

The 2025 Southeastern Public Interest Environmental Law Conference Agenda

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Sewanee: The University of the South
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October 10-12, 2025

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This year's event is brought to you by the SPIEL 2025 Organizing Committee:

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Sheryl Campbell, Tennessee Heartwood

Ashley Wilmes, Kentucky Resources Council

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Jack West, Alabama Rivers Alliance

Charline Whyte, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project

Dave Cooper, Kentucky Heartwood

Eva Dillard, Black Warrior Riverkeeper

Jennifer Mamola, John Muir Project

Byron Gary, Kentucky Resources Council

Justinn Overton, Coosa Riverkeeper

Vickey Wheeler, Alabama Rivers Alliance

Perrin de Jong, Private Practice

FREE PARKING

In the lot behind Jessie Ball Dupont Library (building 7 below)

GUEST WIFI ACCESS

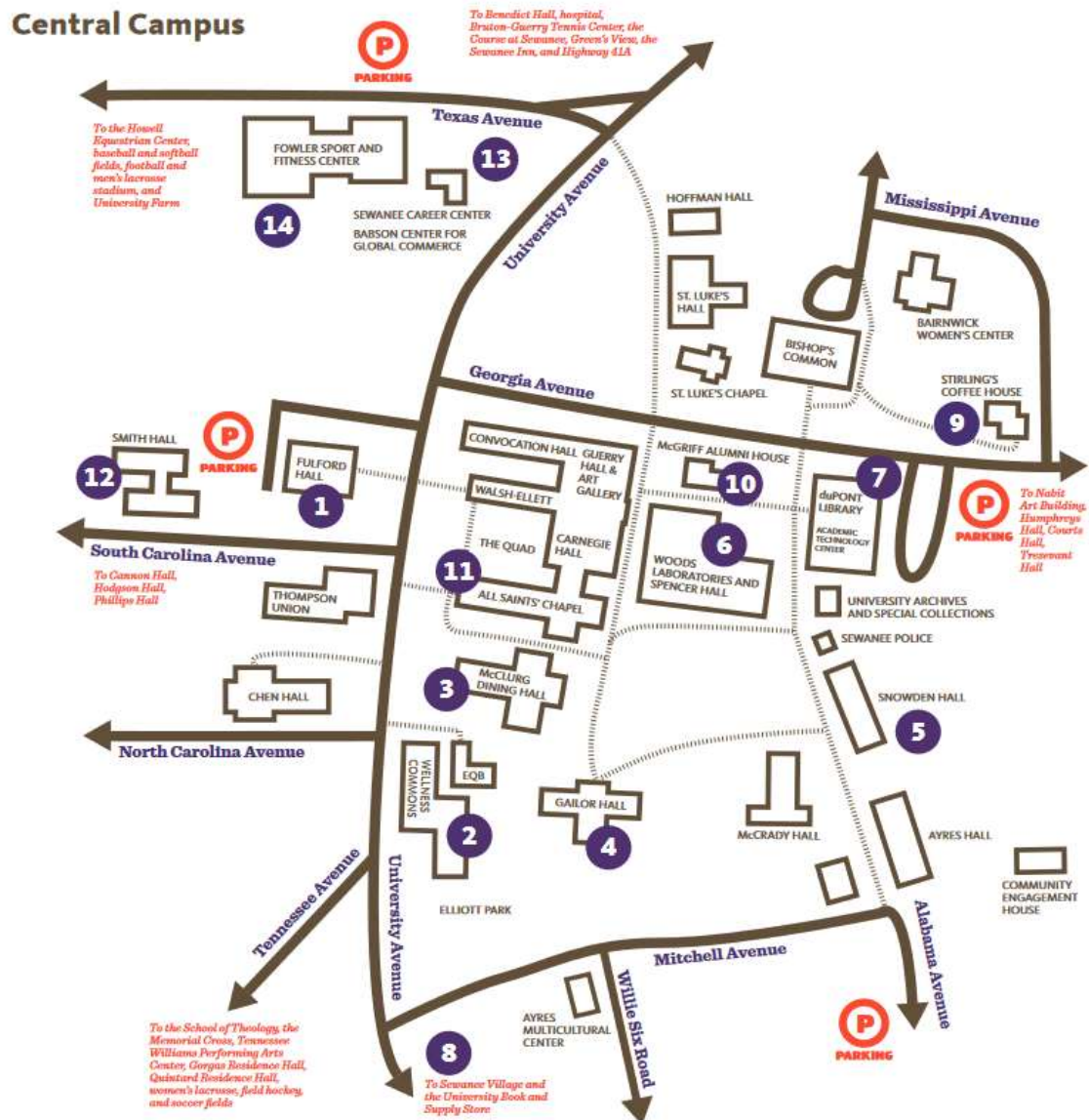
Connect to 'Sewanee-Guest' and fill out the requested fields.

FIND PRESENTATION HANDOUTS HERE

https://mega.nz/folder/S3Q2ya4R#0yJPlwwpf3OiV2Uy3hFh_Q

CAMPUS MAP

<https://new.sewanee.edu/contact/campus-map/>



Most on-campus conference events will take place in **6: Woods Laboratories and Spencer Hall; **4: Gailor Hall;** and **3: McClurg Dining Hall.** Free parking is behind **7: Dupont Library.***

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10th

Red Wolf Tour – For conferencegoers coming in from points East, North, and South, join us for a tour of the red wolf captive breeding facility at the [Chattanooga Nature Center](#) from 2-3:30pm. We will see red wolves, the Southeast's extremely rare and endemic apex predator. Only [18 known red wolves survive in the wild today](#), and the conservation of the species will be explored in a panel at SPIEL. 400 Garden Rd, Chattanooga, TN 37419.

Friday Evening Welcome Social - As you arrive to town on Friday evening, please join us for a social gathering upstairs at local pub and restaurant *Shenanigans* from 6-9pm. After 8pm, enjoy the bar downstairs as late as you like. [Shenanigans](#), 12595 Sollace M Freeman Hwy, Sewanee, TN 37375. Food and beverages are available for purchase at the bar.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11th

7:00 am (6: *Spencer-Harris Commons, a.k.a. Spencer Hall atrium*)

Registration – Upon arrival, all attendees must check in at registration and collect their name tags. All volunteers must sign in and out and wear a volunteer badge. If you require a community service letter, please let us know. Attendance is free for students and Sewanee faculty members; please be prepared to provide your college ID. If you have not already paid your conference fees online, please complete payment at the registration table. A QR code linking to our secure payment portal will be available onsite; online payment is preferred. Cash and checks are also accepted. At the registration table, you may:

- Register and pay on-site
- Reserve a spot on one of the two field trips
- Visit the organization-tabling area

Wake up Yoga (*Lawn next to Spencer Hall*) Get the brain and body going first thing with Anna Lynn McCurdy. Anna will start at 7 and continue until 8. Drop by and join in at any time the session is going on!

