



Institute for Biodiversity Law and Policy 2024–2025 Annual Report

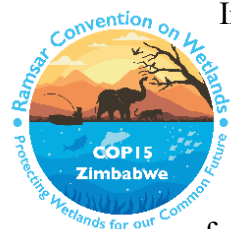
Stetson University College of Law provides environmental law education, research, and service at the international, national, and local levels. The [Institute for Biodiversity Law and Policy](#) is Stetson Law's interdisciplinary focal point for environmental law programs and initiatives and is a past recipient of the **Distinguished Achievement in Environmental Law and Policy Award** from the American Bar Association's **Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources (ABA SEER)**. This report describes some of the Biodiversity Institute's activities during academic year 2024–2025.



LLM in Environmental Law with Public Interest and International Environmental Tracks to Launch in the Fall of 2026

Beginning in fall 2026, Stetson Law will offer a new LLM in Environmental Law designed for both practicing attorneys and recent law graduates from the U.S. and around the world. Students may choose between two specialized tracks: Public Interest Practice, which offers an immersive advocacy experience through the [Jacobs Public Interest Law Clinic for Democracy and the Environment](#) (JLC), and International Environmental Law, which builds on the Biodiversity Institute's international connections.

Stetson Law at Ramsar COP15



In July, second-year Stetson Law students Blair Carlyle and Erika Leeper attended the [Ramsar Convention's 15th Conference of the Contracting Parties](#) (COP15) in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. COP15's agenda included review of an assessment on the environmental impacts of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and a proposal to delist Ramsar Sites (Wetlands of International Importance) in disputed territories. Stetson Law is an observer to the Ramsar COP, and the [Dick and Joan Jacobs' Environmental Law Externship Fund](#) assisted with funding Blair and Erika's travel.



Stetson students, Blair and Erika, representing the next generation of environmental leaders at the Ramsar COP in Zimbabwe.

Stetson Law Hosts International Finals of the 29th Annual Stetson International Environmental Moot Court Competition

Founded by Stetson Law in 1996, the [International Environmental Moot Court Competition](#) (IEMCC) is the world's largest moot court competition devoted exclusively to international environmental issues. Each spring, students migrate to Stetson to compete in the International Finals. Last year's theme was subsistence use and trophy hunting.

From November 2024 through February 2025, student teams submitted written memorials and presented oral arguments at national and regional rounds on five continents. Hundreds of students participated in these rounds, and the top teams were invited to the International Finals at Stetson Law's Gulfport campus. Bangladesh held its inaugural national rounds, with more than 30 teams competing.



The University of Dhaka won the 1st Annual Bangladesh National Rounds of the Stetson IEMCC.



Prof. Gardner and Prof. Anna Kamanzi during the Tanzanian National Rounds of the Stetson IEMCC.

In support of the national and regional round organizers, Professor Royal Gardner traveled to Catholic University of Mbeya in Tanzania in November to judge the inaugural rounds of the Tanzanian National Rounds. While there, he delivered a public lecture on the Ramsar Convention. And, in January, Professor and IEMCC co-director Erin Okuno judged the semifinals of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Rounds, continuing a long tradition of collaboration with the organizers in India.

Ultimately, eighteen teams from Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States participated in the International Finals. The championship round judges were Dr. Arie Trouwborst, Professor of Nature Conservation Law at Tilburg University (Netherlands), Dr. Katie Sykes, Professor of Law, Thompson Rivers University (Canada), and Dr. Wil Burns, Visiting Professor at Northwestern University and Co-Founding Director of the Institute for Carbon Removal Law and Policy at American University (USA).



The University of Chicago team celebrates their win.

The championship team was the University of Chicago, with the University of the Philippines School of Law as the runner-up. Semifinalists were the University of San Carlos (Philippines) and Singapore Management University, Yong Pung How School of Law. The University of San Carlos received the award for the best written memorial, and the Law Society of Ireland received the Spirit of Stetson Award, which recognizes the team that best exemplifies civility, justice, and fair play during the competition.



