

TOGETHER

WE DO

THE WORK.



CONSERVATION
LAW CENTER

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends,

When I was 22 years old and a first-year law student, I decided I wanted to be an environmental lawyer for a living. In fact, that's how old I was when I learned it was even possible. Every professional decision I've made since then has been in pursuit of that goal—to protect the natural world. From grassroots organizing in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming to endangered species litigation in the Deep South to habitat conservation in southern Indiana to now training young lawyers to be Jedi with green lightsabers, I've spent the past three decades working for nature. As a friend of mine says, I sometimes can't believe my good fortune. I'm as excited about the work as I've ever been, and have tremendous appreciation for everyone who's helped me along the way.

Thankfully, I'm not the only one to make that choice. This year, we want to highlight some of the individuals within CLC who wake up every day and try to make the world healthier and fairer and more beautiful. Our clients are communities with water that's unsafe to drink, low-income populations unjustly targeted for industrial development, nonprofits working to protect habitat for endangered species, citizens trying to prevent privatization of our public beaches, and so many more. Our students are young people with the peculiar notion that tomorrow can be better than today, and a belief that they can help. And our supporters ultimately make it all possible. All of these individual choices give me hope.

Thank you for giving us so much cause for gratitude.

Together we do the work.



Christian

“ I do have hope. Nature is enormously resilient, humans are vastly intelligent, the energy and enthusiasm that can be kindled among young people seems without limit, and the human spirit is indomitable. But if we want life, we will have to stop depending on someone else to save the world. It is up to us—you and me, all of us. Myself, I have placed my faith in the children. ”

— JANE GOODALL

ABOUT US

We are lawyers, advocates, and educators who care deeply about the natural world and people's relationship to it. We work to protect and improve the health, diversity, beauty, and resilience of the planet and defend our shared natural heritage.

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LAND



Quick Facts



ROB MCGREA

Land Conservation Attorney

A Bloomington native, Rob received his law degree from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon, and practiced at his grandfather's law firm in Bloomington before deciding to return to his environmental roots, first working for Sycamore Land Trust as the Land Preservation Director and now at the Conservation Law Center as the Land Conservation Attorney. His work focuses on the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape project, for which CLC is the lead coordinator.

1

Accelerating Conservation

CLC's land program is dedicated to increasing the pace and quality of conservation and ensuring public access to nature.

2

Impressive Impact

Over the past 18 years, CLC has directly contributed to conserving over 20,000 acres of land in Indiana alone, with a total estimated value exceeding \$100 million.

3

Free Assistance for Land Trusts in Indiana and Beyond

CLC provides pro bono support to land trusts on complex real estate transactions, conservation easements, and guidance on governance and business matters.

JEFF DANIELSON



LAND

INTERVIEW WITH
Rob McCrea

Explain why natural land conservation is important to address climate change?

Natural land conservation serves as the cornerstone of the global effort to preserve biodiversity and maintain healthy ecosystems. It starts at the local level with place-based decision-making and culminates into regional efforts that connect vast areas and ecosystems. This creates corridors for ecosystem-based adaptation to build resiliency to climate change.

The CLC land protection program supports conservation organizations in various ways. Could you elaborate on what services you offer and share specific examples of how this assistance has made a difference for organizations and the environment in Indiana?

Nationwide, organizations involved in land conservation such as land trusts and cooperatives focused on land restoration are running into

capacity issues and opportunities for conservation are being lost because of this. CLC provides essential assistance to these organizations to help bridge this capacity gap. We provide services without any fees to advise and represent nonprofits on matters related to land transactions and all aspects of conservation easements. More land is getting permanently protected and properly taken care of because of CLC.

You mentioned conservation easements. What are conservation easements, and how will they benefit land trusts and landowners in Indiana?

Conservation easements, or CEs, are an important tool in the conservation toolbox. CEs support conservation on a property by limiting certain uses of the land but allowing landowners to retain ownership. One of the core functions of CLC is to make sure all land trusts in Indiana have access to the most

up-to-date conservation easement templates. We complete periodic reviews of tax decisions that impact tax deductibility and make sure our templates follow current best practices. When land trusts in Indiana use the CLC template they can be assured that they are starting from a baseline that is carefully drafted and meets all federal tax deductibility requirements.

Governance is crucial for the success of conservation organizations. Can you elaborate on how CLC supports organizations in reviewing and drafting governance documents like bylaws and policies?