8:00-9:15 am

I. Legal Ethics Update [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

Presentation and discussion of ethical issues pertinent to environmental public interest attorneys, including:

- Rules on out-of-state activities by lawyers across the Southeast—what constitutes the practice of law in different states? At what stage do you need to engage outside counsel in different states?
- Legal references: ABA Model Rule 5.5 and similar state rules, definitions of practice of law.
- Contact with government agencies/entities on matters that typically don't involve counsel (like records requests) when your organization has litigation against that agency/entity, and how it differs by state in the Southeast.
- Legal references: ABA Model Rule 4.2 and similar state rules, state ethics decisions.
- Ethical issues around large, multi-client settlements.
- Legal references: ABA Model Rule 1.8(g), ABA Ethics opinions, state ethics opinions, law review articles
- The latest and greatest on lawyers behaving badly, including conflicts of interest, lying to the court, and abusing AI

B. Speakers

Meg Parish, Senior Attorney, Environmental Integrity Project, CO

Meg is a clean water attorney who joined EIP in 2022 and primarily works on Clean Water Act permitting and enforcement. Prior to EIP, she led the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment's Clean Water Act permitting section and the Colorado Attorney General's water quality and radiation unit. Meg has also worked at Earthjustice and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

Haley Lewis, Attorney, Environmental Integrity Project, AL

Haley is a Clean Air Act attorney who joined EIP in July 2022 and works on landfill methane and steel sector issues. Before joining EIP, she was a staff attorney for eight years for the Greater Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution (GASP) in Alabama. She holds a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, a J.D. from the Cumberland School of Law and a B.A. from George Washington University.

II. Public Lands Forest Watch Basics *(4: Gailor auditorium)*

A. Workshop Description

Grassroots forest watch is one of the areas of the public trust where grassroots citizens continue to make a strong impact. This workshop covers the basics of federal lands law and how citizens can participate in the process of land management decisions. We cover analyzing and ground truthing timber sale proposals, management plans, and many of the complex issues that forests in the Eastern United States face. Participants will learn how to build legal standing in these processes and be effective forest advocates, while also having the opportunity to learn some of these skills hands on in the Sewanee Domain Forest.

B. Speaker

Davis Mounger, Co-Director, Tennessee Heartwood, TN

Davis has been working on National Forest issues since 1993, starting with the six National Forest districts (DeSoto, Tombigbee, Delta, Homochitto, Bienville, and Holly Springs) in his native Mississippi, and now focuses on public lands in Tennessee and the surrounding area. Davis has conducted in-the-field forest advocacy in eight states. Based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he has taught high school for over 25 years, including Chemistry, Environmental Science, Biology (including a focus on red wolves), English, Theater, French, and Electrical Energy Systems.

III. Defending Life in the Country from Landfills, Quarries, and CAFOs [CLE session] (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Panel Description

Life in the country changes very quickly when landfills, CAFOs, or quarries move in next door and when there are no zoning or other local laws to limit the activity and location of a new industrial neighbor. About half of Tennessee counties have no zoning plans. That means that when these industries (or others like them) come to a community, they may do so with little or no advance notice to surrounding land owners who may find out too late to protect their property values and way of life. Defending life in the country these days depend on knowing what rights and options are available at the local level. Because it has become fashionable lately to “move fast and break things,” industrial infrastructure may get started without permitting and before objections can be raised. A proactive and protective approach is needed to defend life in the country.

1) Landfills: The Jackson Law is a useful state statute that allows local governments to control what kind of landfill may move in and where it can be located before solid waste permitting at the State level takes over and few options are left.

2) CAFOs: Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) come in a variety of forms such as warehouses to raise chicken or pigs. Nearly all of them produce water pollution and dangerous gases from the concentrated biological waste. The consequences to neighboring property, health and watersheds are hard to manage by a nuisance lawsuit because state legislation was passed that equates these operations with traditional farming. Better alternatives are proactive and include knowing how to track and or appeal an NPDES permit, ARAP, and stormwater discharges along with air quality risks that the State may not regulate.

3) Quarries: Quarries also come in a variety of forms that may involve blasting, heavy excavation, pits and heavy transport all of which produces some level of water pollution, and can draw down groundwater supplies or ruin local wells. Protective options include local limits on noise, blasting, and set-backs, as well as knowing how to track and appeal state permits, identify violations, and pushing for best management practices instead of the cost saving methods often employed at the expense of neighboring properties.

B. Speakers

Elizabeth L. Murphy, Attorney, Private Practice, TN

Elizabeth has over thirty years of litigation experience, the last twenty of which have focused on rural land use cases in Tennessee defending landowners from eminent domain takings, industrial pipeline installation, discharges from industry or development of polluted water onto neighboring property, and air pollution from neighboring industry. A specialty area has been landfill litigation representing and consulting for both neighboring landowners and local governmental entities confronted with the complexities of solid waste management, landfills, and resulting consequences such as landfill gas management, rising closure costs and compliance problems. Other representative cases included defeating a proposed quarry in Manchester County and the proposed sale of a prolific spring in Maury County to a Canadian water bottling company. In addition to Tennessee, Ms. Murphy retains a license in California where she spent over seven years in mid-size San Diego law firms litigating complex construction defect cases representing developers, contractors and insurers, along with a host of unique specialty cases ranging from dog bites to a tulip industry battle.

Scott Banbury, Conservation Director, Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter, TN

Scott is the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club's Conservation Director. In this role, he works with and organizes communities across Tennessee as they work to protect the natural resources and quality of life in their communities. Scott is also the registered lobbyist for the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club. Scott started working on environmental issues when he was 15 years old and has spent the subsequent years immersed in urban environmental justice, water and air quality, rural resource extraction, voting rights, and open government issues. Scott has helped form and grow numerous local and regional organizations, including the Tennessee Clean Water Network, Tennessee Forest Council, Frack-Free Tennessee, Protect Our Aquifer and the Dogwood Alliance.

IV. Water Quality Testing Training (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Training Description

Water quality testing is a skill that is well-suited to citizen science. This workshop will cover some overall basics of water quality law and standards, and planning for field sampling, including siting, protocols, transmission of samples, and record keeping. We will also discuss building credibility with agencies, and how attorneys can effectively work with grassroots volunteers to become effective water sentinels and advocates. Participants also

have the option to continue the conversation with presenters about hands-on field sampling after the presentation.