The traditional group shot at the International Finals of the Stetson IEMCC, with the Royal markhor in the background.

We would like to extend our thanks to the **Environmental and Land Use Law Section of The Florida Bar** for providing us with a grant to support the competition again this year. The 30th edition of the Stetson IEMCC in 2026 will focus on legal and policy issues related to de-extinction. To register a team or volunteer as a memorial or oral round judge, please visit www.stetson.edu/law/international/iemcc/ or email Professor Gardner at gardner@law.stetson.edu or Katherine Pratt at kpratt2@law.stetson.edu.

Nitrogen Pollution and Solutions Symposium: Interdisciplinary Dialogue at Stetson Law



Prof. Gardner moderated a panel on policies across U.S. regions, featuring Stetson alum Angela Xu, who now does environmental policy work in Chicago.

In partnership with [BlueGAP](#) and funded by the [National Science Foundation](#), Stetson Law hosted a daylong event in November focused on nitrogen pollution and its causes, impacts, and potential solutions, from the global to local levels. The event opened with Dr. David Kanter, Chair of the International Nitrogen Initiative, presenting on the UN Global Nitrous Oxide Assessment, which he co-led. Other panels explored nitrogen pollution through legal, scientific, and policy perspectives, including state-level efforts in Florida, Iowa, Illinois, New York, and the Chesapeake Bay region.

The program also featured student presentations on how international frameworks, such as the Montreal Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity, could inform more effective nitrogen pollution policy.



As part of their International Environmental Law course, Stetson students Cheyanne Sharp, Audrey Timmins, Maria Assimakopoulos, Katrina Marrero, Leann Browning, Sommer Brokaw, Blake Kahn, and Lola Coutelle presented on the role of international treaties in addressing nitrogen pollution.

The 21st International Wildlife Law Conference returns to campus

For the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Stetson Law welcomed legal scholars, practitioners, and students back to campus for the 21st [International Wildlife Law Conference](#) (IWLC-21). Speakers hailed from ten countries and discussed topics from animal welfare and rights of nature to rewilding.

The conference opened with guided tours hosted by two local organizations, Boyd Hill Nature Preserve and the Tampa Bay Watch Discovery Center at the St. Pete Pier, highlighting the region's rich biodiversity and the importance of place-based conservation efforts.



Dr. Katie Sykes discusses the ethical implications of keeping captive whales and dolphins during the first day of IWLC-21.



Dr. Felix Aiwanger speaks during a panel on animal rights.



Our IWLC-21 speakers after a boat tour of Tampa Bay.

Foreman Biodiversity Lecture Series Brings Leading Voices to Campus

Despite a delayed start due to an especially active hurricane season, the [Edward and Bonnie Foreman Biodiversity Lecture Series](#) hosted a dynamic lineup of speakers throughout the 2024–2025 academic year.



Mr. Hull shared a success story for wetlands in Florida during his Biodiversity Lecture at the Nitrogen Symposium.



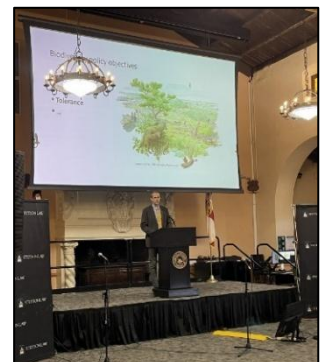
Dr. Meindl captivated students with his expertise in the history of Florida springs.

In November, the series partnered with the Nitrogen Symposium to welcome Tim Hull, who visited from the Orange County Environmental Protection Division to present *Science-Driven Policy: Protecting Orange County's Wetlands*. In February, Dr. Chris Meindl, a geography professor at the University of South Florida, delivered an engaging talk, *Florida's Springs: From Geography to Politics and Restoration*, followed by a book signing.

April featured acclaimed environmental author Cynthia Barnett, who presented insights from her book *Seashells and the Fate of the Oceans*, also accompanied by a book signing. The series concluded with a keynote by Dr. Arie Trouwborst from Tilburg University in the Netherlands. His lecture, *Thinking Big and Aiming High: Taking the Objectives of Biodiversity Law and Policy Seriously*, was the bridge between IWLC-21 and the Stetson IEMCC.