We offer corporate governance support to nonprofit organizations, assisting with establishing new entities and conducting bylaws reviews for existing ones. Our goal is to ensure that new nonprofits are set up correctly from the start, adhering to the highest standards of practice.

How does CLC collaborate with other organizations to expand land conservation efforts and maximize positive outcomes for the environment and communities in Indiana?

CLC is the hub of the wheel with regards to land conservation in Indiana. We have access to a broad network of assistance for complex conservation transactions and opportunities for funding that we deliver to land trusts and land management cooperatives in Indiana. We make sure these organizations submit the strongest possible grants for federal and private funding opportunities.

WATER

Quick Facts



1

Critical Resource

Water is one of Indiana's most vital resources, directly impacting public health, economic development, and overall quality of life in the state.

2

Advocating for Water Quality

CLC is actively engaged in improving water quality by offering legal support to advocacy groups, educating decision-makers about potential solutions, and influencing public policy to ensure the protection of Indiana's waters.

3

Challenges and Opportunities

Indiana faces ongoing challenges in its water management regime, both in terms of the aging built infrastructure and the degradation of natural infrastructure affecting water quality and quantity.



MEGAN FREVELETTI

Nancy C. Ralston Graduate Fellow Attorney

Megan graduated from the University of Mississippi with a degree in International Studies and worked in her home state for the Illinois House of Representatives for two years before attending Indiana University's Maurer School of Law. During law school Megan interned with the Conservation Law Center and after graduation, joined CLC as the Nancy C. Ralston Graduate Fellow Attorney.

JEFF DANIELSON

WATER

INTERVIEW WITH
Megan Freveletti

Indiana's water quality is a critical concern, and CLC's Water Report identified 14 recommendations to improve it. Could you highlight some of the most pressing water quality issues in Indiana, and how these recommendations address them?

Indiana has an abundance of fresh water that, for years, has acted as an economic driver across the state. While this has produced benefits, especially for some industries and sectors, it has also resulted in the majority of Indiana's waterways being polluted. When the water quality is poor, future quantity available for producers and industries is also affected. CLC described this dynamic in its 2016 Water Report. For example, the Report recommends addressing the issue of E. coli contamination by creating vegetated buffers to reduce agricultural runoff. The Report also recommends that Indiana water management authorities should take the environmental, ecological, and social values, along with the economic value, into consideration when making water planning decisions. Indiana has made progress on some of these recommendations but there is more to be done.

Can you provide examples of recent successes or progress made in addressing the recommendations outlined in the Water Report?

Sure, the 2023 legislative session provided some notable wins for Indiana's water quality and addressed a few recommendations from the Water Report. First, IDEM's increased budget will allow the agency to hire fifteen additional drinking water monitors. The state also passed PFAS legislation recognizing these "forever chemicals" as dangerous and life-threatening pollutants, and committed to the continued identification of emerging contaminants. Maybe most importantly, the House Enrolled Act 1639 allows for the creation of Watershed Development Commissions, which have the potential to address both water quantity and quality challenges. This could support water storage capacity, erosion control, sediment reduction, and set voluntary water quality goals. Watershed Development Commissions can also potentially address runoff of nutrients and soil into streams, the reestablishment of wetlands, and improve septic systems.

Good policymaking requires reliable data and research. How does CLC plan to enhance its research efforts to support evidence-based water policy decisions, and what role do student interns play in this process?

CLC operates the Conservation Law Clinic at the IU Maurer School of Law and has student interns every semester. Our interns play a vital role in our efforts to help improve Indiana's water quality. In the past, they have conducted research on drainage laws across the United States, which helped inform our recommendations on updating Indiana's drainage code. When I was a clinic student, I had the opportunity to meet with state legislators, scientists, and policymakers about the implications of failing septic systems, and from those meetings created materials that were then presented to the Indiana State legislature. This really solidified my desire to work in environmental law. It's been amazing to transition from student to attorney in an organization that cares so deeply about training the next generation of environmental lawyers.

Looking ahead, what are the key priorities and action items on CLC's agenda for furthering the cause of improving Indiana's water quality, and how can individuals and organizations support these efforts?

