An impressionistic painting of a landscape. The foreground shows a body of water with dark, swirling brushstrokes in shades of blue and purple. A sandy or rocky shore is visible in the middle ground. The background is dominated by tall, slender trees with vibrant yellow and green foliage, suggesting autumn. The overall style is loose and expressive, with visible brushwork and a rich color palette.

WHERE NATURE LEADS

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF THE CONSERVATION LAW CENTER



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IT'S PERSONAL

By Christian Freitag

Executive Director, Conservation Law Center

It's personal for me.

In the summer of 1976, my parents loaded the family car—a red 1973 Chevy Caprice Estate station wagon with faux wood paneling that we called Ruby—and drove us across the country. Our destination was northwest Wyoming, fifteen hundred miles and three full days of driving from northwest Indiana. The four of us, including my older brother Jason and me, slept in a musty green canvas tent at KOAs and state parks along the way. No smart phones. No movies. No satellite radio. Not even an 8-track. We made up songs. We tallied license plates from other states. We read books. And we got yelled at quite a bit, as I recall. Across Illinois. Overnight in a campground in Iowa with an above-ground pool. A stop at Boot Hill Cemetery in Ogallala, Nebraska. And then, suddenly, snow-capped mountains in the distance seeming to rise from nowhere.

My brother and I saw our first bald eagles on that trip, which seemed even more exciting to us given the bicentennial. We saw the first one standing on the

banks of Jenny Lake in the Tetons, and a few more up in Yellowstone. The long trip (and the scoldings) seemed worth every mile. The eagles blew our minds.

The next year, when my little sister was born, my parents allowed my brother and I got to choose her middle name. Her name is Jessica Eagle Freitag.

After my 1L year in 1995, I returned to Wyoming for my first environmental job, working as a summer intern for the Powder River Basin Resource Council in the Bighorn Mountains. The work was mainly grassroots organizing, helping communities dealing with the effects of a burgeoning oil and gas industry (fracking before anyone called it fracking), the complicated dynamics of coal mining economies, and small ranchers wanting fair prices in a world of megafarms and giant agricultural corporations. While my law school classmates were at law firms wearing suits and saving up money, I got paid \$25 every two weeks for a tank of gas. I lived in the bunkhouse of a cattle rancher with no running water, no toilet, and no electricity, but I had a rocking chair and a gas lamp and elk bugling in the dawn. I got to see the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone the year after the government reintroduced the wolves. I learned how to talk to people who didn't consider themselves environmentalists and gained lessons that have proven invaluable throughout my career, namely that we all mostly care about the same things—like clean water, wilderness, and a healthy future for our children. And I

got to see the eagles again, and I thought of my family. After that, I was sure all I wanted to do was use my law degree to protect the natural environment.

Decades later, in 2019, I succeeded my friend and mentor Bill Weeks as director of Conservation Law Center. I felt like I was coming full circle back to the place where I started. I now get to build a team to try and save the world. We get to fight for clean water, help communities dealing with industrial pollution, and protect some of our most vulnerable and beautiful habitats. And I get to help young lawyers build their toolbox the way others helped me along the way, at the school that started my career. It's what I've wanted to do since I was a 22-year-old student living on peanut butter sandwiches in the mountains of Wyoming. It's an honor.

In the following pages, you'll read stories from people with whom we've worked for the past 20 years—students, clients, donors, and volunteers. They are all connected to Conservation Law Center not only through the work but through our shared love of the natural world. They all have their own version of the stories I shared and reasons they're committed to doing what they can to make things better. For our families. For our neighbors. For our grandparents. For our children. For the forests and the farms and the rivers and the wildflowers. For the eagles.

It's personal for all of us.



Anna Powell Denton





Jen Guyton/Wildpath

Busseron Creek: A Conservation Milestone for Indiana

By Emy Brawley

Vice President (Midwest Region), The Conservation Fund

When the Conservation Law Center first reached out to me about Busseron Creek, I could hear the urgency in their voices. Nearly 4,000 acres of forests, wetlands, and farmland in Sullivan County were at risk of slipping away. They knew it was a once-in-a-generation opportunity and asked The Conservation Fund (TCF) to help ensure the property could be secured for public ownership by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

From the moment I heard about it, I knew this project was special. Busseron Creek would become the largest conservation project completed by DNR in more than 20 years. The scale of the project made it possible to protect critical wildlife corridors, strengthen rural communities, and provide new outdoor recreation opportunities. Even more, it was part of the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, a designation that ensures that working farms, healthy ecosystems, and military readiness can thrive together.

TCF specializes in stepping in quickly with the resources and expertise to buy

land when time is short. With CLC providing legal expertise and the trust of state and local partners, and TCF bringing the capital and experience to make the purchase possible, we ensured the deal was solid and built to last. Together, we created the conditions that allowed DNR to step in as the permanent steward of this remarkable natural space.

Busseron Creek is part of a landscape-scale project that demonstrates how conservation can couple with rural vitality and national defense. As an organization founded in 1985 with a dual mission of land conservation and sustainable economic development, it is a perfect example of mission-alignment for TCF.

Looking at this land today, I see more than boundaries on a map. I see the vision CLC had when they first asked us to join this mission, and I see what's possible when organizations bring their unique strengths to the table. Busseron Creek is proof that when passion, expertise, and partnership converge, we can protect land forever.

When passion, expertise, and partnership converge, we can protect land forever.



A MODEST VISION, A MIGHTY IMPACT

By Bill Weeks

Professor Emeritus, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Not long after the Conservation Law Center welcomed its first 12 interns, I met one of my former Nature Conservancy colleagues for lunch. Then President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, she asked what I hoped the Conservation Law Center would become. She was surprised at the relatively modest scope of my answer.

I hoped, I said, that we could make a difference for the cause of conservation; that we could introduce the law students we were working with to a practice of law that conducted its legal business in a civil and principled way while demonstrating a deep commitment to the vital cause we represented. Meeting those goals alone would have been a worthy result from a newly founded non-profit with one full-time employee: me.

CLC was born of a collaboration made possible by a former dean of the Maurer School of Law, Lauren

Robel. Establishing such a clinic was a goal of the law school's strategic plan. The chance to meet that goal through a partnership with a private not-for-profit organization allowed for unusually quick and robust results.

It solved a variety of legal problems for these clients, focusing on conservation easements and other land conservation issues, freshwater conservation, and high impact conservation litigation.

The arrangement created a genuine and useful buffer between the law school and political pressure that might make it difficult for an environmental clinic to serve conservation causes that deserved a legal voice.

The public-private nature of the enterprise also made something possible that would have been exceedingly difficult

had the law school alone established and funded the Center: growth! Within four years the CLC employed three superb full-time attorneys, two recently minted lawyers as graduate fellows, and an administrator. Within ten years

of its founding, more than 150 law students had spent a semester or more with the Conservation Law Center.

With its expanded staff, the Center was able to serve conservation organization clients across the United States. It solved a variety of legal problems for these clients, focusing on conservation easements and other land conservation

CLC has *made a difference*, as a generation ago I told my colleague we hoped to do.

issues, freshwater conservation, and high impact conservation litigation.

In the Center's first major success at the Indiana Supreme Court, CLC lead attorney Jeff Hyman established that conservation and other non-profit groups could go to court on behalf of their properly qualified members. Another similarly important litigation resulted in a decision by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals (the so-called "second-highest court in the land") that (in a case in which the lives of endangered Indiana Bats were at stake) the United States government was required to give fair consideration to a full range of reasonable alternative approaches to a project that threatened the bats.

