



CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE JOB GUIDE

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

Description

Environmental law is a broad practice area that encompasses a range of issues involving the environment, including water and air quality, hazardous waste, species protection, agriculture, wetlands, biodiversity, sustainability, waste management and right-to-know laws. It also encompasses the handling, transportation, regulation and cleanup of hazardous substances. A career in environmental law could fall into one of four types of practice specialties: (1) traditional pollution control advocacy or litigation; (2) protection of natural resources and protected areas or endangered species; (3) litigation over physical damage from business activity (toxic torts); and (4) corporate practice advising businesses on proactive environmental activities and sustainability issues.

Qualifications

No specific undergraduate degrees or courses of study are required for an environmental law practice, although it is beneficial to have a basic understanding of ecology. The most important attributes for a new lawyer in environmental law are a passion for protecting the environment and natural resources and a good understanding of how administrative law impacts the way businesses operate.

Types of Employers

Government Agencies:

Federal, state and local governments all have agencies or departments whose primary responsibility is to protect the environment and natural resources, or enforce environmental law and regulations. At the federal level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the most

well known, but many other agencies have departments or groups that are primarily concerned with environmental issues. For example, the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice prosecutes white-collar crime cases against individuals and corporations who violate laws designed to prevent pollution of the environment and destruction of critical natural resources. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a significant environmental mission and works with other federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations and corporations to accomplish its goals. USA.gov has an index of all U.S. government departments and agencies. A similar list of Georgia agencies can be found at Georgia.gov.

Nonprofits:

Many international, national, state and local nonprofit public interest organizations engage in activities directed towards protection of the environment, natural resources or endangered species, or issues of land use, pollution control or remediation, or sustainability. Because the efforts of such organizations are often based in existing laws and regulations, they engage attorneys to direct their efforts, write proposed legislation or regulations, litigate, and lobby legislators on behalf of the organization or affected persons or communities. One example of such an organization is the [Southern Environmental Law Center](http://SouthernEnvironmentalLawCenter.org).

Law Firms:

Most large law firms have environmental practice groups. There are also a growing number of smaller environmental law boutique firms in which all the lawyers focus on some area of environmental law. Firms can be identified by searches at Martindale.com. Environmental lawyers in private practice may advise corporations, government agencies, or non-profit organizations in their sustainability efforts or represent such clients in litigation to enforce environmental laws and regulations or against claims of violations of environmental laws or regulations. Environmental law in private practice can also include a transactional component. Environmental lawyers are critical in assisting on acquisitions of businesses that

have major environmental components (e.g., manufacturing plants). Many environmental lawyers are also involved in drafting and negotiating contracts related to environmental matters, such as the growing market for trading renewable energy credits.

Corporations:

Businesses increasingly employ in-house environmental attorneys or non-attorney experts to improve their environmental records and to comply with complicated federal, state and local laws and regulations. While many still hire outside counsel to advise them and litigate as necessary, some will have one or more attorneys in-house to advise on day-to-day matters and planning, and to supervise activities of outside counsel. These jobs typically require several years of experience and are rarely available to entry-level attorneys, regardless of their academic credentials or experience prior to graduating from law school.

Job Search Strategy

Much of the work in protection of the environment and natural resources is within the responsibilities of various federal agencies, and action on environmental matters is often pursued by advocacy groups. Consequently, the most successful applicants for these positions will be ones who have demonstrated a keen interest in environmental matters through volunteer activities and community service and who have an established relationship with the employer prior to the position coming open. That relationship is best achieved by working with the employer during summers, the school term, and even after graduation until bar results arrive.

As you plan your path to a career in environmental law, consider the following advice:

- Credential yourself in the field. Take the relevant law school courses, and choose a relevant topic for your law review or journal note or advanced writing requirement.
- For your 1L and 2L summers, do your best to secure a position for at least part of the summer that will give you relevant experience. Large law firms and environmental boutiques are a good option, if you meet their qualifications. Also, nonprofits and government agencies often hire interns, and they tend to be less concerned about grades and more focused on your passion for the job.
- Look for summer internship positions in Symplicity or at external job posting sites listed below. You should

also talk with 2Ls and 3Ls who had such internships in the past. You can get lists of summer positions held by our students during the most recent summer from your CDO Counselor.