I would say we have two main priorities currently. First, failing septic systems are still one of the main sources of water pollution across the state. We need to find common-sense solutions to keep this human waste out of our drinking water. It's hard to believe there are interest groups in the state that oppose this. Our second priority is to address source water protection, whether it be through revising the outdated drainage code, or working with agricultural producers to reduce nutrient runoff. Individuals and organizations can support our work by collaborating with us on our goals, or through financial support. We are almost entirely donor funded, so we do what donors enable us to do.

BIODIVERSITY

Quick Facts



1

Protecting Vulnerable Species

CLC advocates for the protection of our most vulnerable and sensitive species, works to preserve their habitats, and defends the Endangered Species Act.

2

Ambitious Habitat Goals

Habitat fragmentation and degradation deprive many species of their fundamental needs. CLC is working with land trusts and public agencies to create connected landscapes that support migratory patterns and mitigates the negative impacts of climate change.

3

Biodiversity Loss

The decline in biodiversity has been identified as one of the most significant threats to human existence on Earth. Its advantages encompass everything from providing food and safeguarding against natural disasters to regulating climate, sustaining human well-being, and promoting health.



CHRISTIAN FREITAG

Director

After graduating from Northwestern University, Christian pursued a Juris Doctor degree at Indiana University's Maurer School of Law and later earned a PhD from IU's School of Public and Environmental Affairs. His unwavering dedication to environmental causes has defined his career. Christian's unique blend of expertise in land conservation, environmental law, and entrepreneurialism has made him an exceptionally effective leader, contributing to significant growth for CLC during his tenure.

STEVE GIFFORD

BIODIVERSITY

INTERVIEW WITH
Christian Freitag

I know you have a background in land protection. Could you please share your insights on how the preservation of land, habitat, and species intersect?

I'm a systems guy. The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone, as they say. You care about critters? Then save the places they need to live and eat and mate. You worry about how the critters will adapt to climate change? Connect the protected landscapes so they can move. And for heaven's sake, take care of the water. Every life depends on it. But most importantly, understand that human beings are not separate from nature but instead a participant. As Jane Goodall says, you cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you, so decide what kind of impact that will be. What will your grandchildren say about your impact?

It's such an exciting time to be an environmentalist. It would be easy to get bogged down in Chicken Little thinking that the sky is falling. We're certainly fed enough bad news about the environment that there's reason to feel pretty depressed. But I try to look at it a different way. Look how far we've come as a movement in a relatively short period of time. Over the course of just two generations, the environment has gone from something most people completely took for granted to something most people think about regularly. We shouldn't lose sight of all the progress we've made. And in the hands of the next generation? I think we'll all be amazed.

Nothing is inevitable though. It's not inevitable that we're doomed, but it's also not inevitable that we'll do better. It's up to us.

In the face of climate change and habitat loss, what innovative strategies or technologies do you believe hold the most promise for conserving biodiversity?

I'm regularly astounded at our species' capacity for innovation and creative problem solving. But I don't think we can smartify our way out of the environmental challenges we face, even as entrepreneurial as we are. My greatest hope isn't any form of technology at all. If we're going to rediscover a balanced world, or perhaps repair and create one, it won't come through gizmos or fancy new toys. If we don't get people to realize they're part of nature and not separate from it, we don't have a chance. Our greatest hope is a fundamental change of thought about our role on the planet, not as conquerors but instead as community members. Aldo Leopold wrote about this in the 1940s. He's as right now as he was then. Our greatest hope is our capacity for connection.

Biodiversity is a complex and interconnected concept. Can you explain why biodiversity is essential and its impact on ecosystems?

Biology is incredibly complex, of course, but I don't find the concept of biodiversity

particularly complex. Leopold said the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the pieces. Only in the last decade have we learned that trees communicate through underground networks of fungi and chemicals. Can you imagine? That seems like fantasy stuff to old grumps like me. It seems to me there are two big fundamental lessons to wrap your mind around the basic concept of biodiversity. First, there are no extra parts in nature. Everything matters whether a little or a lot. Second, all the parts are connected, even if we don't know how yet.

What role do government policies and regulations play in biodiversity and species conservation, and how can they be improved or better enforced?