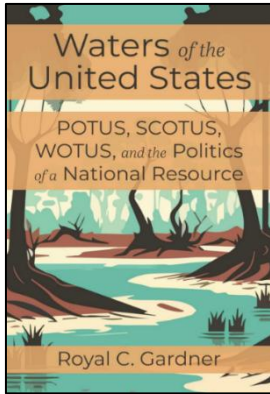


Ms. Barnett used her storytelling talent to highlight the power of creative communication skills in advocacy.



Dr. Trouwborst challenged the audience to imagine a world in which harmony between humans and nature was built into all policy decisions.

Faculty Highlights: 2024–2025 Academic Year

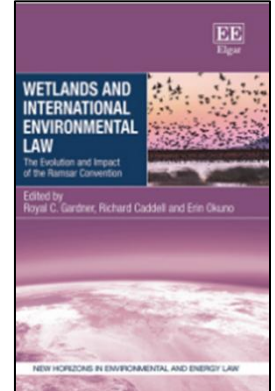


Prof. Gardner's new book was selected by [Yale Climate Connections](#) as one of 12 books to commemorate the diverse legacy of Earth Month.

In late December, Professor Gardner published his latest book, [Waters of the United States: POTUS, SCOTUS, WOTUS, and the Politics of a Natural Resource](#) (Island Press 2024), which breaks down the often contentious history of federal water protections. The book explores how presidents, agencies, courts, and Congress have shaped what counts as “waters of the United States.”

Professor Gardner, Professor Erin Okuno, and Dr. Richard Caddell of Cardiff University co-edited [Wetlands and International Environmental Law: The Evolution and Impact of the Ramsar Convention](#) (Edward Elgar 2025), published in February. To celebrate the book's release, friends and colleagues gathered for a launch event at the historic Kerouac House in St. Petersburg.

Profs. Gardner and Okuno, along with Stetson alum and former Ramsar Science and Policy Officer Marcela Bonells and Foreman Biodiversity Fellow Katherine Pratt, all contributed chapters to the new wetlands book.



Professor Royal Gardner

Professor Gardner spoke about WOTUS and the post-*Sackett* legal and policy landscape to anyone willing to listen, including at Tulane Law School, Case Western Reserve University Law School, Delaware Valley University, and the Florida Studies Book Festival hosted by University of South Florida. He debated Damien Schiff (who argued on behalf of the Sacketts before the U.S. Supreme Court) at a Federalist Society event in Florida and delivered a keynote presentation at the annual meeting of the Society of Wetland Scientists South Atlantic Chapter. He joined the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Everglades in February.

Professor Paul Boudreaux

Professor Paul Boudreaux continued to contribute to the legal discourse on environmental and housing law. He presented at the [American Association of Law Schools' Annual Meeting](#) in January 2025, offering insights on housing law and policy reform informed by principles from environmental regulation. His scholarship includes two forthcoming articles: *The Incoherent Law of Environmental Injunctions*, to be published in *Environmental Law*, and *Towards a New Clean Water Act*, which is set to appear in the *Georgetown Environmental Law Journal*.

Professor Jaclyn Lopez

Professor Lopez presented on climate vulnerability during George Washington University's "[Climate-Related Displacement in the United States](#)" webinar and spoke on resiliency at the [SRP Sustainability Conference of American Legal Educators](#). She addressed the future of Everglades restoration at the [40th Everglades Coalition Conference](#) and explored the use of the Endangered Species Act to combat water pollution at both the [Society for Conservation Biology North America Conference](#) and the [Public Interest Environmental Law Conference \(PIELC\)](#). At the [University of Florida's Public Interest Environmental Conference](#), she discussed the environmental implications of the Supreme Court's decisions resulting from the first Trump administration's appointments.

