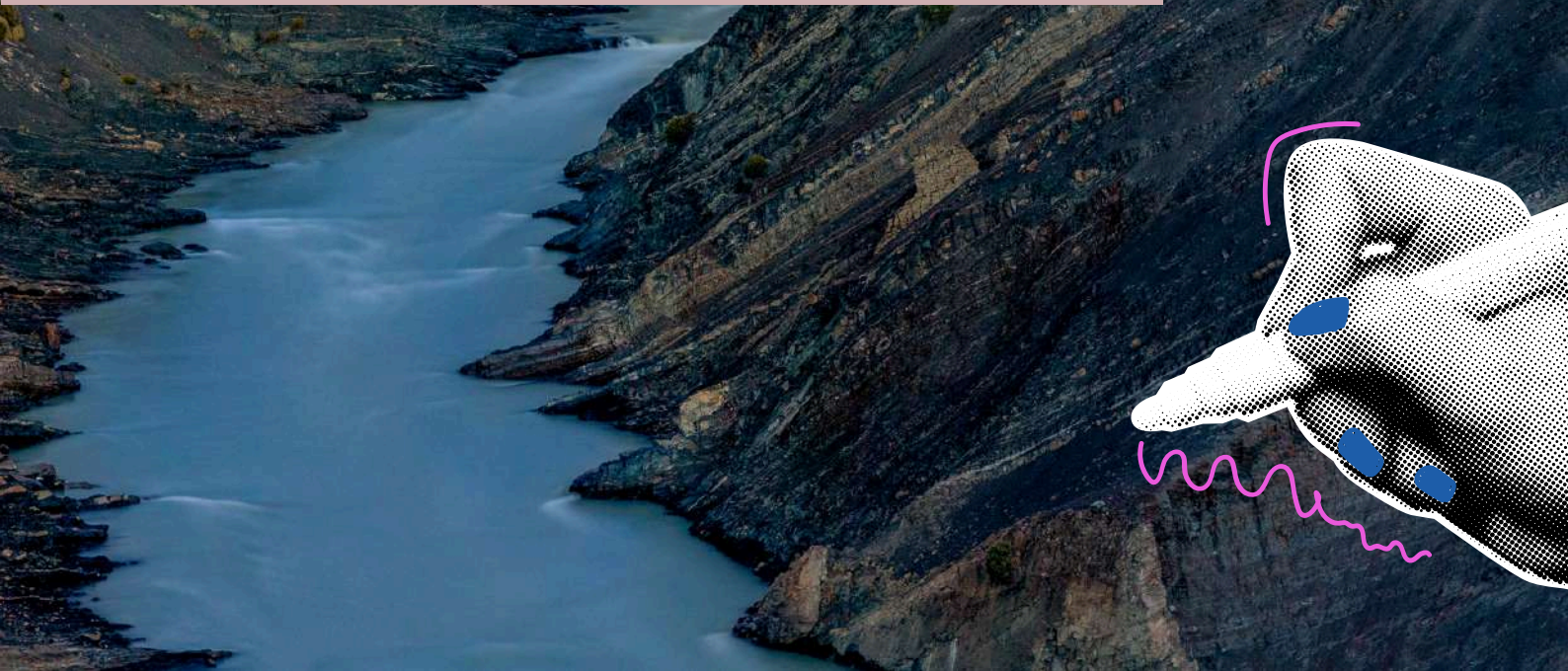


# CALL FOR ACTION



For a transparent and participatory  
water governance  
**in El Chaltén**

**Los Glaciares National Park, Argentina  
UNESCO World Heritage Site**



This Call for Action was carried out within the framework of the program Guardianes de la Cuenca from the Boana Association and with the support of the NGO Rivers For Change.



**GUARDIANES  
DE LA CUENCA**





# We are in a state of environmental emergency for the waters of the River de las Vueltas.

During the last hearing on December 18, 2024 on the El Chaltén water treatment plant contamination case, **the judge highlighted the seriousness of the situation.**

Currently, only the effluents of 800 people in the town are treated due to the precarious situation of the Servicios Públicos treatment plant, when its capacity should cover the more than 8,000 people that are at this site in high season.