I think the government has a huge role to play in a healthy environment. It always has. Emissions limits make our air cleaner. Septic inspections can make our water cleaner. Wetlands regulations provide habitat, but also help with drought and flood. Tax incentives can help motivate better land management. But if we're waiting on the government to save us, heaven help us. Successful social movements always work from the bottom up. The government will reflect the people ultimately. We have to fix the way humans relate to nature first and foremost, and then the policies will come. One thing I always stress is that conservation shouldn't have political baggage. It's not an R or D thing. Everyone wants clean air for their

children to breathe, and clean water for their family to drink, whether they call themselves environmentalists or not. I'm not talking about disingenuous money grubbers, mind you, but serious honest people. I buck the notion that the environment is the bailiwick of one party or another. We all live it, for better or worse, so the only way to win in the environment is a big tent approach.

I understand you're a birder, what makes migratory birds so special?

They almost defy comprehension to me. Imagine a three-inch bright yellow warbler that goes between northern Canada and South America twice a year. Imagine the arctic tern going 22,000 miles! I've been so thrilled to travel to Costa Rica in recent years for Conservation Law Center projects, and to see our own ruby-throated hummingbirds zipping around the Pacific coast in February. They feel like friends, like they were at my last summer barbecue in Bloomington. Migratory birds are also harbingers of the changing seasons for me, which is one of my favorite parts of living in the Midwest. To see the neotropical songbirds arrive in the spring with their full colors on display, and to hear the sandhill cranes in the sky in the fall. Just glorious. The sights they must see on their travels, the strength and resilience they need, it blows my mind. There is wildness in them that attracts me.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Quick Facts

1

Disproportionate Environmental Burden

Communities of color and low-income populations nationwide bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards. This issue is particularly evident in cities like Gary, Hammond and East Chicago, where predominantly Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged populations are exposed to some of the country's most polluted air and contaminated land and waterways due to the area's extreme concentration of heavy industry.

2

Systemic Barriers to Citizen Engagement

Historic discriminatory land use laws such as racially restrictive covenants and redlining continue to fuel environmental injustice. The problem persists because affected citizens lack affordable access to environmental lawyers and experts, making it difficult for them to engage meaningfully in zoning and environmental decisions. Alternatively, well-resourced and politically connected industries can afford costly legal and expert representation, giving them an advantage at every level of government decision-making.

3

Complex Environmental Laws and Regulations

The numerous environmental laws, such as NEPA, the CAA, and the CWA, create complex administrative processes that are challenging for individuals to navigate without expertise in environmental law or the financial resources to hire those who do. This complexity disadvantages low-income and minority communities, allowing more affluent areas to utilize environmental laws to oppose unwanted industrial developments, further exacerbating environmental inequality.



KIM FERRARO

Senior Attorney

Kim E. Ferraro is the Senior Attorney at the Conservation Law Center, known for her pivotal role in securing landmark legal victories for environmental protection during her tenure with the Hoosier Environmental Council. Kim's achievements include halting threats posed by factory farms, compelling cleanups of industrial waste sites, and preventing the construction of hazardous industries near critical natural areas and marginalized communities, demonstrating her commitment to conservation, and addressing environmental injustice.

JEFF DANIELSON

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

INTERVIEW WITH
Kim Ferraro

What initially drew you to environmental justice issues, and how has your commitment to this cause evolved throughout your legal career?

Early on in my practice, I was involved in a legal challenge of a Clean Air Act permit that Indiana's environmental agency issued for the BP oil refinery in Whiting, Indiana. The permit authorized BP to expand its already massive refinery on the shores of Lake Michigan to process heavy crude oil extracted from the Canadian tar sands and piped in via the controversial Enbridge pipeline. Making matters worse, this permit exempted BP from having to install pollution controls. This allowed for the release of cancer-causing air toxics, smog-forming pollutants, and climate-warming greenhouse gases from processing tar sands, which is a fuel even dirtier than coal.

Environmentalists—including me—were outraged that the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) would approve this. After all, it's no secret that mining and refining tar sands produces up to three times more climate-changing emissions than conventional crude, uses and pollutes tremendous amounts of water, and turns pristine Canadian forests into wastelands. But the people who lived near the BP refinery viewed this as just more the same—just another instance of the government enabling a big industrial polluter to use their community as a sacrifice zone because they are black, brown, and poor.

