

Title: Giving Voice to the Extraterrestrial -- Providing legal standing to the unknown**ABSTRACT**

The past several centuries have seen dramatic extensions in the provision of legal standing among humans. In the US and many other cultures, legal rights and personhood status have evolved from a limited subset of predominantly male, privileged landowners to generally include women, children, the mentally infirm and all members of our species. More recently, the circle of legal personhood has been expanded to include some non-humans. Corporations, a few animals and plants, and now even landscape features such as rivers and specific landforms have been granted personhood and legal standing. In all cases, such status has been preceded by documented human interest in that specific entity. It is a legal requirement that has been tested in US courts.

Any extraterrestrial life discovered may require almost immediate legal standing. Without this status it will have no voice – there will be no pathway for representation of its presumed interests. Accordingly, specific human concern for extraterrestrial life (regardless of whether sapient, sentient, its comparable taxonomic status or other factors) and, potentially, related geologic or landscape features on which it may depend, needs to be demonstrated and documented prior to its discovery and, critically in the eyes of courts, prior to any specific threat to it. *Ad litem* guardianship or some similar instrument is suggested as a way to give voice to those yet-undiscovered entities. That process starts with a demonstration of compassionate concern. After extraterrestrial life has been identified, other entrenched interests, such as those urging exploitation, may make legal representation much more difficult. It is proposed that a group of concerned persons begin the process of documenting human interest, and the 2019 Mars Extant Life conference provides an ideal forum for initiating that process. “What’s next?” is the preparation of a legal foundation whereby any extraterrestrial life discovered can be afforded representation in courts here on Earth.

This presentation briefly summarizes the evolution of the concepts of personhood and standing. It describes relevant court decisions and proposes an agenda for documenting human interest in extraterrestrial life, broadly defined. Several scenarios of potential encounters with alien life and the legal issues that would rapidly surface will be presented.