**This means that 90% of the wastewater is released into nature, and recent research has shown the environmental and sanitary consequences for the waters of the protected area.**



# 1

## We need water governance for this World Heritage Site, the freshwater reserve of the entire continent.

*Governance is a set of decisions, rules and practices designed to ensure the optimal functioning of an organization, as well as the structural bodies responsible for formulating, implementing and monitoring these decisions, rules and practices.*

**We need a multi-year roadmap that defines shared management criteria and a systematic follow-up that transcends contexts and political junctures, because the protection of World Heritage sites requires continuity in public policies.**

The region needs to integrate available scientific knowledge for decision-making and create science-decision-makers-community platforms. We need to work collectively on clear, measurable and achievable conservation objectives, and collaborate in allocating the necessary funds to protect ecosystems.

**The Rio de las Vueltas environmental disaster is just one of many governance threats facing the site.**

Scientific knowledge about water, glaciers, vegetation and fauna is not sufficiently integrated into decision-making. None of these areas has an integrated and participatory governance platform, adequate monitoring resources, or a system of coordination between the various stakeholders. In addition, the lack of means of monitoring and information dissemination are other factors of vulnerability for their conservation.

**Moreover, economic development and the type of tourism development projects - both within the protected area and in neighboring zones - are not integrated into a shared vision of tourism development.**

In this context, recent announcements of nautical activities and construction within the protected area remind us of the importance of defining clear conservation norms.

**El Chaltén needs governance.**

**A governance that is participatory, transparent and focused on clear conservation objectives.**

What is the remediation plan to address the abandonment of the wastewater treatment by the responsible institutions? **What is the protected area's roadmap for the conservation of the aquatic ecosystems?** How big should the treatment plant be, in anticipation of the exponential increase in El Chaltén's reception capacity?

The conservation of this protected area depends in part on the ability to implement a management plan and to encourage the communities to adhere to its conservation objectives.

**This situation symbolizes the magnitude of the contamination generated by the lack of infrastructure.** There are other problems that have not been characterized, or for which we do not have enough public information to understand their real impact, such as the **landfill that is not waterproofed and where the plant's sludge is stored,** or the **cumulative impact on the groundwater from decades of inadequate treatment of fecal waste within the protected area.** The accumulation of environmental liabilities within the park and its bordering zones requires concrete actions by the authorities in charge.



## We request the recognition of the State of Environmental Emergency of El Chaltén by the Government of Santa Cruz and the establishment of an Environmental and Water Emergency Committee.

**The Government of Santa Cruz must recognize the State of Environmental Emergency in El Chaltén and facilitate the inter-institutional work necessary to unlock funds for infrastructure and monitoring in El Chaltén.**

Although Servicios Públicos has the obligation to repair and increase the capacity of its treatment plant, the company will not be able to achieve these objectives without the support and supervision of the Municipality, National Parks and the government of the Province of Santa Cruz. These institutions must initiate a dialogue, as dictated by the judge, that will allow for a coherent management of the territory's wastewater. They should also support fundraising for the urgent expansion of the treatment plant. The seriousness of the situation leads us to demand that this problem be taken with the necessary seriousness and urgency.

This committee should integrate all relevant institutions, including the Municipality of El Chaltén, the National Parks Administration, Servicios Públicos Sociedad del Estado (SPSE) and the provincial government, in order to design and implement effective and immediate solutions to address the current crisis.

We call for institutions to form a committee to monitor the main sources of water resource pollution and their impacts on biodiversity. Inter-institutional coordination is essential, namely, a structure that allows the different actors to coordinate their actions around shared conservation objectives, actively involving the community in decision-making.

In addition, fundraising and allocation of funds is required. Given the urgency and seriousness of the situation, immediate fundraising is needed to finance the expansion of the treatment plant, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for efficient and transparent use of these resources.