What I have come to understand since then is that these residents are

absolutely right. Their circumstance is rooted in the same patterns of systemic racism that have existed in our country since its founding. To this day, infrastructure investments are more likely to be made in affluent communities, where environmental laws are more likely to be enforced, and where polluters are more likely to be held accountable or kept away entirely. In contrast, minority-black, brown, and impoverished communities are routinely treated as the dumping grounds where waste can be disposed of, industrial warehouses and polluting factories can be concentrated, and where natural resources can be readily exploited or destroyed. So, in my view, stopping the dirtiest industries from being forced on the most vulnerable communities is not just a cause, it's a moral imperative.

Collaboration is essential in addressing environmental justice issues. Can you discuss your experiences working with community organizations, advocacy groups, or government agencies to advocate for marginalized communities?

A notable example is the effective collaboration I was involved in that began in 2008 in response to BP's plans to expand its refinery to process Canadian tar sands. A large coalition of environmental organizations and local citizens and groups banded together to challenge the air permit IDEM issued allowing the expansion without necessary air pollution controls. We also petitioned the U.S. EPA to intervene. As a result of this collective action, we ultimately achieved a 2012

consent decree requiring BP to install the air pollution control technologies that it should have installed in the first place. BP also had to pay an \$8 million civil penalty and conduct fence-line air monitoring for two years so the impacted community could better understand the refinery's effect on their air and health.

BP's effort to evade its responsibility to control its refinery's air pollution was, in effect, an effort to impose the real cost of processing dirty oil on the community in the form of pollution-induced illnesses, hospital visits, and medical bills. By joining forces and pooling resources, we were able to empower the community to hold BP accountable and make sure EPA stayed on the job. For that matter, in the decade since, EPA has ramped up its enforcement of BP's continuing environmental violations. In May of this year, EPA entered a consent decree requiring the company to pay a record \$40 million civil penalty for emitting excess volatile organic compounds and other hazardous air pollutants at the refinery. The consent decree also requires BP to spend more than \$197 million to install additional air pollution controls and more fence-line monitoring stations so that neighbors know what they are being exposed to.

What role do you believe environmental lawyers play in advocating for systemic change and policy reforms to address environmental injustices on a broader scale?

Environmental attorneys play a crucial role in addressing environmental injustice by empowering communities

to overcome entrenched and structural barriers to remedying environmental hazards. The term, "environmental justice" essentially means that everyone—regardless of race, color, national origin, or income—has the right to the same environmental protections and benefits, as well as meaningful involvement in the decisions and policies that shape their communities. Yet, environmental, zoning, and land use laws are extremely complex, making it difficult for most people to participate meaningfully in environmental permitting and enforcement decisions without legal and technical assistance – and that assistance is financially out-of-reach for even moderate-income individuals, much less those who live in poverty and need the assistance the most.

That means environmental lawyers must step in. Environmental attorneys working for government agencies are needed to help develop and enforce policies that protect the environment for all citizens, not just white and affluent ones. Environmental attorneys who work for industry must ensure that their clients' actions do not further contaminate and exploit the environments of already overburdened communities. And finally, we need more environmental lawyers to provide free legal support to marginalized communities so that their voices are heard, and their interests are fairly represented in decision-making that impacts their health, well-being, and quality of life.

PUBLIC TRUST

Quick Facts

1

Protecting Public Access

The Public Trust Doctrine is a legal principle that requires the government to protect certain natural resources, such as Indiana's Lake Michigan shoreline, for the use and enjoyment of all Hoosiers.

2

Preserving Unique Ecosystems

The Doctrine's protection extends beyond public access rights. It also serves to safeguard precious ecosystems and wildlife from harmful development. Lake Michigan's shoreline, home to abundant biodiversity and unique dune ecosystems, relies on the Public Trust Doctrine for protection.

3

Promoting the interests of future generations

CLC advocates to ensure that our public trust laws are enforced, and our shared public trust waters and shores are stewarded responsibly, so that future generations will also be able to exercise their vested rights to enjoy them in the years to come.



KACEY COOK

Constance and Terry Marbach Conservation Attorney

Kacey's career path in environmental law was charted during her time as a student in CLC's Conservation Law Clinic at the IU Maurer School of Law. After graduating, Kacey served as Policy Specialist and Staff Attorney at Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council in Northern Michigan, where she collaborated with local communities to protect the area's abundant freshwater resources. In 2022, she was invited to return to CLC, this time as the Constance and Terry Marbach Conservation Attorney.



JEFF DANIELSON

PUBLIC TRUST

INTERVIEW WITH
Kacey Cook

What is the public trust doctrine?