B. Speakers

Justinn Overton, Executive Director, Coosa Riverkeeper, AL

Justinn is the Executive Director and Riverkeeper at Coosa Riverkeeper, where she fights everyday for swimmable, drinkable, and fishable water for Alabamians. She patrols the watershed, tackles pollution, and leads our investigative and legislative efforts while guiding staff and Board of Directors. In 2024, she was recognized by River Network as a National River Hero. She has also been awarded the State Alabama River Hero award by Alabama Rivers Alliance. In 2015, she was named one of Southern Living's "Women of Worth," and in 2017, she starred in a Voices for Clean Air campaign celebrating her passion for water and environmental justice. Justinn graduated magna cum laude in Environmental Advocacy from the University of Alabama and earned a Master's Certificate in Non-Profit Management.

Davis Mounger, Co-Director, Tennessee Heartwood, TN

Davis is the co-Director of Tennessee Heartwood and the Public Lands Chair for the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club. He began working on public lands issues in Mississippi in the 1990s. Davis has conducted in-the-field forest advocacy in eight states. Based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he has taught high school for over 25 years, including Chemistry, Environmental Science, Biology, English, Theater, French, and Electrical Energy Systems.

11:00 am - 12:00 pm -- KEYNOTE ADDRESS/PLENARY SESSION

Public Interest Lawyering [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

John Bonine is one of the pioneers of environmental law in the United States and an Emeritus Professor at the University of Oregon School of Law. He was Associate General Counsel for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before joining the University of Oregon in 1978, where he has created or co-founded numerous institutions: the world's first environmental law clinic (now the [Western Environmental Law Center](#)); the [Public Interest Environmental Law Conference](#); the [Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide](#); and a network of environmental law professors worldwide. He is co-author of two textbooks, *The Law of Environmental Protection* and [Human Rights and the Environment](#). In recent years, his scholarship has focused particularly on public participation and access to justice in environmental decision-making. Bonine taught Administrative Law, Comparative

Environmental Law, Constitutional Law, and Environmental Law, Human Rights and Environmental Law, International Environmental Law, and the LL.M. Seminar.

12:00-1:10 pm -- Lunch

Lunch – We recommend sampling the convenient, diverse, quality dining options at Sewanee’s on-campus [McClurg dining hall](#), but off-campus dining options also exist on and around University Avenue.

Caucuses – Meet in the dining hall or in designated campus classrooms for self-organized discussion groups, mini-presentations, strategy sessions, or to launch new projects or coalitions. To promote a caucus at the conference, inquire at registration. See the whiteboard by Registration to learn about caucuses you can attend.

1:10 – 3:40 pm -- FIELD TRIP

Old Growth Forest Ecology and its Implications for Forest Management – A Field Discussion (*Sign up and learn where to meet up at registration -- because space is limited and demand is high, only those who did not attend last year’s field trip may attend*)

Jonathan P. Evans, Ph.D., Department of Biology, Sewanee: The University of the South, TN

Dr. Evans is a Professor of Biology and the Director of the Sewanee Herbarium at the University of the South. His research in plant ecology focuses on plant population dynamics and the processes that determine the composition and structure of plant communities over time and across landscapes. He is specifically interested in the role of clonal growth as a mechanism for population persistence in plant communities. Through the use of long-term research plots, he also studies land-use history and other drivers of forest change on the southern Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee. Evans leads University efforts to promote landscape-level conservation of biodiversity across the Cumberland Plateau region.

1:10-1:55 pm

V. (Un)exceptional Events? Regulating Air Pollution from Southern Prescribed Fires Under the Clean Air Act's Exceptional Events Provision [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

In 2024, EPA adopted a more protective air quality standard for fine particulate matter air pollution (soot) and will designate areas under this standard in early 2026. States across the South have sought to avoid nonattainment designations by discounting unfavorable data under the Clean Air Act's Exceptional Events provision due to the presence of prescribed fire smoke. Research has shown prescribed fire to be a significant source of air pollution and the South is a hotbed for this activity. This session will explore the use of prescribed fire in the South, the challenges of regulating this pollution source, and the tension over the appropriate use of prescribed fire. It will cover the Clean Air Act's National Ambient Air Quality Standards, EPA's Exceptional Events regulation, agency guidance interpreting that regulation, and the current national discussion regarding regulation of prescribed fire under the Clean Air Act.

B. Speaker

Brian Gist, Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center, GA

Brian is a Senior Attorney in the Atlanta office of the Southern Environmental Law Center. Brian has a B.A. in Biology from the University of Cincinnati and a J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law. For over two decades, Brian has worked on the intersection of air quality, transportation, and land use issues in the Southeast.

VI. Interactive EPA ECHO Training: Tracking Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act Violations and Enforcement Data (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Training Description

For attorneys, legal advocates, community organizers, researchers, and anyone working to monitor and enforce environmental laws, this training will introduce participants to the EPA's Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) database and demonstrate how it can be used as a practical tool to identify and respond to potential Clean Air Act (CAA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) violations. Designed to be interactive, this presentation encourages attendees to bring their laptops and follow along as we explore real-world

environmental compliance data together. ECHO allows users to search for facility-level records on compliance status, enforcement actions, discharge monitoring reports, pollutant exceedances, and more. The platform draws from key EPA data systems—including ICIS-NPDES and ICIS-Air—and provides a window into the environmental performance of a wide range of regulated facilities, from wastewater treatment plants and landfills to industrial operations and coal mines. The training will walk participants through how to:

- Search for violations by enforcement action, location, or facility type;
- Map facilities with recent or chronic noncompliance;
- Export datasets for legal analysis or regulatory review;
- Set alerts for new violations or enforcement actions.

We will also discuss how ECHO has been used by legal advocates and environmental groups to inform citizen suits, community campaigns, and regulatory interventions. Special attention will be given to applications in mining-impacted regions, where facilities often discharge heavy metals, sediments, and other pollutants into vulnerable waterways. Case studies from Central Appalachia will illustrate how ECHO helped identify problem sites, track ongoing pollution, and support legal and advocacy strategies. Participants will leave with hands-on experience using ECHO and a clearer sense of how it can strengthen their own legal, research, or community-based environmental work.

B. Speaker

Matthew Hepler, Environmental Scientist, Appalachian Voices, VA

Originally from Bath County, Va., Matt received his B.A. in geography from Virginia Tech with a concentration in Geographic Information Systems and environmental resources. After working in the GIS field for five years, he spent two years in the master's program at Appalachian State University, focusing on hydrology. Matt returned to Virginia to work for the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards in Wise County, leading the group's water program and helping develop litigation strategies against coal companies. He joined Appalachian Voices in 2017, and is based in its Norton, Va., office.

