

# ECOLOGY LAW QUARTERLY

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### What is a Land Acknowledgement?

A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

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*Ecology Law Quarterly* is printed on reclaimed paper.

# Foreword

*Becky Hunter & Grayson Peters\**

*Ecology Law Quarterly's* Annual Symposium is a forum for leading voices in environmental and energy law, policy, and advocacy. In recent years, our symposia have tackled topics including the legal issues raised by worsening wildfires, environmental justice, and the just transition.

The 2023 Annual Symposium explored the challenges and opportunities of rural lawyering. The event highlighted the unique environmental and social issues faced by rural communities. These include threats to the endangered Canada lynx, the long-lasting health impacts of coal mines on Appalachian mining communities, and the prevalence of poor air quality and asthma in the Central Valley. The Symposium featured voices from on-the-ground community groups, both lawyers and non-lawyers, who are fighting for justice in rural locales ranging from California to Montana and Kentucky.

Rural communities may be far from metropolitan centers, low in population, and outside the gaze of the large institutions of mainstream environmental law and advocacy. But these communities face unique environmental challenges that deserve attention, analysis, and legal remedies. It is often scrappy and under-resourced but tenacious rural lawyers who use law to defend the rights and interests of their neighbors and ecosystems.

The Symposium featured three distinct panel discussions on the present and future of rural environmental lawyering.

First, the effects of the energy transition away from fossil fuels like coal and towards renewable energy on rural communities, many of which will feel the economic impacts of a transition away from carbon and the development impacts of new renewable infrastructure.

Second, the effects of climate change, which can include severe flooding that causes landslides, irreversible species impacts, and dangerous heat that threatens the health and lives of farmworkers.

Third and finally, the importance of communication and collaboration between rural-facing public interest organizations, lawyers, and community advocates.

As the speakers made clear, environmental law and environmental lawyers have a critical role to play in defending the interests of rural communities and

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\* Editors-in-Chief, 2023–24, *Ecology Law Quarterly*.

ecosystems, but more work has to be done to share resources between the “Big Greens,” the legal academy, and rural advocates across America.

In sum, a host of environmental health and environmental justice issues plague rural communities. The symposium speakers clarified that a lawyer’s integration into, and knowledge of, the rural community is necessary to effectively contribute to environmental solutions. These advocates exemplified grit, as they often face scant resources and significant barriers to garner attention, build movements, and win legal success.

This symposium was organized by Berkeley Law student Anna Goldberg and moderated by Sabrina Ashjian, Supervising Attorney at Berkeley’s Environmental Law Clinic. The panelists were Estella Cisneros of California Rural Legal Assistance, John Meyer of Cottonwood Environmental Law Center, Kevin Hamilton of Central California Asthma Collaborative, Mary Cromer of Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center, Samantha Ruscavage-Barz of WildEarth Guardians, and Tanmay Shukla of Environmental Law & Policy Center.

Becky Hunter and Grayson Peters  
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