To name just one more amazing result, the Conservation Law Center, with Jeff Hyman in the lead again, presented the Indiana Supreme Court with the vital legal analysis that securely established and defined for Indiana the application of Public Trust law to the Indiana shore of Lake Michigan. The decision secured for the public the ancient right to use the shore of the lake up to the landward limit of the lake's ordinary high water

mark. CLC also successfully opposed a petition, filed by those who would have privatized that beach, seeking review of the state court decision by the United States Supreme Court.

The Center has created and managed a diverse panel of experts to apply their collective expertise in developing recommendations regarding the governance of Indiana's vital freshwater resources. The recommendations, in the form of a widely distributed report that deals with both the availability and quality of fresh water, were an important supplement to an Indiana Chamber of Commerce report on water quantity and distribution. The report still represents the state of the art, and its conclusions are still a blueprint for CLC action, informing state water policies.

A few names must be mentioned: My partner in everything for fifty years, Mary. Lori and the Efroymson Family Fund, David Hillman and the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Bob and the McKinney Family, Glenn and Donna Scolnik, Terry and Connie Marbach and the Namaste Foundation, Marj and the Zeigler Family, Dr. Charles

Test, Russ and colleagues at the Great Lakes Protection Fund, and of course, Rob Fischman, John Applegate, Lauren Robel, Andrea Need, and the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. These and a handful of others were willing to bet (as I did!) that the Conservation Law Center and its Clinic would not only survive its first years but would live to make important contributions to conservation in Indiana, the nation, and the world. The collective leap of faith they and other early supporters took, along with a lot of hard but unusually satisfying work done by CLC people, made it possible to build a strong foundation for a new and vital conservation enterprise. And now Christian and the team he has assembled have taken CLC far beyond what even the most optimistic person could have hoped at its founding.

CLC has made a difference, as a generation ago I told my colleague we hoped to do, and we have trained hundreds of law students to recognize issues that are important to everyone's future. Getting those things done would have been enough. Twenty years on, though, the organization has done so much more. And its best years are yet to come!

CLC is the Place for Me

By Kim Ferraro
Managing Attorney, Conservation Law Center

Why did I choose to join the legal team at the Conservation Law Center? The answer is straightforward: CLC is precisely the sort of law firm that I envisioned working for when I decided to become a lawyer. CLC represents local nonprofits and frontline communities in environmental matters. This unique service is critically necessary to level the playing field against well-resourced industries that can afford to hire lawyers and technical experts to represent their interests at every level of government decision-making—from local zoning and land use decisions to environmental permitting and enforcement.

Because low-income communities lack such resources, they are often left out of these decisions and targeted by polluting industries as environmental sacrifice zones. Not only is that unjust from a humanitarian perspective, but we all pay the price in terms of dirty air, polluted waterways, and rapid depletion of natural resources and wildlife habitat. Simply put, I’ve always wanted to be part of a talented team of lawyers and professionals who share my passion and commitment to doing something about it—I found my people at CLC.

In just the three years since I came on board, CLC has recognized the need to

I’ve always wanted to be part of a talented team of lawyers and professionals who share my passion and commitment to doing something about it—I found my people at CLC.

expand its focus beyond conservation law to address some of Indiana’s most pressing environmental challenges including coal ash contamination of our waterways, loss of wetlands and critical wildlife habitat, and privatization and degradation of Lake Michigan’s public trust shoreline.

Engaging in high-impact environmental litigation to address these problems has had the added benefit of attracting new donors, which in turn has allowed CLC to hire more attorneys to serve more frontline communities and organizations. Last year, we hired Mike Zoeller, a seasoned environmental litigator formerly with the Department of Justice, who represented U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies in environmental enforcement actions. Zoeller now heads CLC’s environmental legal aid program—a first of its kind program

serving the environmental legal needs of citizens in Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago who have long suffered undue pollution burdens from the area’s heavy industries. Also new to the legal team is Allie Gardner, a former IU Maurer Law grad and CLC intern with eight years of litigation experience with a large D.C. firm. Ready to hit the ground running, Allie will soon be taking on her own docket of cases, expanding our capacity to serve Indiana’s environmental community.

More attorneys also means CLC can train more law students to be effective public interest lawyers. With a record number of nearly 40 law students enrolled in Clinic this year, we’re not just teaching, we’re equipping an army of advocates to take real action in court on behalf of communities and the environment. At a time when environmental agencies are stepping back from their regulatory responsibilities, this work is more important now than ever.

As my legal career begins to wind down, I am confident and heartened that CLC will continue to be a force for good, and I am grateful and humbled that I got to be part of it.

We’re not just teaching, we’re equipping an army of advocates to *take real action* in court on behalf of communities and the environment.

Becoming an Expert: A Lesson from the Conservation Law Clinic

By Matt Castelli
Senior Assistant Regional Counsel, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Maurer School of Law, Class of 2015

To me, “the Quad” didn’t just mean a green space on campus; it referred to the small group of law students who took *every* environmental law course together—the highlight being our time at the Conservation Law Clinic. It’s where we transformed from environmentalists who felt at home in places like Yellowwood State Forest to advocates who felt at ease acting as attorneys for the environment.

The Clinic applied the theory of environmental law to practice, teaching skills and sculpting mindsets along the way. We drafted briefs on public access to Indiana’s shores and mooted arguments to protect the Indiana bat. We argued for National Environmental Policy Act protections and fair processes under the Administrative Procedure Act. And the Clinic gave us space to grow. It’s where I brought in my first client and developed my first Endangered Species

Act case. But more important than any individual case was the lesson that the Clinic attorneys taught us: *You can be the experts.* With enough focus and elbow grease (if that term applies to legal research), we could become experts in any corner of the law—go toe-to-toe against governments, big corporations, or more experienced attorneys—and win.

From my perspective, this lesson was one of the most important aspects of law school. It’s the foundation from which I, along with another Quad-ster, went on to become senior attorneys at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It’s how we became the experts writing national policy on protecting human health and the environment on Indian reservations and teaching a new generation of attorneys “Superfund 101.” Becoming the expert is how I won a first-in-the-nation case extending LGBTQ+ protections under the Fair Housing Act.

And it’s how I became a lead advocate for the Union protecting EPA workers. These successes have involved learning new areas of law to protect people and places I care about. Becoming the expert, fighting the good fight,

With enough focus and elbow grease (if that term applies to legal research), we could become experts in any corner of the law—go toe-to-toe against governments, big corporations, or more experienced attorneys—and win.

and winning—founded on the lessons and experiences from the Conservation Law Clinic.

I’ll admit that there was another, equally important aspect of the Clinic for me. Beyond forging friendships and advocates, the Clinic is where I met my wife. She just so happens to be the other Quad-ster at the EPA, and through no fault of our own, has the office right next to mine. Like at the Clinic, we strategize how to develop environmental cases and sharpen arguments to support them. And while we now counsel senior EPA officials instead of Senior Attorneys at the Clinic, we think back to the lessons learned there often. Any student can become an expert, and the Clinic is a fantastic place to start.



Lydia Barbash Riley, Kayleen Glaser Castelli, Matt Castelli, Scott Breen

Protecting Land, Inspiring Generations

By **Connie and Terry Marbach**
Directors, Namaste Foundation

Our appreciation for land conservation evolved over a lifetime of hiking and backpacking in both the United States and internationally. It began with our hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon in our early 20's in 1965. How thankful we were that someone from Indiana had access to such grandeur!

In the ensuing years we were able to meet some of the actual people who were dedicating their lives to saving land. Persons from all walks of life have benefited from their selfless efforts.

They make things happen even in the face of great obstacles.