## Local Advisory Committee now !

Prior consultation mechanisms should allow citizens and associations to address key issues related to protected area management. Current mechanisms do not allow for the dissemination of information in time to understand the challenges. Territorial construction is partly conditioned by power games that marginalize citizens concerned about the protected area's conservation objectives and current trends and lack of connection with the protected area's administration.

We welcome the announcement by the Intendant of Los Glaciares National Park wishing to reestablish the Local Advisory Commission for this protected area. This is a consultative space that is made up of representatives from the public and private sectors to deal with important issues of the protected area. In Los Glaciares NP it was created in 2000 but only functioned for 4 years. UNESCO had warned about its inactivity.

The CAL is a consultative body for key stakeholders in the territory, which should be made up of national, provincial, and municipal entities, as well as nongovernmental organizations, and those that bring together tourism providers. It addresses transcendental issues for the protected area in order to reach consensus on the best decisions.

**In this context, the CAL could be a platform for the participatory management of the waters of Los Glaciares National Park and include environmental agendas within its operation.**

**We encourage this initiative and hope that it will be carried out as soon as possible, incorporating a representation of the community's inhabitants.**



## Governance must actively include community voices, highlighting the key role of women and youth in the defense of ecosystems.

The history of environmental action in El Chaltén demonstrates the vital role that citizens - particularly women - are playing in the implementation of concrete measures to protect aquatic ecosystems. Despite their key contribution to making the objectives of the management plan and the Heritage Convention a reality on the ground, voices for the defense of the commons must increasingly be raised to have the opportunity to be heard and taken into account.

The youth of El Chaltén should also be represented and heard when drawing the possible futures of this constantly and rapidly evolving territory. The voices of youth and future generations should also be included in decision making. It is necessary to design spaces for the requests and visions of youth to be legitimized and integrated into territorial planning.





## For the integration of an ecocentric vision of rivers in planning agencies.

This commission, together with the other water governance bodies, must also represent the intrinsic interests of the rivers in the area.

As the judge states: “the legal regulation of water is based on an ecocentric or systemic paradigm, and does not take into account only private or state interests, but those of the system itself, as established by the General Environmental Law”.

The ecocentric vision leads us to consider the needs of systems and their intrinsic value, independently of human uses. According to IPBES, “these values imply recognizing the right of other living beings to continue their evolutionary path (...) these values encourage the protection of biodiversity, ecosystems, habitats or species for their own sake, as such”.

We call for the establishment of governance mechanisms to implement these rights recognized by the provincial judicial authorities and for the formalization of river representation systems in decision-making bodies concerning the management of the protected area.

Within the Glacier National Park, declared a World Heritage Site, we have the opportunity to create a form of governance that allows the application of this local jurisprudence of river rights, moving from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach. In a context of the emergence of post-glacial ecosystems linked to climate change and massive biodiversity loss, the creation of governance bodies that integrate intrinsic values would be a historical precedent and an example of a governance model for Patagonian ecosystems.