2:10-3:25 pm

VII. Greenlighting Gaslighting: Seven County, Regulatory Retrenchment and the Future of the National Environmental Policy Act [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, three judges on the D.C. Circuit said this:

“Several recently enacted statutes attest to the commitment of the Government to control, at long last, the destructive engine of material “progress.”¹ But it remains to be seen whether the promise of this legislation will become a reality. Therein lies the judicial role. . . In these cases, we must for the first time interpret the broadest and perhaps most important of the recent statutes: the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Our duty, in short, is to see that important legislative purposes, heralded in the halls of Congress, are not lost or misdirected in the vast hallways of the federal bureaucracy.”

Even a mere 35 years ago the Supreme Court lauded NEPA’s role of insuring that an agency “will have available, and will carefully consider, detailed information concerning significant environmental impacts,” and noted that these disclosure requirements foster meaningful public participation in the decision-making process. What a difference a few decades can make. In *Seven County Coalition v. Eagle County* four justices on the Supreme Court had this to say (without citation to any data in the record): “NEPA has transformed from a modest procedural requirement into a blunt and haphazard tool employed by project opponents (who may not always be entirely motivated by concern for the environment) to try to stop or at least slow down new infrastructure and construction projects.” And this was about the nicest thing they had to say. The Court also suggested that NEPA failures are often harmless. Three other justices concurred on narrower grounds, but still emphasized the limits on NEPA. On other fronts the D.C. Circuit last year decided, without briefing, to throw out the Council on Environmental Quality’s longstanding implementing regulations for NEPA. Individual agency changes to their implementing regulations are just beginning to roll out under the Trump administration, but the initial signs are for less transparency, less data, and boundaries being pushed to the breaking point. All of these developments mean there is a massive corpus of NEPA case law that litigators will have to assess to determine what protections survive. This panel will focus on the important role NEPA has played for communities on the front lines of climate change, industrial pollution and land conservation, review the recent decisions, and assess the path forward for communities and those of us who represent them.

B. Speaker

Robert Wiygul, Attorney, Partner, and Co-Founder, Waltzer Wiygul & Garside, MS

Robert graduated from Millsaps College in 1981 and received his law degree from the University of Mississippi where he was the Editor in Chief of the Mississippi Law Journal. He clerked for Judge W. Eugene Davis of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and afterwards was in private practice in New Orleans. In 1990 he was selected as the Burlington Northern Fellow in Natural Resources Law at the University of Colorado School of Law. From 1990 to 2001 he was with the non-profit environmental law firm Earthjustice in New Orleans and later as the managing attorney of its Rocky Mountain office in Denver. In 2001 he co-founded Waltzer Wiygul & Garside, which has offices in New Orleans and Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The firm specializes in environmental work, including representing landowners, injured workers, and non-profits. He's received a number of awards, including the Sierra Club's William O. Douglas award for exemplary use of environmental law. He is a member of the Louisiana, Mississippi and Colorado bars, and is an instructor at the Tulane University School of Law. He represents individuals and conservation groups in property injury, toxics, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act and other matters.

VIII. Pellets, Pollution, and Power: Environmental Justice in Mississippi (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

Planet destroyer, Drax, is the world's largest consumer of wood pellets, burning over 8M tons per year at their UK power station. They are also the second largest wood pellet manufacturer. Land & Climate Review found that the company broke environmental rules 11,378 times in the US since 2014. Drax received over \$1 billion dollars in subsidies last year alone. It is always looking for new and creative ways to fleece the government. The latest scheme being Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage, in which they cut down trees, burn them and bury the ash in the ground to somehow save the planet. This October, the Mississippi permitting board will consider a Drax expansion to its Gloster facility. It would then be allowed to log and pollute even more. However, there is hope. A growing network of communities who have been fighting the wood pellet industry for years will be working together to help bolster the community of Gloster in its outcry to stop the expansion. Black communities are disproportionately affected by the sourcing and operations of the wood pellet and forest products industries. Grassroots organizing can be effective for not only

raising awareness of the economic, health, and environmental impacts of biomass, but also in developing lasting political organizing skills and inter-community support.

B. Speaker

Danna Smith, Executive Director, Dogwood Alliance, NC

Danna is Founder and Executive Director of the Dogwood Alliance. As a thought leader in the world's largest wood-producing region, Danna connects the dots between forests, climate, and justice in the US South. Environmental colleagues have nicknamed her “the little giant” and Forbes Magazine has referred to Danna as a "Force of Nature." After obtaining a law degree from Emory and working at Greenpeace, Danna founded Dogwood Alliance in 1996. She is the primary spokesperson and strategist for the organization. Danna's expertise drove Dogwood's success in the corporate sustainability movement and her ground-breaking strategies have redefined forest protection in the US South.

3:40-4:55 pm

IX. Zombie Mines and National Forest Crimes: Confronting Coal's Toxic Legacy in Appalachia (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

For decades state and federal regulators have allowed the Appalachian coal industry to evade regulatory compliance. As the industry has contracted, numerous coal company bankruptcies have resulted in the functional abandonment of numerous high liability, chronically non-compliant idled coal mining sites, leaving hundreds of thousands of acres of land in need of remediation, and countless impaired waterways, across the region. Though coal production in Appalachia has slowed down, regulators continue to grant new mining permits in certain areas, including, notably, along the edge of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia, where one company is currently hauling coal through the NF in violation of a decades old ban on such activity. In addition to this abuse of public land, this mining complex has violated reclamation and clean water standards dozens of times in recent years, and is poised to add yet more open wounds of coal mining to the region's inventory of idled and unreclaimed, or inadequately reclaimed, mines. Mary Cromer of Appalachian Citizens Law Center and Claire Horan of Appalachian Mountain Advocates will discuss ongoing research and legal action to prevent coal companies from shirking their reclamation obligations. Andrew Young of Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance will discuss the legal defense a grassroots coalition is mounting against coal's encroachment into the national forest. Willie Dodson of Appalachian Voices will

moderate, and offer perspective on the roles of grassroots organizing and advocacy in tandem with these legal efforts.

B. Speakers

Mary Cromer, Attorney and Deputy Director, Appalachian Citizens Law Center, KY

Mary joined Appalachian Citizen Law Center's staff in October 2008 to expand ACLC's community-based environmental law work. Mary represents individuals in Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky on a variety of environmental justice issues related to the legacy costs of coal mining, including landowners' rights issues, toxic waste disposal, and safe drinking water. Mary has served on the Virginia Governor's Advisory Council on Environmental Justice. Prior to joining ACLC, Mary worked as an Associate Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center and clerked for the Honorable Glen Conrad of the United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia. She earned her JD magna cum laude from Washington & Lee University School of Law. Mary and her family live on a farm in Wise County, VA, that has been in her family since the 1840s.