We have been fortunate to know two of these most passionate people: Bill Weeks, founder of the Conservation Law Center, and his successor Christian

Freitag. We first met Bill when he was with The Nature Conservancy. We first met Christian when Terry was a member of the group that interviewed and hired him as Sycamore Land Trust's first paid employee in 2000.

They are both "doers." They make things happen even in the face of great obstacles. This tenacity is important to us when we decide which non-profits we will support. The sheer amount of land they have been instrumental in protecting is impressive.

The first 20 years of the Conservation Law Center's work have been very noteworthy. We congratulate Bill, Christian, and all the CLC staff!

We look forward to seeing even greater successes in the years ahead as they help conserve land and the biota it supports.



Friendship Launches Partnership

By Larry Clemens

Retired State Director (Indiana), The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has worked for over 60 years, both in Indiana and globally, through partnerships with like-minded organizations, individuals, and governments to conserve the natural world in a solution-oriented style. So, when Bill Weeks, one of my mentors at TNC, settled back in Indiana to begin the Conservation Law Center, I was anxious to reconnect and find ways to work together just like we had throughout the 1990’s as colleagues.

While our personal interests were the same, we struggled to find ways for our organizations to partner. That is, until the Wabash River project came along in the late 90’s. Our goal was to protect and restore the floodplains of the Wabash. We were working through other partnerships at the time, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE). There was a huge demand from interested landowners which resulted

in thousands of acres being restored, but we often discovered oil and mineral right issues on deeds/titles preventing their enrollment into the program. The landowners did not have the know-how to address the removal of these rights, often nearly 100 years old and not in use. We knew they could be removed from the deed, but TNC did not have the legal capacity to provide this assistance.

This was the first problem I brought to Bill and CLC. We immediately realized this real-life challenge created a fantastic opportunity for conservation and for law students to practice their skills.

We have achieved definite “wins” for conservation, but perhaps more important are the relationships and trust we have built along the way.

CLC’s talented staff and students went to work removing mineral and oil rights for landowners thus making them eligible for the WRE program. So began a partnership between TNC and CLC focused on protecting and restoring thousands of newly protected acres along the Wabash.

We did not stop with one project. Freshwater biodiversity has been declining for decades in Indiana due to reduced water quality and altered hydrology from excessive drainage and runoff into our streams and rivers. TNC was pioneering a new design called “two stage” ditches. This design improved water quality and habitat within the ditch and by slowing water runoff to main channels and reducing sediment entering the system. Although two stage ditches were frequently used in Indiana, we needed more of them—and other conservation practices—to improve our state’s water quality. Our challenge was figuring out entry points into the drainage laws to help county drainage officials apply these practices at a meaningful scale. Once again, CLC stepped in to assist.

Our partnership continues to grow through new projects, such as the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape. We have achieved definite “wins” for conservation, but perhaps more important are the relationships and trust we have built along the way. The quality of the journey is often as important as the outcome.

Standing Together for Gary’s Future

By Dorreen Carey

President, Gary Advocates for Responsible Development

In the fall of 2021, a small group of Gary residents learned of a troubling proposal: Fulcrum Bioenergy planned to build an unproven “garbage-to-jet-fuel” plant on the city’s western Lake Michigan shoreline. The project would have trucked in millions of tons of municipal waste and caused further industrial pollution in an already-overburdened community. We knew it was important to stop Fulcrum for the sake of our community’s health, our air and water quality, and our globally unique shoreline ecosystem.

We formed Gary Advocates for Responsible Development (GARD) to fight back.

From the very beginning, the Conservation Law Center stood with us. They provided the environmental legal expertise we lacked and helped us navigate environmental permit processes, state and federal laws, and scientific complexities. CLC attorneys and law student interns joined us at public hearings, advised us on strategy, and strengthened our efforts to demand environmental accountability.

After three years of research, community organizing, and an administrative challenge to the state-issued air permit, our arguments prevailed, and the plant was *not* built on Gary’s Lake Michigan shore.

This victory showed us what is possible when legal expertise



supports community-based efforts. Gary is targeted by many waste and polluting industries. With CLC’s encouragement and guidance, GARD has expanded its mission to promote economic development that prioritizes environmental justice, community health, and natural resource protection.

Our work continues with CLC at our side. We are challenging another waste-to-fuel project, MAYA Energy, planned for a site across from a local school and beside an artesian well that supplies many Gary residents’ drinking water. We are also helping Gary residents oppose proposals to place trucking and manufacturing facilities on former school properties in the middle of residential neighborhoods.

CLC also supports our active engagement with local industries. Together we are monitoring air and water permit compliance at Carmeuse Lime plant and meeting with management and staff to explore opportunities to implement green infrastructure. CLC law students are reviewing the cleanup plan for

the former Dean Mitchell Generating Station so that community voices play a central role in shaping how the property is used in the future.

Looking ahead, we are investigating how U. S. Steel Gary Works can adopt more sustainable steel-making processes and technologies. Our newly-formed Green Steel Committee will use that research to educate residents and promote industry changes that benefit both the community and the environment.

With CLC’s legal foundation, GARD has grown from an ad hoc committee into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, officially recognized in 2024. We are equipping ourselves for the long-term work of safeguarding our environment and demanding sustainable development of our communities, and we know we’re not in it alone.

CLC’s unwavering partnership has been, and will continue to be, foundational to every success we achieve for Gary’s environment and its people.

Building a Legacy of Learning

By Rob Fischman

George P. Smith, II Distinguished Professor of Law, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

With Conservation Law Clinic enrollments regularly breaking new records, it is tempting to see student passion for the Clinic as recent. My experience is that student initiative always led the way in clinical education. It certainly is true for the origins of CLC. You will read many recollections and stories of CLC interns. My contribution here is simply to remind us that they stood upon a foundation laid by members of the Environmental Law Society (ELS) and its years-long efforts to offer no-fee legal services.

ELS served as a social, educational, and activist hub long before I arrived at Indiana University in June 1992. The students were hungry to experience practice and contribute to legal developments. Then as now, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management provided opportunities for students to earn externship credits. Some students by 1993 had gone as far afield as to seek externships with the District Counsel office of the Army Corps Louisville District. Advising students who wanted to help pro bono clients on matters like pollution prevention and wildlife protection proved more difficult. Because pro bono lawyers were stretched too thin to provide consistent oversight, I sometimes had to restrict student participation to ensure they received proper guidance and avoided engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.

Still, student enthusiasm would not dim. ELS hosted the then-annual National Association of Environmental Law Societies meeting twice in the 1990s. All that activity generated more excitement, and the students created the Environmental Law Research Group

A law school clinic would plug the most important gap in our otherwise world-class environmental law program.

(ELRG) as a project of ELS. While ELRG did not solve the problem of pro bono lawyer scarcity, it did provide consistent annual opportunities for students to help lawyers serve clients. The organizations that benefitted from student ELRG help remain pillars

of Indiana conservation: Save the Dunes, Indiana Wildlife Federation, and Hoosier Environmental Council.

The ELS and ELRG students understood the limitations of externships and local research support for remote organizations. By 2002, they began promoting an environmental law clinic. With leadership from students Jeff Hyman (who would later return as a CLC lawyer), Chris Saporita, and Drew Yoder, a team of eight students researched environmental law clinics at 30 schools and interviewed representatives from 23 of them. They produced a persuasive report, arguing that a law school clinic would plug the most important gap in our otherwise world-class environmental law program. ELRG would continue to provide students with pro bono environmental law research opportunities right up until CLC offered its first clinic class.