- Many public interest and government summer jobs do not pay. However, there may be some opportunities for stipends or fellowships (see the sample list below). In the alternative, you may be able to receive course credit for summer positions. Check with Professor Alex Scherr, but do so as soon as possible and definitely before you start the job.
- You might also consider enrolling in the Civil Externship Program. There may be placements available that relate to environmental law (see below).
- Participate in extracurricular activities and professional organizations. You can network with helpful people at meetings, and it helps to have these affiliations on your resume. For example, watch for speeches or continuing education seminars focusing on environmental law. These will be attended by practitioners in the field and are a good place to network. You may also meet helpful contacts at non-law seminars focusing on environmental issues. These are attended by corporations and government employees, who can often be helpful in your job search.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

Environmental Law Practicum. This clinic gives students an opportunity to conduct advanced legal research on environmental issues identified by stakeholders and clients, with primary attention to water and biodiversity issues. Students work to improve water quality and protect and restore native aquatic species in targeted watersheds and the Upper Etowah River Basin.

Civil Clinic Externships. Students are placed in judicial, governmental and nonprofit positions. Placements in prior years have included the EPA, Athens Land Trust, GreenLaw, and the Southern Environmental Law Center.

DC Semester in Practice: Students earn credits while living and working in Washington, D.C., in placements in a wide range of offerings, including federal, state and local government agencies and private non-profit organizations. A number of placements in prior years have focused on advocating for environmental issues, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, the EPA, and American Rivers.

Relevant Courses

Students interested in environmental law should take the Environmental and Natural Resources survey courses. They should also consider:

Administrative Law
Water Law
Wilderness Law and Policy
Land Use
Real Estate Development
Sustainable Business: Transactions and Strategy

For additional information about relevant courses, the following video provides helpful guidance from Georgia Law Professor Peter Appel. Also, check the Law School's [Course Offerings page](#) for a list of courses offered and the applicable semester class schedule.



Relevant Law School Activities

[Environmental Law Association](#) -- among other activities, ELA organizes the annual Red Clay Conference, which brings together experts to discuss the balance between public interests and private rights in environmental law

[Land Use & Planning Organization](#)

[Environmental Law Institute](#)

[Public Interest Law Council](#)

Bar and Professional Organizations

[Environmental Law Institute](#) (membership free for full time students)

[American Bar Association Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources](#)

[Georgia Bar Association Environmental Section](#)

[Atlanta Bar Association Environmental & Toxic Tort Section](#)

[American College of Environmental Lawyers](#) (membership directory is searchable)

Job Fairs

[Georgia Public Sector Career Fair \(Spring\)](#)

- Takes place in Atlanta
- Last year, it included over 75 employers from the Southeast
- Registration period is in mid-January, and the job fair is typically during the third week of February
- No website; see a CDO Counselor for more information

[Equal Justice Works \(Fall\)](#)

- Takes place in Washington, D.C.
- Last year, it included over 140 employers from across the country
- Registration period is August 11–September 14, 2015, and the job fair is October 23-24, 2015

External Job Posting Sites

[Natural Resources Defense Council](#)

[The Center for International Environmental Law](#)

[Southern Environmental Law Center](#)

[Environmental Law Institute](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[Earthjustice](#)

[Earthrights Jobs](#)

[Envirolink](#)

Fellowships and Internships

[Southern Environmental Law Center](#)

[Louis B. Sohn Fellowship in Human Rights & Environment](#)

[U.S.-Asia Partnership for Environmental Law LL.M. Fellowship](#)

[International Union for Conservation of Nature Internships and Fellowships](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency Fellowships](#)

[Environmental Defense Fund Fellowships](#)

[Sierra Club Environmental Law Fellowship](#)

[Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide](#)

Recent Jobs

It is often difficult for CDO to track our students and graduates who are engaged in environmental practices within large firms and corporations. We have listed below employment that we know to be environmental-related. For confidentiality reasons, we do not publish the names of specific students; however, CDO may have contacts at these employers who can help you.

Name	Location	Type of Job
Southern Environmental Law Center	Nashville, TN	Summer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Atlanta	Summer
International Paper Company	Memphis, TN	Summer
New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Office of General Counsel	Albany, NY	Summer

Other Resources

A Trail Guide to Careers in Environmental Law, Harvard Law School

Environmental Law Lib Guide, UGA King Law Library