

# Conservation Law Clinic Impact

## **Conservation Law Center and Conservation Law Clinic: Building a better planet**

by Amangul Hydyrova <<https://wellsscholars.indiana.edu/about-the-program/meet-the-scholars/2020/hydyrova-amangul.html>>

Pollution, deforestation, extinction of endangered species, and extreme weather events are taking their toll on today's world. A nonprofit organization in Bloomington, Indiana is doing its part to reverse these trends.

The Conservation Law Center <<https://conservationlawcenter.org/>> provides legal counsel without charge to conservation organizations throughout the world. Its primary areas of expertise are land conservation, freshwater ecosystems and water quality, and the protection of endangered species.

CLC staff has decades of expertise in land conservation. The CLC has directly supported the conservation of 15,000 acres of land and has played a crucial role in several high-profile lawsuits. One of the cases, which ultimately went to the Indiana Supreme Court, concerned Indiana's Lake Michigan shoreline. The CLC fought to protect people's right to access the beach, successfully arguing that manages the shoreline in trust for the people's benefit under the Public Trust Doctrine.

The CLC has recently started its first international work in collaboration with the Macaw Recovery Network. The CLC has been working on research related to the endangered Costa Rican Great Green Macaw, threatened by expanding pineapple plantations and substantial forest clearing. The CLC has been researching the issue to give its client advice on reaching a positive outcome. Additionally, the CLC devotes the time to educate policymakers on issues regarding environment and human health, such as poor water quality. The staff consults the policymakers on the best available practices and helps to fill the gaps in the system.

Besides advocating for conservation, environmental protection, and human health protection, the faculty members at the Conservation Law Center train young attorneys to continue the environmental work. The Conservation Law Clinic <[conservation.html](#)> provides an amazing opportunity for the second- and third-year law students at the Maurer School of Law to gain valuable practical experience.

The clinic is a three-credit course that consists of two parts: seminars and casework. The seminars help students improve their legal skills, such as reading statutes, breaking down arguments, and interpreting the implications of scientific data on policy.

Clinic interns gain hands-on experience in several ways, from doing legal research to performing tasks that require longer-term involvement in active or soon-to-be active cases. Under the supervision of the faculty members, interns draft and prepare for filing documents that the faculty would ultimately use in the briefs. Additionally, the faculty members give interns opportunities to venture out on their own. Interns get the necessary support to pursue the issues that are of interest to them.

Students in the clinic have different aspirations, but they have one common characteristic: a commitment to advocate for the communities' needs. For **Matthew Castelli**, '15, senior assistant regional counsel at the EPA, Maurer graduate of class of 2015, and a former intern at the clinic, an interest in the environment was the reason he went to law school. Matthew knew from the beginning that he wanted to join the Conservation Law Clinic. As someone who studied Biology, worked as a backcountry guide in Alaska and Yellowstone, and pursued research in the Australian rainforests, law was a great way for Matthew to stay involved in the issues that were meaningful to him, "while not having had to sleep in a tent."

**Kacey Cook** is a recent graduate of the Maurer School of Law and an incoming policy and advocacy specialist with the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council in northern Michigan who studied International Studies in college and did extensive research in Latin America. Her experience at the CLC helped solidify her choice to pursue environmental law. As someone who grew up in a rural area of Michigan, surrounded by water and woods, Kacey appreciated the opportunity to apply the lessons gained at the CLC to her home state and to her community. The faculty members hope the experience that the students have at the Clinic makes them more sensitive to the needs of their local communities, even if they choose to pursue a career in different areas of law.

Faculty members at the Clinic are truly invested in helping interns enhance their professional skills. The relationships between the interns and faculty members can last a lifetime. Students can feel the progression from a law student to an intern to a coauthor. In Matthew's case, his relationship with **Robert Fischman**, George P. Smith II Professor of Law and a founding board member of the Conservation Law Center, evolved into a coauthoring opportunity. Their article about the current state of the Endangered Species Act was published in the Yale Law Journal. The faculty members play an important role in the lives of the interns outside of the caseworks as well. Before the pandemic, professors at the CLC invited interns to their houses for dinner and took them out to walks to teach the interns about the native plants and animals. Even after graduation, interns have fond memories about the time they walked through the campus and talked about wildflowers, while also discussing the issues on the cases. A former intern says, "I remember that very fondly and vividly as any exam or practical experience I had at the law school."

The work setting at the clinic is professional, but warm, welcoming, and supportive. The faculty members hold interns to high standards and regard them as colleagues. Former interns report that the faculty members at the Clinic were mentors for them and were always ready to answer any questions or clear up the confusion. Fortunately, small groups allow the faculty mentors to provide students with lots of feedback and advance the learning process. Furthermore, the colleagues at the Clinic put a lot of effort to support if not encourage the interns to voice their opinions. They ask questions before expressing their own feelings. When students graduate and start their careers, they are usually the youngest attorneys in the office. Faculty teach students to express disagreement in productive and constructive way on many occasions throughout the course. Matthew Castelli noted, "The lesson that you do not have to be the most senior person in the room to have a well-formed opinion has stuck with us based on working with Jeffrey Hyman [senior attorney] at the Clinic."

Positive relationships with peers is another aspect of the CLC that interns appreciate. The students can lean on each other when they inevitably stumble. Kacey Cook said, "Having peers at the same stage of the learning process can be a comfort and the real source of encouragement. We were all learning together." Additionally, the Clinic provides a great way to grow connections with people that will end up practicing law throughout the country. As it happens, some interns grow very strong bonds. Matthew even met his wife through the Conservation Law Center. He says, "We are currently both attorneys at the EPA and we have offices right next door to each other, so it is the real world version of the Conservation Law Clinic. Now that we are graduated, we are still working together."

The team at the Conservation Law Center is excited about the future. The conventional thought of conservation has been to identify and preserve a land as an island, disregarding the surrounding area and that area's role in the whole ecosystem. As environmentalists and conservationists have come to realize, the next step is to build the connectivity. **Christian Freitag**, the executive director of the CLC, says, "We are going to try to take the lead on this. In twenty years, this is what I would love to be proud of." Meanwhile, the Clinic is continuing training great attorneys, as "nature needs good lawyers."

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