John Applegate and I repackaged their exhaustive documentation for the law school’s Environmental Law Alumni Advisory Board and received terrific feedback. During a break in the advisory board meeting, Bill Weeks pulled me aside. Offhandedly, or so it seemed to me, he said, “You know, I think I might be interested in working on the clinic initiative.” So it was that I handed off all the heavy work of creating a clinic from the students to Bill Weeks, who, well... you know the rest of the story.

Answering the Call for Clean Water

By Jill Hoffmann

Executive Director, White River Alliance

Once upon a time, our executive director (who was then a young 25-year-old biologist working at the Department of Natural Resources) was quietly working on a report in her cube at the Indiana Government Center when she got an unexpected call from a researcher out of Michigan. The researcher happened to be in Indiana with a friend enjoying a day on one of Indiana’s many northern lakes, but the call came with a tone of concern.

The researcher was a phycologist specializing in toxic algae, and she explained that she was paddling in a suspicious-looking blue-green algal bloom. Naturally, the young biologist took the report seriously and initiated a field investigation. After several water samples and a \$1,000 lab analysis, it was confirmed to be a harmful algal bloom, one of the first noted in the state.

It was then that this fledgling director began her career-long fight to improve

the state’s water quality. This is a daunting fight, since almost half of Indiana’s waters don’t meet state water quality standards. At the time there were very few ally organizations around to help address the complexities of water quality management that had led to this dangerous reality. While researchers play a critical role in environmental protection, neither they nor state resource agency staff alone can bring about change.

Environmental change, unfortunately, often requires regulation... and regulation requires watchdogs and litigation. These last two elements are why the Conservation Law Center plays such an important role in ensuring Hoosiers have safe, healthy, ecologically rich environments to enjoy.

Over several years the White River Alliance and CLC have worked together

to advance the missions and recognition of both organizations. We at the Alliance have relied on the expertise of our CLC colleagues and the publications they have produced to more skillfully navigate state law and policy. Since we began the annual Indiana Water Summit in 2018, CLC professionals have contributed as presenters, panelists, and advisors, which in turn has provided a platform for more Hoosiers to become acquainted with CLC’s work. This year we had two CLC colleagues on the Summit stage! CLC leaders also serve on our year-round Water Summit Working Group, which considers water resource issues and trends in greater depth and provides valuable advice and feedback about the Summit event itself.

Most recently, partners from the CLC worked with us on our efforts to organize a private-sector-led group—the Indiana Water Roundtable—to engage Indiana businesses in constructive and informed discussions about state water policy. Over time CLC and the White River Alliance have grown into trusted partners who collaborate and rely on one another to promote wise policy and practice to manage and protect our most vital and truly irreplaceable natural resources. That young biologist, now a seasoned executive director, is thrilled to have such a valuable ally in the fight to protect our water.





DEFENDING THE COMMONS: MY JOURNEY THROUGH CONSERVATION LAW

By Henry Ugwu
Maurer School of Law Class of 2025

Before I joined the Conservation Law Clinic, I believed I understood injustice. As a human rights advocate in Nigeria and student across Europe and the United States, I saw political persecution, the misuse of power, and the denial of civil liberties. I fought for freedom of expression, protection from torture, and the right to dignity. These, I thought, were the most urgent struggles of our time. But the CLC confronted me with a quieter kind of injustice. One that settles in lungs, seeps into groundwater, and hides behind government permits.

I remember Bethany, a small Indiana town where residents lived under a haze of fugitive dust and harmful industrial emissions. Where homes wore a layer of grime and children's bikes sat coated in soot. These were not isolated violations by big corporations. They were slow-moving assaults on the right to live safely, to breathe clean air, to raise a family without fear of invisible harm.

Working alongside residents, I came to see the environment as more than just scenery or resources. It's a shared foundation, one that can be undermined by the actions of a few, with lasting consequences for many.

The land, the water, and the air belong to no one, yet decisions about them rest with a few. The wind does not stop to check ownership. Water moves where it must. Birds cross borders without regard for fences or maps. Still, very few speak for them. At the CLC, I was proud to be one of those voices.

At the Clinic, we did more than draft legal arguments or track statutory violations. We carried the concerns of communities like Bethany into rooms where they had never been heard. I recognized familiar patterns: the same neglect, the same silence, the same dismissal of suffering I had seen in human rights cases. Only here, the violations hid behind technical language and the stamp of government permits.

The experience changed me. I no longer separate the defense of people from the defense of place. Environmental harm is human harm. A future worth building will not rest only on constitutional protections, but on clean rivers, healthy wetlands, and the chance for every community to thrive without being asked to surrender its air, water, wildlife, or peace.

The work the CLC does is often quiet. Its victories are easy to miss, until you see what's at stake. In defending the environment, we defend people. We defend futures. And we defend the commons we all share. Cheers to CLC for twenty years of defending the common good!

The land, the water, and the air belong to no one, yet decisions about them rest with a few. The wind does not stop to check ownership. Water moves where it must. Birds cross borders without regard for fences or maps. Still, very few speak for them. At the CLC, I was proud to be *one of those voices*.

Strengthening Indiana’s Water Future Together

By David A. Hillman, O.D.
Retired Senior Program Officer, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust

It is my pleasure to join in celebrating the Conservation Law Center’s 20th Anniversary. The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust (NMPCT) was among the Center’s first funders, and I worked closely with its founder, Bill Weeks, in those early years. More than a decade ago, Bill, alongside Mary McConnell from The Nature Conservancy, played a significant role in helping the Trust establish its revised environmental grantmaking priorities during a two-year strategic planning process. Two landmark projects emerged from those planning sessions: the Partners for the White River (PFTWR) Initiative, in which CLC became a core partner; and the development of CLC’s seminal report, *Water and Quality of Life in Indiana: Modernizing the State’s Approach to a Critical Resource (The Water Report)*. These two efforts have reshaped Indiana’s approach to water policy. In fact, this past spring, Governor Braun signed an executive order to develop Indiana’s first statewide water management plan for future development—a long-overdue milestone built on the foundation CLC helped lay.

CLC’s work on *The Water Report* began at a time when many doubted that Indiana had water quality issues. For more than a decade, through the PFTWR Initiative and its grantees, the Trust has worked to restore the watershed’s health, expand public access, and foster a deeper

appreciation among the communities it serves. CLC works to improve Indiana’s water quality by advocating for policy solutions to protect wetlands, address failing septic systems, improve drainage administration, remediate coal ash pollution, and generally modernize the state’s approach to water management. Their efforts have not only established the groundwork for Indiana’s first statewide water management plan but also engaged law students in research, legislative analysis, and public education—ensuring the next generation is part of the solution.

Under Christian Freitag’s leadership, CLC has grown into a trusted partner in advancing the Trust’s focus on land and water protection. Building on an Indiana Chamber of Commerce report that focused on business, industry, and community water needs, CLC broadened the report to include the state’s environmental water needs. This statewide effort has brought diverse leaders and organizations together, and CLC’s leadership has guided this group to a cordial and productive working relationship—a minor miracle in today’s polarized world. This achievement says a great deal about the steady, inclusive leadership of Christian, the CLC staff, and their partners in shaping meaningful water policy.

CLC has also played a leading role in the Indiana Water Summit, which

convenes water experts, government leaders, and the public to learn about Indiana’s water challenges and solutions. The Summit’s Working Group now guides the development of a statewide roadmap for addressing Indiana’s water issues, with CLC providing the research, data and legislative advocacy needed to turn ideas into action.