Willie Dodson, Coal Impacts Program Manager, Appalachian Voices, NC

Willie grew up in the piedmont and mountains of Virginia, and graduated from Berea College with a bachelor's degree in Appalachian Studies. Since 2004, Willie has been organizing for environmental and social justice in Appalachia within a variety of communities from coal-mining areas, to college campuses, to churches. He has been with Appalachian Voices since 2015. As Coal Impacts Program Manager, Willie supports a team of community leaders, policy advocates and experts in documenting the impacts of Appalachian coal mining on public health and the environment, and addressing these impacts through organizing, litigation, legislation, and communications strategies.

Claire Horan, Senior Attorney, Appalachian Mountain Advocates, VA

Claire joined Appalachian Mountain Advocates as a Senior Attorney in June of 2023. Claire graduated cum laude from Harvard Law School in 2018, where she was Co-Editor-in-Chief of Harvard Environmental Law Review. After law school, Claire clerked for the Honorable Travis R. McDonough of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, based in Chattanooga. She then worked at Southern Environmental Law Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, before joining Appalachian Mountain Advocates. Claire is a member of the Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia State Bars and works from Charlottesville, Virginia.

Andrew Young, Attorney, Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, VA

Andrew's practice specializes in environmental litigation aimed at protecting Appalachian ecosystems, particularly cases involving NEPA, ESA, and SMCRA. Andrew is currently lead

counsel challenging South Fork Coal's operations in the Monongahela National Forest, and he is the chair of the Extractive Industries Committee for the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

X. Green Waters, Gray Areas: Nutrient Pollution and Clean Water Act Permitting [CLE session] (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Panel Description

Nutrient pollution is widely recognized as among the most serious problems facing water quality around the world but efforts to control it have been largely ineffective. The panel will present an overview of the complex problem and discuss possible solutions:

- The nature of nutrient pollution and its effects
- Sources of nutrient pollution and the role of point sources
- Technology-based limits v. water-quality based limits
- Efforts to establish numeric nutrient standards for states and interstate water bodies
- Alabama
- Kentucky
- Efforts to translate narrative standards into numeric limits through permits and TMDLs
- Success stories: legal and regulatory approaches that have been effective in reducing nitrogen and phosphorus pollution
- What's next? How do we solve this problem?

B. Speakers

Albert Ettinger, Attorney, Private Practice, IL

Albert is currently in solo practice. From 1997 until 2010, he held the position of Senior Staff Attorney at the Environmental Law & Policy Center of the Midwest.

Mr. Ettinger's work since 1997 has focused on protecting water quality and implementing the Clean Water Act. In doing this, Mr. Ettinger represented numerous environmental organizations in legal and regulatory matters, including the Sierra Club, Prairie Rivers Network, Iowa Environmental Council and Kentucky Waterways Alliance. This work has

involved development of water quality standards, work on animal feeding operations, review of permits for sewage treatment plants and other point sources, mining issues, lawsuits against U.S. EPA, citizen suits against dischargers alleged to have violated their NPDES permits and suits against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers relating to Corps' activities under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Ettinger was also counsel for environmental organizations in several cases brought under the Clean Air Act alleging violation of the new source review provisions and has been counsel for plaintiffs in numerous NEPA actions. Prior to coming to ELPC, Mr. Ettinger was a partner at a private law firm in Chicago where he worked on numerous federal antitrust cases as well as cases arising under the federal commodities, environmental, racketeering and securities laws. Ettinger is a graduate of the University of Michigan (1975) and the University of Michigan Law School (1979).

Ashley Wilmes, Attorney and Executive Director, Kentucky Resources Council, KY

Ashley graduated from Centre College and the University of Oregon School of Law, earning a specialty certificate in Environment and Natural Resources Law. Before joining the Council, she practiced environmental law as a solo practitioner, served as a visiting lecturer at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, and worked as in-house counsel for the environmental advocacy organization WildEarth Guardians. Ashley has represented organizations across the country on environmental matters and has argued cases before the U.S. Courts of Appeal for the Ninth and Tenth Circuits. She is a former Chair of the Environmental Law Section of the Kentucky Bar Association and currently serves as a member of the Kentucky Environmental Education Council.

Eva Dillard, Attorney, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, AL

Eva became Black Warrior Riverkeeper's Staff Attorney in 2010. She is a graduate of Mary Baldwin College and the University of Virginia School of Law. Her practice has been split between litigation and advising clients in both the public and private sector. She is a former Senior Counsel for Environmental Compliance in the Office of the General Counsel at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington, D.C. As Staff Attorney, Eva represents Black Warrior Riverkeeper on legal matters regarding pollution prevention and environmental enforcement; works with our Riverkeeper and Enforcement Coordinator on pollution investigations, file reviews, permit research, document procurement, and public comments; communicates with polluters and their attorneys to encourage environmental compliance and pollution prevention upgrades; and coordinates the work of our legal volunteers and interns. Eva is also a founding board member of the Environmental Defense Alliance, an Alabama organization formed for the conservation, preservation, protection, maintenance, improvement, and enhancement of human health and the

environment on behalf of its members and the public. She is also a member of the inaugural board of the Cumberland School of Law's Land Use and Natural Resources Center. Eva was named a "2023 Alabama River Hero" by the Alabama Rivers Alliance.

Meg Parish, Senior Attorney, Environmental Integrity Project, CO

Meg is a clean water attorney who joined EIP in 2022 and primarily works on Clean Water Act permitting and enforcement. Prior to EIP, she led the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment's Clean Water Act permitting section and the Colorado Attorney General's water quality and radiation unit. Meg has also worked at Earthjustice and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. Meg lives in Denver, Colorado and makes good use of her backyard hammock.

5:10-5:55 pm

XI. Law, Science, and Community Mobilization: The Trifecta of Discipline-Diverse Watershed Advocacy for the Duck River [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

This session presents a case study for building a multi-disciplined and non-partisan campaign to protect the Duck River Watershed, North America's most aquatically biodiverse river. This session will explore the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement throughout the lifecycle of a critical partnership that may form the basis of watershed planning across Tennessee for years to come. Discussion will touch on collaboration across multi-disciplines as vital for effective advocacy, and this session will detail how various disciplines work together to accomplish a common goal for a healthy watershed for all uses. Specific examples will include recent or ongoing clean water issues related to land use planning, zoning, permitting, state regulations, and legislation. The session will conclude with tools and action steps participants can utilize in each area and an interactive discussion on best practices.