She also presented a work-in-progress at several national forums, including the [American Association of Law Schools \(AALS\) Conference](#), the [Burke Center's Junior Environmental Law Scholar Workshop](#), the [Foundation for Natural Resources and Energy Law's Natural Resources Law Teachers Institute](#), the "[Environmental Law Clinics and NGOs: Creating a Global Network](#)" conference at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, and the [Sabin Center Colloquium on Innovative Environmental Law Scholarship](#). Her forthcoming article, *Ethical Lawyering While Our House Is on Fire*, will be published in the *Maryland Journal of International Law*.

Professor Lopez also played a key role in organizing and presenting at major regional events. She helped the Florida Springs Council host its biannual [Florida Springs Summit](#) at Stetson where JLC staff attorney Rachael Curran and clinic students presented on springs issues. She also helped the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council launch its [Tampa Bay Coastal Master Plan Kick-Off Workshop](#) at Stetson.

Professor Erin Okuno

Professor Okuno launched and taught Stetson Law's new *Animal Law and Policy* course in the spring semester. In addition, she served as the Faculty Advisor for the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund, supporting student engagement and advocacy on animal protection issues. Her article, "*The Silence of the Farms*": *Suppressing Speech and Trampling Transparency to Shield Big Ag*, was accepted for publication by the *Texas A&M Law Review*, adding to her growing body of work at the intersection of law, transparency, and industrial agriculture.

Training Tomorrow's Advocates Through Real-World Experience



EL-T alums Lauren Beames, Mia Hartley, Brooke Cleary, and Stefanie Stockwell share their experience with our new teachers.



First day of school photos for the 2025 EL-T teachers.

The Biodiversity Institute continues to support the **Environmental Law-Teaching Program (EL-T)**, which was launched in 2021 and modeled after a program developed by Professor Zyg Plater at Boston College Law School. Each fall, third-year law students are taught to design and teach undergraduate courses in environmental law and policy. Each spring, the students enter the classroom as adjunct professors with Biodiversity Fellow Katherine Pratt. In spring 2025, Audrey Timmins co-taught Environmental Regulation at the University of South Florida, while Anna Brulte co-taught Environmental Law at St. Petersburg College. The program will continue to grow in the coming year, welcoming four new student-teachers and expanding to include a new course offering at Stetson's DeLand campus.

In February 2025, several students in the environmental law concentration traveled to the University of Oregon to attend the [Public Interest Environmental Law Conference \(PIELC\)](#). Professor Gardner joined Katherine Pratt and student-teacher Audrey Timmins virtually on a panel led by Professor Plater, where they shared insights on developing and teaching undergraduate environmental law courses.

In the spring, Professors Gardner and Lopez led their **Research and Writing II – Environmental Law** class on the annual swamp walk at Big Cypress National Preserve. Students look forward to the hike and camping trip where they learn about the unique Everglades ecosystem. This year, the appellate brief problem focused on wetland protection after the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling in *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency*, which limited the geographic scope of the Clean Water Act.



First-year law students trekked into a cypress dome at Big Cypress.

Professors Lopez and Gardner designed an upper-level writing course, **Cases and Places: The Everglades**, for the 2025 spring semester, patterned after a course developed by Professor Karrigan Börk at UC Davis School of Law. The Everglades course provided students with a unique, hands-on approach to studying environmental law. Blending classroom learning with field experience, students studied landmark legal cases on Everglades conservation before heading into the heart of the Everglades and surrounding ecosystems for an immersive journey that included camping, hiking, and on-site learning with experts working to protect these unique ecosystems.



Students explore the Everglades via airboat.



Everglades National Park rangers teach the students about this important landscape.



Students hear from advocates working in the field.