As I begin my retirement from the Trust after nearly 26 years of grantmaking, I am extremely proud of this work. The projects we have supported and the nonprofits that have carried them forward will have lasting impacts on Hoosiers, our communities, and the environment for generations. It is especially rewarding to see CLC lead the way in these projects.

This statewide effort has brought diverse leaders and organizations together, and CLC’s leadership has guided this group to a cordial and productive working relationship—a *minor miracle* in today’s polarized world.



Jen Guyton/Wildpath





Anna Powell Denton

CLOSING THE LEGAL GAP FOR CONSERVATION

By Andrea Huntington

Executive Director, Indiana Land Protection Alliance

For the past several years, there's been significant coverage of the looming attorney shortage in the United States, and there's good reason for concern. With fewer lawyers we can anticipate delays in justice—placing additional strain on an already burdened legal system—and professional burnout. As of 2024, Indiana ranks 43rd out of 50 states in the number of lawyers per capita. The situation has grown so concerning that the Indiana Supreme Court created the Commission on Indiana's Legal Future to better understand this shortage and make recommendations for resolving it.

As an attorney, albeit “inactive, in good standing,” I've been aware of this problem for some time. When I graduated from law school in 2011, the legal field, much like other industries, was not a burgeoning workforce. Available legal jobs for new attorneys were scarce, and compensation for these positions failed to match the daunting student loan debt many of us carried. It's no surprise law schools experienced a decline in enrollment.

Yet, the many complex factors contributing to today's attorney shortage do not solve the problem nor do they ease the impacts on the people and organizations that depend on reliable legal counsel. This unfortunate truth dawned on me during the annual gathering of land trusts and related associations at the Land Trust Alliance's National Rally Conference in Rhode Island. At this meeting, I realized how severely the shortage was affecting land trusts in other states. I learned that the pool of conservation attorneys is also shrinking, mirroring the broader shortage and presenting serious challenges to our work.

Conservation law is unique. It blends property law, environmental regulations, tax policy, and nonprofit governance. It's an area that requires extreme diligence, always with permanence in mind.

At Rally, I listened to colleagues from across the country describe the measures

they had taken to fill this growing void. One state association worked with conservation attorneys nearing retirement to form a mentorship program. Another hired a staff attorney to provide legal services to member land trusts.

This discussion reinforced my longstanding appreciation for the Conservation Law Center and the fact that this world-class organization calls Indiana home. For years, CLC has been a critical partner. They've prepared templates, created resources, and led presentations on topics that make it possible for Indiana land trusts to advance their important land conservation mission with confidence and care. In addition to providing essential legal services, CLC is cultivating the next generation of conservation attorneys.

As we mark this 20th anniversary of CLC, we recognize more than just years of service. We celebrate the incredible lands and waters that are protected forever thanks to their partnership and steadfast commitment to our shared mission.

Guarding Indiana’s Coastal Treasure

By Paul Labovitz
Former Superintendent, Indiana Dunes National Park

“Greetings from coastal Indiana!” The audience looks at me, confused. After the initial surprise fades, I explain how wonderful and amazing the Indiana Dunes National Park truly is. It remains one of the most biologically diverse places in North America, home to over 1,100 native plant species and nearly one-third of Indiana’s rare, threatened, and endangered species. I was fortunate to serve almost ten years as the superintendent of the park, and even in retirement, I continue to marvel at the ecological richness and human value of Indiana’s 45-mile Lake Michigan coastline.

Protecting one-third of that coast while still ensuring public access is challenging. Unlike most National Parks, Indiana Dunes is a tapestry of public and private ownership with a mixed-up and twisted boundary that includes and surrounds several lakefront communities. With historic high lake levels and development pressure, conflicts inevitably arise over how to balance private property and public trust resources. And even though the public trust is theoretically protected at both the federal and state level by a variety of agencies, the fight to stop encroachment is anything but easy.

In one recent case, a lakefront community planned to destroy up to two miles of Lake Michigan coastline to protect several dozen homes built too close to the lake. This is where the Conservation Law Center stepped in on behalf of the public trust. Partnering with Save the Dunes, CLC challenged the project and advocated for solutions that both upheld state and federal protections and safeguarded the ecological integrity of Indiana’s Lake Michigan coast. Their legal expertise has been pivotal in forcing state and federal agencies to fulfill their obligation to protect the public trust, ensuring that Indiana’s shoreline continues to support diverse ecosystems, provide recreation for millions, and sustain human well-being.

CLC’s leadership on Indiana’s shoreline builds on a long track record of defending public access and ecological values. Through cases like *Gunderson*, which clarified public rights along Lake Michigan’s natural ordinary high water mark, CLC protects the public’s right to use and enjoy Indiana’s short but mighty Great Lakes coastline.

But their work extends far beyond legal doctrine. It is about ensuring that the Indiana Dunes continues to support

wildlife, welcome visitors, and serve as a vital green refuge for millions of people in the Chicago metropolitan region. The pandemic underscored just how valuable this resource is. When other public spaces closed, Indiana Dunes National Park remained open—the only open parkland on the southern end of Lake Michigan in three states. Families, hikers, birders, and first-time visitors discovered what locals already knew: Access to nature and large open spaces is essential for health, resilience, and community well-being.

The economic impact is striking: Indiana Dunes is the state’s most visited tourist destination, contributing well over one billion dollars annually to the regional economy. Clean beaches, healthy wetlands, and diverse plant and animal communities are not only ecological treasures; they are the foundation of local livelihoods.

We all benefit from a protected and accessible Lake Michigan shoreline. This is why the work of the Conservation Law Center matters so deeply. By holding agencies and communities accountable, CLC ensures that the Indiana Dunes National Park will be protected and accessible for residents and visitors, forever.

We all benefit from a protected and accessible Lake Michigan shoreline. This is why the work of the Conservation Law Center *matters so deeply.*

Forever Farmland

By Patricia Larr
President, George Rogers Clark Land Trust

Over 20 years ago, the George Rogers Clark Land Trust was established with a mission of helping landowners in Southern Indiana protect their working farmland by securing conservation easements, fee-simple acquisitions, or other interests in real property. GRCLT’s vision of working farmland includes a diverse landscape of crops, grazing land, forests, wildlife habitat and wetlands... all working together to create productive, healthy, and sustainable ecosystems. George Rovers Clark Land Trust has an all-volunteer board of directors with decades of experience in owning and operating their own farms and in working with landowners to plan and implement conservation practices. But our experience in land conservation did not include knowledge about the complicated legal processes needed to establish an enduring conservation organization, or how to write an agricultural conservation easement that would stand the test of time. We struggled for a few years to achieve this objective, but none of our partners had a more profound effect on our success than the Conservation Law Center.

I still remember my first conversation with Bill Weeks, and how lucky we were to have found CLC. I was so pleasantly surprised that the finest conservation law experts in the country would back our fledgling organization! At the time, it seemed remarkable that they would take such a leap of faith in us as clients. It felt almost too good to be true.

CLC reviewed our founding documents and confirmed the work done to establish GRCLT was solid. They played a pivotal role in developing our first agricultural conservation easement in Harrison County. Bill and his team helped us craft an easement document that would protect the working farmland from development in perpetuity and require sustainable farming practices. Their careful wording ensured it would have the best possible chance of standing up to future potential legal challenges. Together, we aimed to protect a variety of conservation values: soil and water resources, wildlife, forestland, open space and scenic values, and, of course, agricultural production.