B. Speakers

Grace Stranch, Attorney and CEO, Harpeth Conservancy, TN

Grace joined Harpeth Conservancy as COO in September 2021. As of April 2023, Grace is Harpeth Conservancy's CEO. Prior to joining the team, Grace practiced law full time at Branstetter, Stranch & Jennings, PLLC, now Stranch, Jennings & Garvey, PLLC. She has engaged in environmental work across the world and has over 15 years of experience

organizing around environmental issues in Tennessee. As a native Nashvillian, she grew up playing on the Harpeth River and continues to love spending time in nature. Grace received her B.A. in international studies from Rhodes College and her J.D. from University of Tennessee College of Law. Based on her significant community involvement, Grace was honored with the [2020 Athena Young Professional Award and Metro Council Resolution RS220-457](#) and she was named to the [Nashville Bar Foundation's 2024 class of fellows](#).

Elise Karpinski, Attorney, Harpeth Conservancy, TN

Elise serves as Director of Clean Water Protection, leading Harpeth Conservancy's policy work, liaising with grassroots coalitions and state and local officials on state-wide conservation issue campaigns and advocacy efforts. Over the last 10 years, Elise has practiced in areas of compliance and land use law, and served on the boards of various Nashville non-profits. Elise received B.A.s in Political Science and English from Appalachian State University and her J.D. from Elon University. Born and raised in Asheville, North Carolina, Elise is a seventh-generation Appalachian mountaineer. Hailing from a family of educators and farmers, protection of water and land is engraved in her core.

XII. Orphans, Zombies, Strippers, and Deadbeats: Abandonment Issues in the Oil & Gas Industry (*4: Gailor auditorium*)

A. Presentation Description

This panel (which takes its colorful name from a series of interesting industry terms) would discuss the problems posed by decommissioning delays in the Gulf of Mexico. Under federal and state law, oil and gas companies are theoretically obligated to plug wells, remove infrastructure, and restore sites once operations end. In practice, the industry has utilized a playbook of well-established tactics (and benefitted from government inaction) to delay or avoid their decommissioning obligations. This failure to decommission offshore sites results in deleterious impacts to public health, marine life, and the climate. It can also put taxpayers on the hook for cleaning up after the Gulf's multi-billion dollar oil and gas industry.

B. Speaker

Mark Patronella, Attorney, Center for Biological Diversity, DC

Mark is a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. He also focuses on offshore decommissioning in the oil and gas industry. Prior to joining the Center, Mark worked as a

public interest litigator. He holds a law degree from Duke University and an undergraduate degree in economics from Drew University.

6:00-8:00 pm

Dinner –You can sample the convenient, diverse, quality dining options at Sewanee’s on-campus [McClurg dining hall](#) (the dining hall is open 7am-8pm), but off-campus dining options also exist along University Avenue.

7:00-8:30 pm

Environmental Film Screening – (6: *Woods-Blackman auditorium*) Please join us for a special screening of Southern Exposure Films, short documentaries from the Alabama Rivers Alliance and their partners throughout the Southeast. In this collection, we meet Alabama’s salamanders like you’ve never seen them before, and fall for their undeniable charm. We wind through the Tallapoosa River, where our country’s veterans find healing, community, and the joy of casting a line for red eye bass. We confront the environmental impacts and costs of artificial intelligence as massive data centers pop up across the Southeast, threatening to drain communities of precious water and energy, and we are invited in to witness a small town’s fight to protect its peace and health from the relentless blasts of a quarry next door. Stick around for discussion after about the films and this incredible award-winning program! See trailers of the films at <https://alabamarivers.org/se-sewanee/>

8:30 pm – Late

Party – (11: *Convocation Hall on the corner of University and Georgia Avenues*) Join us for fun and refreshments with Chattanooga’s own Rock and Soul outfit The Dose!

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12th

7:00 am (6: *Spencer-Harris Commons, a.k.a. Spencer Hall atrium*)

Registration – Upon arrival, all attendees must check in and collect their name tags. All volunteers must sign in and out and wear a volunteer badge. If you require a community service letter, please let us know. Attendance is free for students and Sewanee faculty members; please be prepared to provide your college ID. If you have not already paid your conference fees online, please complete payment at the registration table. A QR code linking to our secure payment portal will be available onsite; online payment is preferred. Cash and checks are also accepted. At the registration table, you may:

- Register and pay on-site
- Reserve a spot on one of the two field trips
- Visit the organization-tabling area

8:00-9:15 am

I. Keeping Wildlife First in the National Wildlife Refuge System (6: *Woods-Blackman auditorium*)

A. Panel Description

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of public lands and waters with a wildlife conservation mission. But do you know the history and legal framework applicable to these important sanctuaries for wildlife? This presentation will provide an overview of the history and significance of the National Wildlife Refuge System and applicable legal requirements for ensuring these public lands fulfill their conservation purposes and the “wildlife-first” mission of system. The panelists will also discuss how wildlife refuges are established or expanded (and how refuge lands can be divested) and explain the legal requirements, and relevant procedures, for ensuring a use of a refuge is compatible with the refuge’s purposes. The panel will weave in litigation and policy examples featuring southeastern refuges to give real-world examples of how to advocate for these important wildlife habitats.

B. Speakers

Desirée Sorenson-Groves, President & CEO, National Wildlife Refuge Association, VA

Desirée re-joined the Refuge Association in October 2024 as the President and CEO. Her career has been focused on protecting and enhancing the National Wildlife Refuge System, first as a grassroots organizer for the National Audubon Society, then as the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Refuge Association. After 14 years at NWRA, Sorenson-Groves became the Director of the Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign where she managed an Indigenous-led, multi prong effort to stop any development in the Arctic Refuge. She comes back to NWRA after leading Defenders of Wildlife's public and private lands programs as their Vice President of Land & Habitat Conservation. She has a B.A. in Geography from George Washington University.

Christian Hunt, National Wildlife Refuges and Parks Program Director, Defenders of Wildlife, NC

Christian supervises and directs Defenders of Wildlife's National Wildlife Refuges and Parks Program. He partners with agency leaders and members of Congress to enhance and defend the policies, regulations, and laws of the National Wildlife Refuge and Park Systems and oversees campaigns to protect and restore habitat on priority lands and waters. Christian joined Defenders' Southeast program in 2016 before moving into the Land and Habitat Conservation Department. He graduated from law school in 2015, where he studied environmental law, with an emphasis on climate change and the law and the Endangered Species Act. Christian is admitted to the North Carolina State Bar and holds a J.D. from Charlotte Law and B.S. in Geography from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

Ramona McGee, Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center, NC

Ramona develops and implements regional strategy to advance SELC's mission on behalf of Southern wildlife and habitat. She coordinates with and supports wildlife-related work that spans offices and departments, working to highlight our region's rich biodiversity and SELC's work defending it. Ramona also leads and supports state and federal litigation protecting southern wildlife, including lawsuits under the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Administrative Procedure Act. She works with partners and clients to advocate for and defend laws and policies protective of southern wildlife. In particular, Ramona has long advocated for the endangered red wolf in North Carolina, an issue she has consistently worked on since her first day as an attorney at SELC.