The public trust is a legal doctrine that has been passed down from Roman law through British common law and finally to federal and state law here in the United States. Under the doctrine, certain natural resources are held in trust by the government for the benefit of the public.

The public trust has been recognized to extend to a variety of natural resources and to protect several public uses, varying from state to state. As trustee of the public trust resources, the State is required to steward them for the benefit of current and future generations.

Lake Michigan is one of Indiana's most important public trust resources, and CLC has played a key role in advocating for the recognition and protection of the public's rights to the lake and its beaches.

Why are the Great Lakes an important natural resource and what challenges do they face?

The Great Lakes hold one fifth of the planet's freshwater, making up the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world. They house incredible biodiversity and are home to many endangered

and threatened species. They also play a central role in supporting regional economies and serve as the source of drinking water for more than 28 million people. Visitors from all over the world come to enjoy their beauty and the recreational opportunities they provide.

The Great Lakes are faced with several challenges including erosion and access issues caused by shoreline hardening, the threat of pollution from industry, nutrient pollution from agricultural runoff, and the spread of invasive species.

Fortunately, the public trust doctrine can be employed to address these challenges, and public trust advocates are engaged in those efforts throughout the Great Lakes Region.

What makes the public trust a powerful legal tool?

The public trust is a promise that certain public interests in shared resources will be protected above all else. This promise has been passed down from government to government, generation to generation, over millennia.

Relatively few states in the U.S. have recognized a constitutional right to a healthy environment, but every state has its own public trust doctrine. As

a result, the public trust is often one of the most powerful tools advocates can use to ensure that important natural resources are stewarded for the benefit of all people.

Why are you passionate about working on public trust issues?

I grew up along the shores of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior in Michigan. It's personal to me. I pursued a career in environmental law because I wanted to protect the places I love most and contribute to efforts that ensure all communities have access to healthy environments and our shared natural resources.

In the face of climate change, it is now more critical than ever that our freshwater resources are managed equitably and sustainably. The public trust places that goal within reach, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to work toward it every day.

How can members of the public participate in efforts to protect Indiana's Lake Michigan public trust resources for current and future generations?

The first step is to learn about your public trust rights and to

spread the word! Then get out and exercise those rights by enjoying the beautiful shores and waters that are held in trust for all of us.

We also encourage you to join the ongoing fight to ensure that these resources are around for our children and grandchildren. You can get involved by supporting advocacy organizations, and by engaging with your representatives and letting them know that the State's continued protection of the public trust is important to you.

We all have a role to play in protecting our public trust resources and our rights to enjoy them now and in the future, and we are grateful to everyone that supports and participates in these efforts.

SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

Quick Facts

1

Military Readiness and Natural Heritage

Designated by the federal government in 2022, the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape (SISL) helps ensure our nation's military readiness while safeguarding Indiana's rich natural and agricultural heritage.

2

Key Installations

SISL encompasses 3.5 million acres including four critical Department of Defense installations and ranges: Naval Support Activity Crane, Lake Glendora Test Facility, Atterbury-Muscatatuck Training Center, and the Indiana Air Range Complex. These installations serve as crucial testing and training grounds for various military branches.

3

Partnership for Sustainability

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, founded in 2013, unites federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations. Their mission is to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, prepare for environmental challenges, and support agricultural and forestry economies in the region.



MICHAEL SPALDING

Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape Coordinator

Michael Spalding, the Program Coordinator for the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, has deep-rooted ties to conservation, stemming from his family's land in central Indiana that dates back to 1889. Graduating with honors from Purdue University College of Agriculture in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry, he has dedicated more than 15 years to conservation efforts spanning 55 Indiana counties. Michael's career has seen him work as a field forester in a forestry consulting firm and manage public forests, including Jackson-Washington, Yellowwood, Morgan-Monroe State Forests, and Atterbury-Muscatatuck Training Center.

ANDREW BENTON

SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

INTERVIEW WITH
Michael Spalding

What specific goals and objectives does the Sentinel Landscape program aim to achieve in Southern Indiana?

We are currently drafting our strategic plan to guide us through the next three years. Our core goals will focus on preserving and protecting military missions, supporting sustainable farming and forestry, restoring and sustaining ecosystems, and increasing landscape resiliency. We will be focusing on strategies and actions that promote wise land use, permanently protect land, encourage sustainable land management practices, restore degraded ecosystems, utilize natural climate solutions, and improve water quality.