CLC continues to help review and update our new easements to make sure they will remain enforceable over time, protecting both farmland and the future of our land trust. With their help, we will soon close our eighth conservation easement—bringing our land trust’s total to almost 1,000 acres! CLC has counseled us during difficult disputes; **their dedication to help defend our easements against future legal challenges gives us peace of mind and the confidence to forge ahead.**

The GRCLT Board of Directors is forever grateful to CLC and congratulates them for 20 years of outstanding service in conservation! We look forward to a bright future, thankful for the continued privilege of being clients of CLC.





Jen Guyton/Wildpath

A Shared Commitment to the Public Trust

By Betsy Maher

Executive Director, Save the Dunes

For 20 years, Save the Dunes has partnered with the Conservation Law Center to defend Indiana's Public Trust, the principle that Lake Michigan's shoreline belongs to everyone. That commitment drives our work to uphold the landmark *Gunderson* decision, which affirmed that Indiana's beaches belong to the people. Defending that right is not symbolic. It demands constant vigilance and strong legal advocacy.

Most recently, we faced a serious challenge when the Town of Ogden Dunes moved forward with building a massive stone revetment along the shoreline, despite an active appeal of the permit issued by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the unresolved Public Trust concerns it raised. In response, CLC attorneys acted immediately, securing an emergency stay that stopped construction in its tracks. This kind of swift, decisive action is exactly why our partnership matters—when the shoreline is at risk, we can respond fast, navigate legal complexity, and hold decision-makers accountable.

Over the years, I've worked closely with CLC's attorneys and staff. Their

legal skill is matched only by their passion for this place and the people who love it. I've learned so much from them about environmental law, litigation strategy, and the Public Trust Doctrine. These lessons have made Save the Dunes a stronger advocate.

Our connection goes beyond the courtroom. Many at CLC have become dear friends and fellow stewards of the dunes. Their commitment isn't just written in briefs. It's reflected in the passion they put into ensuring our beaches remain healthy and accessible.

The threats to Indiana's shoreline aren't going away. But with CLC at our side, we are ready. We know we can mobilize quickly, take bold legal steps, and protect the values at the core of our mission.

Together, we defend a principle that matters: the right of every Hoosier to access and enjoy the Lake Michigan shoreline. This partnership doesn't just protect land—it safeguards public rights and strengthens the legal foundation that keeps these places wild and open for all.

This kind of *swift, decisive action* is exactly why our partnership matters—when the shoreline is at risk, we can respond fast, navigate legal complexity, and hold decision-makers accountable.



Meghan Doll

REFLECTING ON MY TIME WITH THE IU CONSERVATION LAW CLINIC

By Denise A. Dykeman

Associate General Counsel, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Maurer School of Law Class of 2006

As a second-year JD/MPA student in 2004, I was thrilled to join the Environmental Law Research Group at Indiana University. This proto-clinic was still in its formative stages at the time—meeting in law school basement study rooms and even local homes. We worked under the guidance of Professor Rob Fischman to perform legal research and outreach for attorneys representing area clients.

IU environmental law students had long dreamed of establishing a formal clinic

with dedicated staff and a permanent space. We held fundraisers each year at Oliver Winery to help bring this vision to life. In 2005, that dream became a reality: We finally secured enough funding to hire a director. I was honored to be selected as the clinic's first-ever student fellow.

I began working alongside Bill Weeks that summer, initially on campus and later remotely during my clerkship with Earthjustice in Oakland, California. Together, we laid the foundation for what would become the Conservation

Law Center. I helped create the first website and collaborated with IU graphic designers to design CLC's logo. After considering several options, including a tulip poplar leaf, we ultimately chose the owl, which remains the Center's emblem today. Endangered owls were a prominent issue at the time, but the symbol also reflected broader values: wisdom, knowledge, and insight. With eight owl species native to Indiana, the image was fitting. Walk through the woods near the law school and you're bound to hear or see one.

**HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE
AND REAL-WORLD
LEARNING**

My time at the Clinic, and later with the Conservation Law Center, was rich with meaningful work. I contributed to projects involving water rights in Michigan, the reasonable use doctrine, invasive species regulation with the International Joint Commission, and Superfund matters. One memorable legal question involved advising the Sycamore Land Trust about risks related to a property left to them in a resident’s will. One of my very first clients was Christian Freitag, who now serves as CLC’s director.

Through these experiences, my law school coursework took on new relevance. Suddenly, my classes became exciting because I had real issues to investigate. I vividly remember thinking, “*Hey, I need to know this!*” My work on Christian’s question and others made Property Law—as well as Environmental Business Transactions, Advanced Environmental Law, and International

Environmental Law—immediately applicable. I also began to see connections between courses that weren’t obvious before. The Clinic transformed law school into something dynamic, engaging, and—most importantly—fun.

**FROM THE CLINIC
TO COURTROOM**

I joined the Environmental Division of the Indiana Attorney General’s Office after graduation, representing the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and Department of Natural Resources. Thanks to my IU coursework and clinic experience, I felt reasonably prepared—until my boss asked me to obtain a preliminary injunction during my first week on the job. I hesitated and admitted, “But I’ve never even done a direct examination.” His response? “You’ll figure it out.” That was the mentorship style in state government!

And I *did* figure it out. In those early proceedings, I often wished I could revisit my Evidence class, but nothing teaches like doing. That’s exactly what the Clinic

had given me: the opportunity to “play the game,” not just study the rules.

**A CAREER BUILT ON
IU’S FOUNDATION**

Since those early days, I’ve been fortunate to build a career rooted in that foundation. I served at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for four years during the Deepwater Horizon litigation, led the Freedom of Information Act Expert Assistance Team in EPA’s Office of General Counsel for a decade, and managed some of the Agency’s most complex information law and crisis response challenges. Now, after 15 years of federal service, I’m returning to state government as an attorney with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The Conservation Law Clinic gave me more than legal skills—it gave me friends, mentors, and a deep appreciation for the intersection of law, policy, and the natural world. It helped shape who I am as an attorney and as a public servant.

Thank you, IU and CLC.

The Clinic transformed law school into something dynamic, engaging, and—most importantly—*fun*.



The Conservation Law Clinic gave me more than legal skills—it gave me friends, mentors, and a deep appreciation for the intersection of law, policy, and the natural world. It helped *shape who I am* as an attorney and as a public servant.

Protecting My Farm for the Future

By Darin Sisil
Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape Landowner

When I walk the fields, prairies, and forests on my farm in Sullivan County, Indiana, I feel a deep sense of pride and responsibility. This land is an important part of my life, and I’ve always known I wanted to keep it healthy, productive, and free from development well into the future.

Over the years, I’ve worked hard to balance farming with conservation. My property today includes active cropland, restored prairie, and forests. I manage the woods to keep them healthy, protect the soil, and support a variety of plants and animals. One of the most rewarding things for me has been seeing Northern Bobwhite quail flourish here—a species that has been disappearing from much of Indiana because of habitat loss.

A few years ago, I started looking for ways to make sure this land would always stay the way I’ve cared for it. That’s when I began working with American Farmland Trust to explore a conservation easement supported

by the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program. This federal program helps protect farmland and natural areas near military installations from development, and it seemed like the perfect fit for my goals.

The process took some time, but it was worth every step to know this farm will stay protected forever. During that time, the Conservation Law Center joined the effort, bringing additional expertise, capacity, and direct support for landowners like me who were navigating the process. Their involvement strengthened the overall project, making it easier for more people in our area to understand and pursue conservation easements. I eventually became the first landowner in Indiana to complete a REPI-funded conservation easement.

What this easement means is simple: My farm is permanently protected from development. I can continue to farm, manage my forests, and maintain wildlife habitat just as I always have—

but now I know it will stay this way forever. I think a lot of folks don’t realize that you can protect your land, keep using it, and even earn income from the easement—it’s a win all around.