II. Cultivating Aesthetic Awareness for Environmental Improvement (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Workshop Description

Aesthetic awareness often inspires environmental improvement. For example, when a community notices the overgrowth of algae on the local pond, they look for changes that will make the pond look nice again. Their desire for beauty begins the process of restoring ecological balance. In this interactive session, a poet, a visual artist and a naturalist will lead an exploration on how artistic expression and collaboration help interest groups reach their goals. The naturalist will give an inspiring presentation on the interactions of living and nonliving components of the natural world. The artist and poet will guide each participant in creating a drawing and/or brief poem on cardstock that expresses their ideal vision of an outdoor setting. The participants will then collaborate to create a single art piece from the art they made. Their collaboration will be displayed at the conference. This session is designed to be replicated in a variety of settings. The exercise enables groups to communicate in way that assures that everyone is heard and to develop a vivid shared vision for the natural environment.

B. Speakers

Vicky Wheeler, Board President, The Friends of Big Canoe Creek, AL

Vickey is a founding member (1990) and president of the board of The Friends of Big Canoe Creek in Springville, Alabama, working extensively on mission development, fundraising and communications. She is part of the team that envisioned and guided the establishment of Forever Wild's Big Canoe Creek Nature Preserve. She is on the board of Alabama Rivers Alliance and co-convenes the annual Environmental Dinner, bringing the arts and sciences together for conversation and collaboration. An accomplished artist, she has implemented art based programs in schools and other institutions. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Alabama and both a Masters in Early Childhood Education and a post graduate Educational Specialist degree from University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Tina Mozelle Braziel, Eco poet and Author, AL

Tina won the Philip Levine Prize for Poetry for *Known by Salt*. Her book *Glass Cabin*, co-authored with her husband James Braziel, was named Southern Literary Review's 2024 Poetry Book of the Year. Her work also appears in *Attached to the Living World: a New Eco poetry Anthology*, *POETRY*, and other publications. As an Alabama Poetry Delegate, she partnered with the Alabama Rivers Alliance to enable local poets to create eco poetry films

for the Southern Exposure Film Festival. She has been awarded a fellowship from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and an artist residency at Hot Springs National Park. She has led ecopoetry writing sessions for Friends of the Locust Fork, Friends of Pinchgut Creek, and Alabama River Alliance. She serves on the Board of Directors for The Friends of Big Canoe Creek.

Henry Hughes, Executive Director, Friends of Shades Creek, AL

Henry is a founding member (1998) and executive director of Friends of Shades Creek in Homewood, Alabama, an emeritus board member of the Cahaba River Society, a past board president of the Alabama Rivers Alliance and a member of the advisory board of The Friends of Big Canoe Creek. Following twenty-five years in forestry research and management in Alabama he was director of education at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens for ten years, where he established Centennial Trees, an urban reforestation program that used local seed sources from century-old trees. In retirement, he has taught numerous classes in tree identification and forest soils and for years has lead forest education hikes regularly in the Birmingham area. His undergraduate and graduate degrees are in plant and soil science.

9:25-10:40 am

III. Red Wolves, Science, Advocacy, and the ESA: a Case Study of the South's Only Endemic Apex Predator and the Treatment of Controversial Megafauna under Federal Law [CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

The red wolf is the American Southeast's only endemic apex predator. Once spread across nearly the entire region all the way north to Long Island, New York, they were persecuted by Euro-Americans until they were almost extinct, radically altering the wild ecosystems that this species once helped to regulate. By 1944, no red wolves survived east of the Mississippi. In 1967, the species was federally listed as endangered. During the 1980s, the last red wolves were removed from the wild and a captive breeding program was established as a part of a federal program to re-establish an experimental population of the species within its home range in coastal North Carolina. The program was first met with great success, and then terrible setbacks when the species proved to be controversial to a small group of local residents within the new population's range. Overall, however, red wolves are incredibly popular locally, statewide, and nationwide. Many in the grassroots have rallied to support the species' recovery throughout its historic range, resulting in

considerable litigation in the federal courts, scientific research, and grassroots advocacy on the wolf's behalf. This interdisciplinary panel will tell the tale of this beleaguered species' journey to the edge of extinction, its road to recovery, and back again. The panel will touch on all 3 of these inquiry & advocacy prongs, exploring the litigation, science, and advocacy initiatives that have been launched to help the species recover. Each of these avenues will be examined to reveal the diversity of successful tactics that can be used to promote the recovery of controversial listed megafauna, along with the natural history of the species, and the pitfalls that await recovery efforts for keystone apex predators like the red wolf.

B. Speakers

Perrin de Jong, Attorney, Private Practice, NC

Perrin has been litigating cases to increase protections for red wolves since 2018. He is currently in private practice, before which he worked for the Center for Biological Diversity for eight years, before which he was in private practice for seven years after an extensive career in campaign organizing and grassroots environmental advocacy. Based in Asheville, North Carolina, he thanks Lewis & Clark Law School for his J.D. and Berea College for his B.A.

Ramona McGee, Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center, NC

As the organization's Wildlife Program Leader, Ramona develops and implements regional strategy to advance SELC's mission on behalf of Southern wildlife and habitat. She coordinates with and supports wildlife-related work that spans offices and departments, working to highlight our region's rich biodiversity and SELC's work defending it. Ramona also leads and supports state and federal litigation protecting southern wildlife, including lawsuits under the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Administrative Procedure Act. She works with partners and clients to advocate for and defend laws and policies protective of southern wildlife. In particular, Ramona has long advocated for the endangered red wolf in North Carolina, an issue she has consistently worked on since her first day as an attorney at SELC.

Davis Mounger, Co-Director, Tennessee Heartwood, TN

Davis has been working on National Forest issues since 1993, starting with the six National Forest districts (DeSoto, Tombigbee, Delta, Homochitto, Bienville, and Holly Springs) in his native Mississippi, and now focuses on public lands in Tennessee and the surrounding area. Davis has conducted in-the-field forest advocacy in eight states. Based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he has taught high school for over 25 years, including Chemistry,

Environmental Science, Biology (including a focus on red wolves), English, Theater, French, and Electrical Energy Systems.