Advancing Environmental Justice and Advocacy: Highlights from the Jacobs Law Clinic for Democracy and the Environment

During the 2024-2025 academic year, the Jacobs Law Clinic for Democracy and the Environment (JLC), headed up by Professor Jaclyn Lopez and JLC staff attorney Rachael Curran, supervised students in a wide range of legal projects, providing hands-on experience in environmental and administrative law while advancing key advocacy goals. Students helped Professor Lopez and Ms. Curran represent dozens of clients in a variety of matters including initiating litigation in the Southern District of Florida to protect 11 at-risk [South Florida species](#), initiating litigation in state court to safeguard [Florida springs](#), submitting a notice of intent to sue and filing a petition for mandamus in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of a coalition fighting industrial [fertilizer pollution](#), and filing an amicus brief in the Middle District of Florida on behalf of [gopher tortoise](#) scientists. The JLC also filed an administrative challenge on behalf of a client before the [Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#) (NRC) to address aging nuclear power plant infrastructure vulnerabilities in South Florida.

JLC students also aided Professor Lopez and Ms. Curran in filing amicus briefs in several environmental cases before the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, representing [coral scientists](#), [Clean Air Act](#) experts, and a South Florida environmental group challenging the NRC's failure to consider sea level rise risks in its nationwide review of aging nuclear facilities. Additional projects included researching and drafting white papers on industrial pollution for the [Childs Park Neighborhood Association](#), an analysis of corporate campaign finance through [Florida registered political committees](#), an analysis of wetland determinations in the Greater Everglades ecosystem in light of the *Sackett* decision, and submitting Freedom of Information Act requests to federal agencies on behalf of clients. Together, these efforts reflect the clinic's commitment to both student development and impactful environmental advocacy.

The image shows the footer of a website. On the left is a large image of coral reefs. To its right is the WMNF logo and a navigation menu with links for Listen, Music, News, Events, About, and Support. Below the menu are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The main text of the footer reads: "A law professor & scientist ask for a halt to a dredging project that could harm Puerto Rico coral reefs". At the bottom right, it says "POSTED ON OCTOBER 17, 2023 • BY SEAN KINANE". There are also buttons for "Donate Now!" and "Shop".

Earth Day 2025: Community, Celebration, and Environmental Awareness

In April 2025, the Stetson Environmental Law Society hosted a vibrant and well-attended Earth Day celebration in the Banyan Courtyard. The event brought together student organizations, faculty, staff, local environmental nonprofits, and campus departments for an afternoon of food, games, and community engagement.

Attendees enjoyed live musical performances by students, faculty, and staff, while exploring displays from organizations such as the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund and the Center for Biological Diversity. Highlights included fresh produce from the Stetson garden, shared by the Food Law Society, and locally made small-batch ice cream.



The Food Law Society advocating for food systems sustainability.



Stetson alum and Florida Director at the Center for Biological Diversity Elise Bennett joins the fun.



As always, the highlight of the annual celebration was a performance by Royal Gardner and the Official Intermeddlers.

Celebrating Student Successes

Stetson Law students Ethan Garcia, Noah Peretz, Erika Leeper, and Blair Carlyle all received a 2024–2025 stipend from the [Dick and Joan Jacobs' Environmental Law Externship Fund](#). Ethan accepted a summer internship with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, while Noah worked with the Civil Liberties Defense Center. Erika and Blair attended the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in Zimbabwe. Stetson Law students can apply for financial support from the Environmental Law Externship Fund during the summer, which enables them to participate in environmental law externships and other opportunities around the country and internationally.



Anna Brulte receives the Nader/Zrake Memorial Award.



Audrey Timmins receives the Hearne Environmental Law Award.

Congratulations to our environmental law concentration graduates and to those who received environmental law and public service awards at the spring 2025 Graduate Awards Ceremony! Audrey Timmins received the Hearne Environmental Law Award, and Anna Brulte was the recipient of the Nader/Zrake Memorial Award.

For more information about Stetson's Institute for Biodiversity Law and Policy and how to support our programs, please visit www.stetson.edu/law/environmental/institute-for-biodiversity/ or contact Professor Royal Gardner at gardner@law.stetson.edu or Katherine Pratt at kpratt2@law.stetson.edu.



Erika and Blair taking in the stunning natural beauty of Victoria Falls and nearby wetlands while in Zimbabwe for the Ramsar COP.



A leopard in the trees at Ruaha National Park in Tanzania. Photo credit: R. Gardner