Indiana has been losing farmland at an alarming rate, and that worries me. I want to see rural communities, agriculture, and wildlife thrive here long into the future. By putting my land under a conservation easement, I feel like I’m doing my part to make that future a little more secure.

Since completing the easement, I’ve started talking to my neighbors and community members about the program. I tell them about my experience and why protecting farmland is so important. I just want to leave this land better than I found it—for my family and for the wildlife that call it home.

This farm is part of who I am, and now I know it will stay this way, even long after I’m gone.

I just want to leave this land *better than I found it*—for my family and for the wildlife that call it home.

Improving Lives and the Environment in Northwest Indiana

By Mark Templeton
Clinical Professor of Law, Director of the Abrams Environmental Law Clinic, The University of Chicago Law School

The Abrams Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School and our clients have benefited enormously from our partnership with the Conservation Law Center during the past decade. The attorneys at the Center have advocated fiercely for our clients and have been excellent thought partners, role models, and sources of inspiration for me, my colleagues, and our students.

Since 2016, the Abrams Clinic has partnered with residents of the USS Lead Superfund site in East Chicago. When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its contractors began

cleaning up the site, our client, the East Chicago Calumet Coalition-Community Advisory Group, expanded its advocacy to address pollution across the broader community and Northwest Indiana. Together, we and our clients have collaborated with the Conservation Law Center to press the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) on pollution concerns and problematic environmental permits in the region.

We have drafted formal comments and informal letters about facilities such as Tradebe and Sims Metal, with the Center’s lawyers providing sharp legal feedback that has strengthened our advocacy. While IDEM did not grant every one of our requests, the agency did make changes to improve public health and environmental outcomes. We and our clients have also joined several comments and letters led by the Center’s attorney, Mike Zoeller, raising concerns about other facilities in Northwest Indiana.

In another case, our clinic represented the Surfrider Foundation in a lawsuit against the U. S. Steel plant in Portage, Indiana after the plant discharged excessive amounts of hexavalent chromium and other pollutants into a canal that

flows into Lake Michigan next to a public beach. Our advocacy led to stronger public notifications about discharges, improved operations and maintenance plans, and a water quality monitoring program that shares results online for the public to see. Importantly, Center attorney Kim Ferraro provided a critical affidavit that helped us secure substantial attorneys’ fees for our work. Such an award not only recognizes the effort invested but also sends a clear message to U. S. Steel and other polluters that this kind of misconduct will not go unchecked.

One of my former students will soon spend a year working with the Center through a post-graduate fellowship, and I’m very pleased knowing the excellent mentorship she will receive. I appreciate the technical and legal expertise of the Center’s lawyers. Moreover, they live by the credo that strength comes from collaboration: They share credit generously and work as true partners.

In sum, it is a pleasure and an honor to work with such an excellent and welcoming team.

They raise the bar for everyone tackling environmental issues in Northwest Indiana. Through their extraordinary efforts, they improve people’s lives and the environment in Northwest Indiana.





NATURE NEEDS GREAT LAWYERS:

A 20-YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INDIANA
UNIVERSITY MAURER SCHOOL OF LAW

By Christiana Ochoa

Dean and Herman B Wells Endowed Professor, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

For 20 years, the Conservation Law Center and the Conservation Law Clinic at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law have demonstrated how a law school can bring students and practicing attorneys together in the vital mission of defending the natural world. Together, we have trained the great lawyers nature needs.

Founded in 2005, the Conservation Law Clinic filled a crucial gap within Indiana Law's environmental curriculum. From the beginning, its mission went beyond legal training. Students learned to tackle complex cases where law, science, and policy intersect, providing real representation to clients while growing into principled advocates.

From its beginning under its founding director, Bill Weeks (IU Law Class of 1979), to the current leadership of Christian Freitag (IU Law Class of 1997), the Center has been guided by visionaries who understand that conservation law must be both principled and pragmatic. Freitag, who became executive director in 2019 after nearly two decades at the helm of Sycamore Land Trust, has broadened the CLC's reach and deepened its impact.

He emphasizes connectivity—linking habitats, communities, and disciplines—as the next frontier of conservation law and he has trained our students to be the conduits for these connections.

In one of its earliest projects, students confronted the invasive species threatening the Great Lakes. They researched legal liability for ballast water discharges and proposed private-

He emphasizes connectivity—linking habitats, communities, and disciplines—as the next frontier of conservation law and he has trained our students to be the *conduits for these connections*.

sector remedies to curb zebra mussel infestation. It was an early example of what the Clinic continues to do best: giving students the chance to engage with real, high-stakes problems and push toward workable solutions. Over the past two decades, Clinic students have helped conserve tens of thousands of acres across Indiana through land trusts, conservation easements, and nonprofit governance initiatives.

Among the Clinic’s most remarkable moments concerned litigation over Indiana’s Lake Michigan shoreline. Representing Save the Dunes and Alliance for the Great Lakes, CLC attorneys and students argued before the Indiana Supreme Court that the public

trust doctrine protects the shoreline for all citizens. The Court agreed, affirming that Indiana holds the shore in trust for its people, ensuring access for generations. Impact is also reflected in the students who have passed through the Clinic. Matthew Castelli ’15, now senior counsel at the Environmental Protection Agency, credits the experience with teaching him that a well-formed argument does not require seniority.

CLC has achieved impressive success in garnering institutional and philanthropic support, ensuring the Clinic continues to flourish. As the lead partner in the 3.5 million-acre Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, CLC now plays a central

role in coordinating landscape-scale conservation efforts and engaging with landowners on critical conservation projects. Likewise, CLC secured support for paid internships, expanding access to students interested in public-interest work. Endowed fellowships such as the Nancy C. Ralston Conservation Attorney and the Constance and Terry Marbach Conservation Attorney positions have both added legal expertise to the field and ensured that students can move seamlessly from clinic to career.

Students remain at the forefront of major initiatives as the Clinic’s regional conservation impact continues to expand. In partnership with state and local organizations, CLC has supported

As one student put it, “The fact that we could do something that will affect landowners’ rights for *years to come* has been an incredible experience.”



Spring and Fall 2025 Clinic Students

At Indiana Law, the Conservation Law Clinic stands as a beacon of experiential *learning with purpose*. It equips students not only with legal skills but also with the values of integrity, professionalism, and service.

projects such as the restoration of Busseron Creek into a 4,000-acre fish and wildlife area, providing critical habitat and public access opportunities. In 2025, the Clinic played a vital role in drafting Indiana’s prescribed fire legislation, which established training standards and liability protections and has now been signed into law. As one student put it, “The fact that we could do something that will affect landowners’ rights for years to come has been an incredible experience.” Students are also producing nationally recognized scholarship, such as Zoe Kolender’s “CERCLA Ambiguities and Failures: How Defenses and Liability

in Environmental Legislation Fail at Environmental Justice and Perpetuate Environmental Racism,” which earned the Ohio Bar’s Environmental Law Student Writing Award.

This 20th anniversary is both a moment of celebration and a moment to look forward. Under Christian Freitag’s leadership, the Clinic continues to pursue a broad vision of conservation that weaves together law, ecological networks, and community resilience.

At Indiana Law, the Conservation Law Clinic stands as a beacon of experiential

learning with purpose. It equips students not only with legal skills but also with the values of integrity, professionalism, and service. It has shown our students—and the wider legal community—that law is so much more than a profession; a legal career can be a means of stewardship.

