



Environmental Lawyer

Personal Profile

-  Personal profiles outline one person's experience in this career.

Dianne Saxe

Ph.D.- Doctorate of Jurisprudence in Environmental Law



My Career Path

→ Getting Started

I have always had a passion for the environment. As a youngster I had the opportunity to go to summer camp and my experiences there helped to foster a love of science and nature. I am also passionate about the law. Environmental law combines both of these interests, however it took time, hard work and persistence to achieve my goal to be an environmental lawyer.

→ Gaining Experience

Some of my early legal experience included litigation work on behalf of government. I developed my civil and criminal law skills while interacting with people who were in trouble. This was front-line, hard work and a memorable learning experience. I left government to pursue my doctorate after fifteen years in this role. Throughout this time I had accumulated a box of documents about interesting decisions of law related to the environment. This was my opportunity to reflect on why I had been practicing law and fit it into a new framework. There were no guides to follow and I had to use my experiences and interest in the environment to figure out this new career path on my own. By the end of my doctoral degree I had accumulated three boxes of environmental legal decisions from my thesis research. Now I was ready to start my own practice.

→ Staying Current

A lawyer needs to know the latest information in order to do their work well. For this reason I read environmental legal cases, magazines and journals constantly. I also contribute to the knowledge base of my profession by writing two columns and a newsletter on topics of environmental law. When I am asked to speak or present my views on various issues, it provides me with another chance to stay current in that area.

→ Seeing the Future

The implications of environmental issues such as climate change are

enormous. The consequences of our effects on the environment are spreading into many areas of law. Genetically modified organisms will be another concern related to human health as will smog and the increase of childhood diseases. There is likely a link from these issues to the environment. There is a lot of work to be done in this area of law and I plan to contribute by affecting environmental policy development.

A Day in the Life

I run my own practice and this gives me flexibility as well as additional responsibilities. I need to fulfill all of the business requirements of running an office and manage the role of lawyer. To do this well I need people skills and an understanding of science and business organizations in addition to legal expertise. While it is challenging to balance the demands of my work it is also very rewarding to go out in the field, get my feet dirty and see the results of my efforts. I make a difference. Sometimes it is a small difference, however when I am able to advise my client and then see that advice get used to train people, reduce waste and improve the environment, I know it is worthwhile.

Dianne's Advice

A long time ago someone told me to "do what you love, never give up". If you follow this advice and get involved you will accomplish your goal. I recommend volunteering with an environmental organization that is doing good work. Also, go to court and watch. When you are starting to gain experience as a lawyer, practice your skills in night court and traffic court where you are in a low stakes situation. It will take a while to establish yourself as an environmental lawyer but you can make it if you try hard.

My Unique Contribution

Sometimes I am able to affect the way issues are resolved so that the environment and the people involved both benefit. One such situation that is currently in progress is the prosecution of a municipality by the federal government. The municipality is alleged to have not done enough to protect a stream from erosion resulting from the actions of land development. My contribution to this issue is to convince government to initiate a pilot project to solve the problem for this situation and future similar situations. In this way the problem is resolved for all government levels and the biggest winners, when the streams are protected from erosion, are the fish.