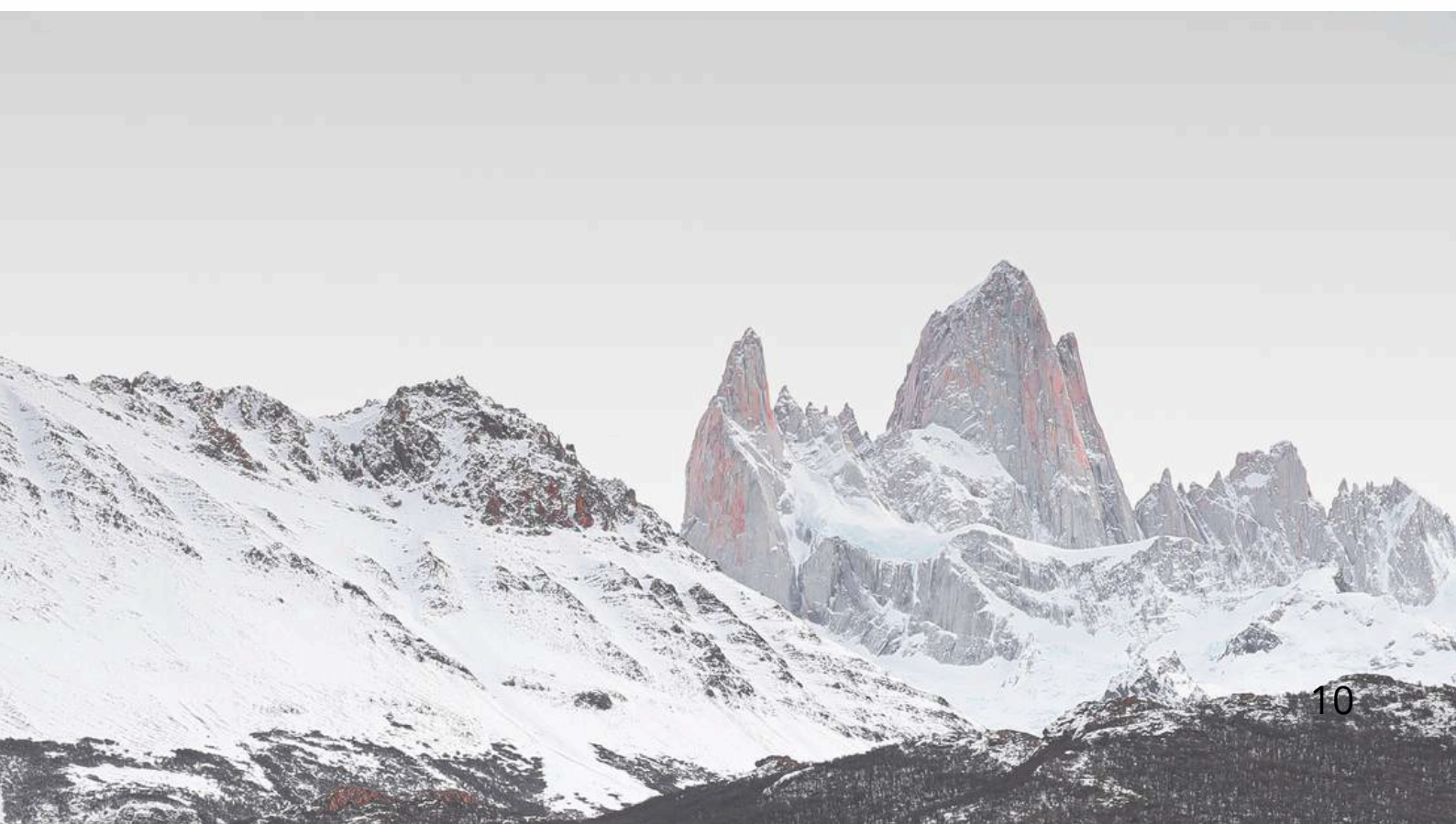
**The River de las Vueltas, symbol of the union between the glaciers and the ocean, between two National Parks, must be represented in the decision-making structures for the management of Glacier National Park.**

# 6

## For the implementation of integrated management, from the Source to the Sea.

The River de las Vueltas watershed is a symbol of the water cycle. As the source of one of the largest solid freshwater reserves in the world, the conservation of the river must be thought of from the watershed to the sea. In a context where antibiotic resistant bacteria are developing within the waters of the protected area, we need to adopt approaches that will ensure water quality from source to sea and preserve the health of ecosystems, wildlife and people

The impacts of downstream projects should be able to be analyzed and deepened in local governance bodies. Thus, projects that may have a direct impact on glaciers in Los Glaciares National Park - such as the Néstor Kirchner Jorge Cepernic Hydroelectric Complex - must be fully understood by upstream communities. Similarly, the impacts and contaminations that originate in El Chaltén should be monitored along the river and up to the sea, in order to define the efficiency of conservation policies implemented in the upper parts of the basin.





## **Let us protect the waters, emblem of the commons, in the Glacier National Park, pillar of the water cycle.**

We have a lot to build for this town, the newest in Argentina, for this protected area, one of the first World Heritage sites in the country. We need all stakeholders to join forces and unify criteria to define conservation objectives in a participatory and transparent manner, and to collectively solve the health and environmental problems of the protected area and its neighboring areas.