As we mark 20 years of the Conservation Law Center, we honor the students, faculty mentors, and partners who have advanced its mission. And we reaffirm the conviction that inspired the Clinic from the beginning: Nature needs good lawyers, and through the Conservation Law Center, Indiana Law will continue to provide them.

THE FIRST 20 YEARS OF CLC

2005

Established in 2005 to provide expert legal services for conservation partners and train the next generation of environmental lawyers.

2006

Created the Conservation Law Clinic at the Maurer School of Law; began providing pro bono counsel to land trusts and conservation groups; first graduate fellow joined the staff.

2007

Added staff attorneys, growing from a single director to a team supporting litigation, policy, and student mentorship.

FIRST DECADE WINS: Protected habitat in Hoosier National Forest and for endangered species such as the Indiana bat.

2016

Published the Indiana Water Report setting the benchmark for statewide water quality data and policy recommendations.

2018

Secured key victory in *Gunderson v. State* in 2018 affirming public trust rights along Lake Michigan's shoreline.

2019

Hired Christian Freitag to succeed Bill Weeks as President and Director.

2022

Awarded Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape designation of a 3.5-million-acre region, coordinating land protection at the intersection of conservation, agriculture, and defense.

Expanded staff again by adding SISL coordinator and attorneys specializing in litigation, land conservation, and habitat protection.

2023

Joined the fight against toxic coal ash pollution in Indiana's White River and filed suit on behalf of Hoosier Environmental Council

2024

Won 5-year lawsuit challenging CAFO permit by Army Corps of Engineers, hailed as a "huge win" for protecting wetlands and waterways on farmland.

Launched the Environmental Legal Aid Program to serve communities in northwest Indiana facing complex pollution problems.

2025

Dedicated the Busseron Creek Fish and Wildlife Area, a major conservation milestone permanently conserving nearly 4,000 acres in Southern Indiana.

WHO WE ARE

STAFF

- Christian Freitag**
Executive Director, Glenn and Donna Scolnik Clinical Chair
- Raenah Bailey**
Midwest Resilience Specialist
- Katie Beck**
Director of Advancement
- Andrea Capio**
Deputy Director
- Lakin Cuchetto**
Nancy C. Ralston
Conservation Attorney
- Kim Ferraro**
Managing Attorney
- Allie Gardner**
Senior Associate Attorney
- Rob McCrea**
Constance and Terry Marbach
Conservation Attorney
- Christie Pace**
Operations Manager
- Rachel Schwartz**
University of Chicago
Public Service Fellow
- Michael Spalding**
Southern Indiana Sentinel
Landscape Coordinator
- Ben Taylor**
RCPP Coordinator, Southern
Indiana Sentinel Landscape
- Michael Zoeller**
Senior Attorney

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- Ryan Murray**
- Stephen Swartz**

Join Us in Our
Next 20 Years

The stories you’ve just read prove something powerful: When people step forward, real change is possible. Every success in these pages began with someone who believed their actions could help protect clean water, preserve wild places, and create a healthier future for all.

Now it’s your turn. The story of the next 20 years of conservation in Indiana will be written not only by our attorneys and partners but by people like you—people who care deeply about protecting what matters.

Your gift today is more than just a donation. It’s a declaration that Indiana’s waterways and wild spaces matter and that our communities deserve a healthy environment both now and for generations to come. It’s an investment in legal strategies that secure lasting protections, in students who will carry this mission forward, and in victories we cannot yet imagine but know are possible.

Each step forward begins with someone who chooses to care. Together we can ensure that the stories we tell two decades from now are ones of resilience, renewal, and hope.

The future is ours to protect—join us today.



conservationlawcenter.org/donate

ABOUT THE ARTIST

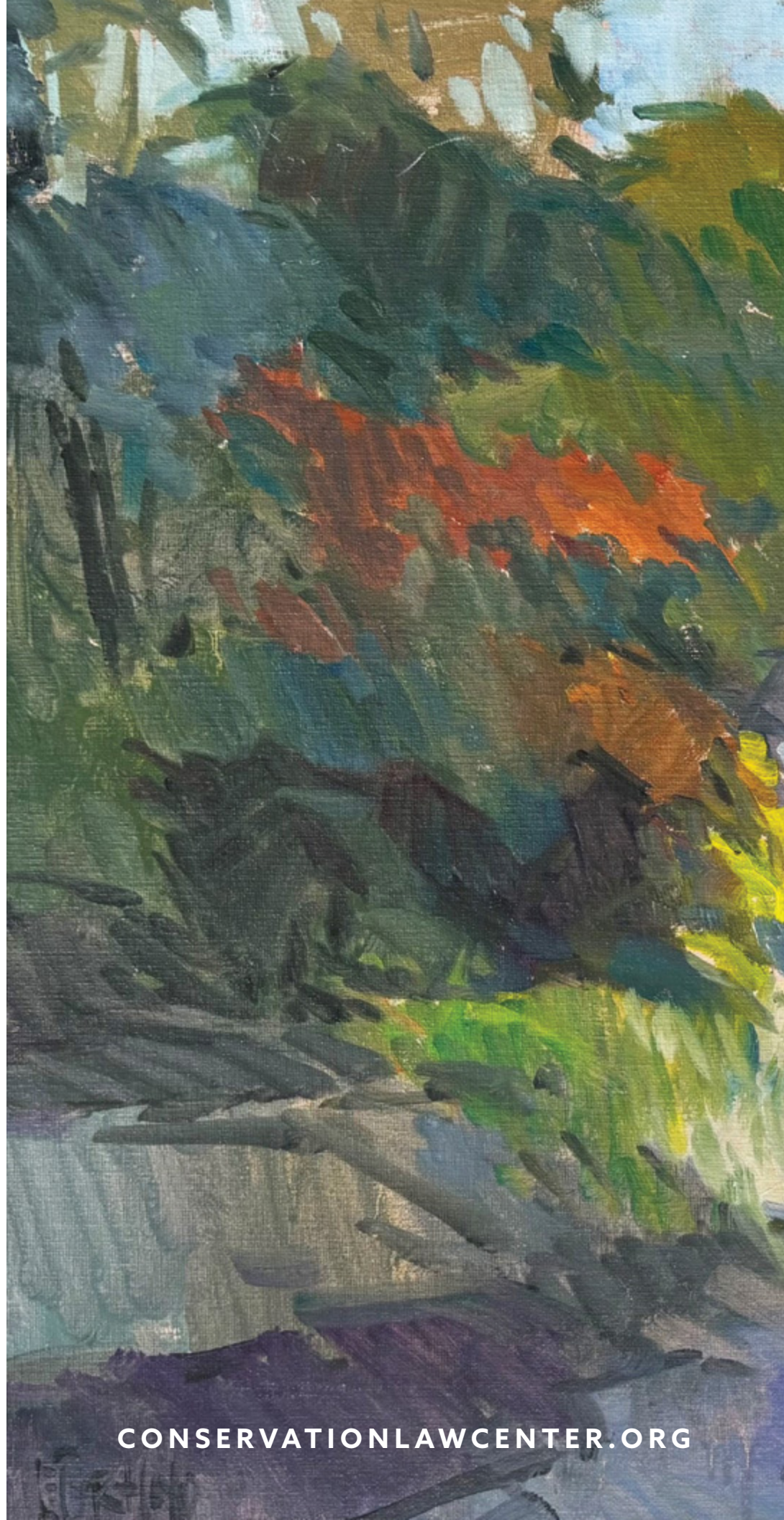
Wyatt LeGrand is a painter from Bloomfield, Indiana. Much of his work is created on location in landscapes unique to southern Indiana, featuring the inherent beauty of our conserved lands and waters.



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