

COLLEGE OF LAW OPENS

Earthlaw Environmental Law Clinic

In January, the Natural Resources Program created a new, exciting opportunity for College of Law students — the Earthlaw environmental law clinic. The College of Law established the clinic to provide students an experience integrating concern for the environment with ongoing dialog about social values and public policy, to give law

students a chance to develop their lawyering skills in a real world setting, and to serve as a “capstone” experience for students concentrating in natural resources law. “With the clinic, we have moved our environmental law program into the top tier of programs in the country,” said DU Law Professor Fred Cheever.

In the clinic, College of Law students handle significant environmental cases for nonprofit groups, ranging from the National Audubon Society and the Sierra Club to grassroots groups such as Friends of Sand Creek. Jay Tutchton, the clinic director, calls the clinic “legal aid for the environment.”

The clinic’s first students worked on cases to protect the endangered swift fox, rapidly disappearing native prairies, and old-growth forest in the southwest. Clinic

students also prepared language for a proposed ballot initiative in Wyoming, worked on briefs challenging the constitutionality of recent congressional efforts to prevent federal courts from enforcing the Endangered Species Act, and investigated suits to stop illegal pollution from two government facilities. Students researched and



▲ Pictured with Mark Hughes (second from left), who is the senior attorney of Earthlaw, are members of the Natural Resources Program at the College of Law, (l-r) Professors Fred Cheever, Jan Laitos, and George (Rock) Pring.

filed four federal cases, intervened in another, filed two administrative appeals, drafted two consent judgments, and initiated a petition to the Secretariat of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The College of Law designed the program to help its students “hit the ground running” after graduation. According to Tutchton, the clinic

mimics the type of work that students can expect to do after graduation and gives them basic information about surviving and prospering in private or corporate practice. Each student has primary responsibility for at least one case. On this case, a senior attorney supervises the student’s work, but the student plays the chief role in research, client contact, and preparing court documents. Each student also works on a more complex matter, supporting the clinic’s supervising attorneys. Professor Cheever is impressed by the quality of the experience the clinic provides — “I wish we had something like this when I was a law student.”



▲ Environmental law clinic director Jay Tutchton

The College of Law conducts the clinic through an innovative partnership between the College of Law and Earthlaw, a leading, nonprofit, environmental group. The College of Law gains the benefits of Earthlaw’s fundraising, Earthlaw’s docket of significant environmental cases, and the experience of Earthlaw’s seasoned senior attorneys. In the clinic’s first year, Earthlaw will contribute nearly seventy-five percent of the cost of running the environmental law clinic program.

According to Tutchton, the type of work available to DU students through the clinical program and the quality of training the students bring to the program make DU’s clinic “second to none.” ■