversity-collapse](https://forestsandfinance.org/banking-on-biodiversity-collapse)





# ACTION RECAP



**January 19, 2024:** We joined Gulf Coast community members on the streets of New Orleans to protest the buildout of methane gas (liquefied “natural” gas) terminals in their backyards, while corporate executives gathered for the American Energy Summit.

PHOTO: Shawna Ambrose / RAN



**February 20, 2024:** While the world’s leading investment institutions and consumer goods companies are gathered at The Boca Raton, a luxurious coastal resort, we showed up to warn investors to stay away from these companies! Many of them, like Procter & Gamble and Mondeléz International, are some of the biggest drivers of forest loss and community conflicts around the world.

PHOTO: Jake Conroy / RAN



**February 28, 2024:** As part of the Insurance Global Week of Action, RAN, community leaders from the Gulf Coast, and a hundred activists showed up at the office of Chubb to demand an end to fossil fuel insurance.

PHOTO: Erik McGregor



**May 8, 2024:** Along with partners, allies and activists, RAN took to the streets of Charlotte, North Carolina outside the Bank of America headquarters to call them out for their role in human rights and climate disasters — from their continued investment in the fossil fuel industry to funding the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

PHOTO: June Blotnick



**May 22, 2024:** RAN and partners showed up at the Mondelez headquarters during their annual shareholders meeting to hold them accountable for Indigenous rights violations and rainforest destruction. Mondelez is one of the largest snack food companies in the world, and they continue to source palm oil from agribusinesses operating illegally in some of the planet’s most critical rainforest ecosystems.

PHOTO: Isiah ThoughtPoet Veney



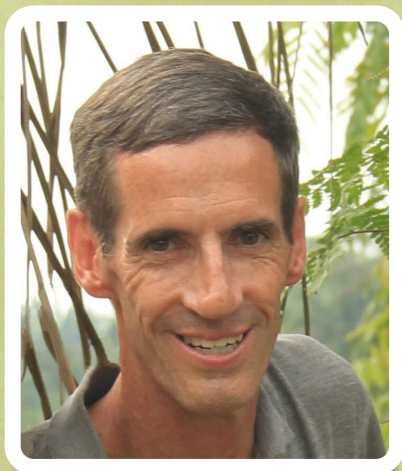


# RAN WELCOMES

## Chief Financial Officer, Elisabeth Williams

A seasoned financial and operations leader with over 20 years of experience in non-profit administration, Elisabeth brings a comprehensive skillset to her role as Chief Financial Officer at RAN. She is adept at optimizing the impact and outcomes of non-profit organizations through strategic financial planning, operational excellence, and effective risk management.

Before joining Rainforest Action Network, Elisabeth was Senior Director of Finance and Administration at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, where she played a pivotal role in optimizing financial performance, enhancing operational efficiency, and mitigating organizational risks. Prior to her work at the foundation, Elisabeth held various roles in finance and operations supporting large and small nonprofit organizations.



## Dan Scales, RAN's newest Board Member

Dan joins the RAN Board as a senior software architect, bringing a unique experience that blends technological expertise and strong environmental commitment. A long-time supporter of RAN, Dan provided invaluable support for the early tracing of the sources of palm oil in Sumatra, Indonesia. Since earning his Ph.D. in computer science from Stanford University, Dan has done computer science research at DEC/Compaq Research Labs, was a key early engineer at VMware, and subsequently worked as a principal engineer at Google. Dan is currently a senior engineer at the World Resource Institute working on the Global Forest Watch project. Global Forest Watch provides comprehensive deforestation analysis and alerts for use by stakeholders worldwide, including national park rangers and corporations monitoring their supply chains.





425 Bush Street | Suite 300 | San Francisco, CA 94108 | [RAN.org](https://ran.org)

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### We are nothing without our network!

From all of us at Rainforest Action Network, thank you for supporting our mission to keep forests standing, defund climate chaos, and uphold human rights. You are receiving The Panther because you have supported RAN in the last year, and we would love to connect with more of our supporters! If you'd like to share your thoughts on RAN's direction, ask questions, or just get to know the organization a little better, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us at [membership@ran.org](mailto:membership@ran.org).

PHOTO: [sorn340](#) / iStock