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership involves various stakeholders, including federal agencies, state and local governments, and conservation organizations. Can you discuss how these partners collaborate to achieve the program's mission and objectives?

A core Landscape Coordinating Committee of twelve organizations lead this effort. While we are still in the early stages of this partnership, we are currently in the process of finalizing a charter to formalize our commitment to this collaboration. This committee

consists of prominent conservation and military leaders in Indiana. The underlying principle of our collaboration is to achieve more collectively than we could have accomplished individually.

How does CLC coordinate and support the Sentinel Landscape program in Southern Indiana?

CLC is the host organization for this partnership program. Last July, I was hired as the full-time program coordinator but I have the entire CLC team behind me supporting my efforts. Our Landscape Conservation Attorney, Rob McCrea, supports any legal needs of the program, and Christian, Andrea, and Christie also lend their support through their diverse set of skills. While all the Sentinel Landscapes throughout the country are doing excellent work, SISL seems to me to have the largest host-supported team leading the effort.

SISL supports sustainable land management for farms and forests. How does the program connect private landowners with available resources and programs to promote sustainable practices?

We connect with landowners through multiple channels of outreach including traditional in-person events, social

media, and word of mouth. Throughout my career working in Indiana, I have found people are often unaware of financial and technical assistance available for conservation projects on their lands. I also found that those who tried to independently research options online quickly became overwhelmed with seemingly endless pages of materials to read. We serve as a navigator for those landowners and help them discover the conservation options best for them and connect them with the most appropriate local professionals for the project. In an effort to make this information easily accessible for everyone, we created the Conservation Discover Web Application, SISL.org. This site is a one-stop-shop for landowners to learn more about the many conservation options available to them, as well as information to connect them with professionals who can help.

You mentioned the Conservation Discovery Web Application. Can you explain how this application works and how it assists landowners in making informed conservation decisions.

This interactive web tool is based on publicly available parcel data similar to county GIS websites. You can locate your property by searching for your name or address, or you can zoom into your parcel and select it. Then, you

can choose from several conservation interests and sub-interests based on your conservation goals. These interests include cropland management, erosion control and soil health, forestry, livestock pasture management, permanent land protection, tax incentives, water quality, wildlife habitat, and technical assistance. The web tool will then generate a custom property report that includes your conservation options as well as relevant contact information for conservation professionals who can help you reach your goals.

What makes SISL unique from other conservation initiatives in Indiana?

Recognizing the value of landscape-level conservation, CLC is leading the most comprehensive conservation effort in Indiana by supporting a diverse partnership of key leaders in military, conservation, and agriculture. Not only are we talking about taking a comprehensive approach in the diversity of leadership but also in the time and scale of the project. While we will be achieving significant milestones along the way, this 3.5-million-acre landscape-level project will take decades to fully implement.

BEHIND THE SCENES



ANDREA LUTZ

Deputy Director

Anyone who knows me knows I love a spreadsheet. I thrive in a world of budgets, and procedure, and projects. Pair that with spending time with our donors, environmentalists who care about our work and our world, and I'm living the dream. I would have never guessed in a million years I would be working for a public interest environmental law firm, but honestly I feel like I won the lottery. Beyond saving the world and all, I couldn't imagine spending my days with a more inspiring group of people.



CHRISTIE PAGE

Operations Manager

After working in healthcare for a few years, I decided to join an organization that aligns with my values. CLC's work allows me to connect my passion for nature with a career that helps protect it for future generations. It's incredibly rewarding to wake up daily knowing CLC is helping to make the world a more beautiful place.



ALEX EDMINSTER

Marketing and Development Coordinator

I chose to work at the Conservation Law Center because I share its vision of the world, one where we fiercely protect our land, water, and air, empower communities, and train a new generation of environmental champions. It's truly incredible to be part of a team that is so dedicated to their mission and is so knowledgeable about the work they do. It's work and organizations like these that energize people of my generation and make us believe in a better future.

It is because of you, our donors, that we can continue doing this critical work for our natural environment.

Thank you for prioritizing us in your year-end giving.



TO DONATE TODAY PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW OR GO TO

conservationlawcenter.org/donate



You can also include a check in the enclosed envelope or mail it to:

Conservation Law Center
116 South Indiana, Suite 4
Bloomington, IN 47408

TOGETHER

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