IV. The Rise of Mega-Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and the Fall of Family Farms (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Panel Description

The Southeastern U.S. is a hotspot for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), particularly in poultry and swine production. Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi are among the nation's top producers of broiler chickens, while North Carolina is home to one of the country's largest concentrations of industrial hog operations. These operations generate staggering volumes of waste and pollution, often in areas with weak zoning protections, limited regulatory oversight, and a long history of environmental and social exploitation. Join us to learn about the most recent trends in CAFO development, including the rise of mega-CAFOs, recent policy shifts (e.g., rollback of NEPA reviews, underenforcement of Clean Water Act protections, and climate-smart agriculture funding), the promotion of methane bio-digesters as so-called "climate solutions." The presentation will also discuss advocacy opportunities for impacted communities. SRAP offers free assistance to communities fighting factory farms, offers water testing training, advocates for broader policy change, and helps contract growers transition out of the integrator model of food production. To bring these trends into sharp focus, this session will use the poultry industry as a case study. The vertically integrated poultry model allows corporations—the “integrators”—to retain ownership and control of the birds, feed, and processing facilities, while shifting financial risk, environmental liability, and regulatory scrutiny onto the farmers/contract growers. Under this model, growers often operate under a tournament system, which has been widely criticized as unfair and exploitative. This system causes income volatility and, in many cases, leads to bankruptcy for growers. Hear firsthand from Craig Watts, former poultry contract grower in Fairmont, North Carolina, who in 2014 decided he had had enough of the inhumane animal treatment practices and the unfair balance of power held by large agricultural producers.

B. Speakers

Craig Watts, Contract Grower Transition Program Director, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, AL

Craig is a sixth-generation farmer and former contract chicken grower for Big Ag. He made headlines when he teamed up with Compassion in World Farming USA to expose animal

issues rampant throughout the company's operations. He now serves as the Director of the Contract Grower Transition Program at the Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, where he helps farmers transition out of industrial contracts and into more sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

Charline Whyte, Attorney, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, AL

Charline is a Staff Attorney with the Socially Responsible Agriculture Project. She was born and raised in Costa Rica, where she earned degrees in Special Education and Natural Resource Management. After relocating to the United States, she obtained a J.D. from the Birmingham School of Law.

10:50 - 11:50 am -- KEYNOTE ADDRESS/PLENARY SESSION

Valley So Low: A Lawyer's Fight for Justice in the Wake of America's Great Coal Catastrophe (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

Jared Sullivan is the author of *Valley So Low*, a tense nonfiction account of one of the largest environmental disasters in U.S. history—the 2008 collapse of a coal-ash pond in Kingston, Tennessee that released more than a billion gallons of toxic sludge, devastating the surrounding area and exposing cleanup workers to hazardous materials. The book was awarded the 2025 Tennessee Book Award for nonfiction. Jared is an investigative journalist who has written for The Atlantic, Garden & Gun, Oxford American, The New Yorker, and Time, among many other publications. He was formerly an editor for Men's Journal and Field & Stream. He lives outside Nashville, Tennessee with his family.

11:50-1:00 pm -- Lunch

Lunch – We recommend sampling the convenient, diverse, quality dining options at Sewanee's on-campus [McClurg dining hall](#), but off-campus dining options also exist on and around University Avenue.

Caucuses – Meet in the dining hall or in designated campus classrooms for self-organized discussion groups, mini-presentations, strategy sessions, or to launch new projects or coalitions. To organize and promote your caucus ahead of the conference, [fill out this form](#) by October 1st, and your caucus will be posted to our website by October 3rd. See the whiteboard by Registration to learn about the caucuses you can attend.

12:30 – 3:00 pm -- FIELD TRIP

Biodiversity of Upland Wetlands – A Field Discussion (*Sign up and learn where to meet up at registration*) This field trip on the Sewanee campus will visit different upland wetland habitat types found on the Cumberland Plateau, including a vernal pool, a plateau stream, an acidic seep and a waterfall spray field. We will observe the rare and unique plant and animal species associated with these special habitats and discuss management considerations relating to their conservation. Trip will involve approximately 1.5 miles of relatively easy hiking. Bringing food and drink is recommended.

Dr. Grady Wells, Ph.D., Department of Biology, University of the South, TN

Dr. Wells is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of the South. Professor Wells is a fisheries biologist. His research work includes conservation, ecology, and management of Southeastern fishes of North America. Recent work by Wells has focused on the Endangered Pygmy Madtom (*Noturus stanauli*). Current work focuses on crayfish ecology on the Domain. Wells teaches ecology, field biology, and ichthyology.

Jonathan P. Evans, Ph.D., Department of Biology, University of the South at Sewanee, TN

Dr. Evans is a Professor of Biology and the Director of the Sewanee Herbarium at the University of the South. His research in plant ecology focuses on plant population dynamics and the processes that determine the composition and structure of plant communities over time and across landscapes. He is specifically interested in the role of clonal growth as a mechanism for population persistence in plant communities. Through the use of long-term research plots, he also studies land-use history and other drivers of forest change on the southern Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee. Evans leads University efforts to promote landscape-level conservation of biodiversity across the Cumberland Plateau region.

1:00-1:45 pm

V. “I say you don’t need FEMA”: Emergency Management in the Age of Federal Retreat (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

This presentation examines the significant implications for states of the Trump administration's shift away from federal disaster response leadership. This change is exemplified by Executive Order 14239 and broader policy statements about potentially

eliminating FEMA. Using Kentucky's experience with the 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods, the presentation will analyze how the administration's move from an "all-hazards" federal approach to a "risk-based" state-led model creates insurmountable challenges for resource-constrained states. The presentation will explore the constitutional, financial, and practical problems with federal retreat from disaster management, including the breakdown of interstate coordination, the loss of federal economies of scale, and the disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. Rather than advocating for complete federal control, the presentation will argue for enhanced federal-state coordination that maintains federal resource capacity and authority while strengthening state and local capacity—demonstrating that the solution to past federal response failures lies in reform, not abandonment.

B. Speaker

Ella Helmuth, Attorney, Appalachian Citizens Law Center, KY

Ella joined Appalachian Citizens' Law Center staff in September 2024 as an Equal Justice Works Fellow and Staff Attorney focused on rural water systems. She works in Eastern Kentucky communities, helping them exercise their rights to clean, affordable water and functioning wastewater infrastructure. She also works on flood policy with the Kentucky Flood Coalition. At Georgetown Law School, she served as Executive Editor of the Environmental Law Review and was a Student Attorney in the Environmental Justice Clinic. Ella is a Kentucky native. She holds a B.A. from Tulane University and worked on political campaigns in New Orleans before moving home to serve her community.

VI. The Earth and Its Community of Life: Elevating Non-Human Animals in Justice, Ethics, and Law through Wilderness Protection [CLE session] (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

Despite Howard Zahniser's exhortation that we see ourselves as "dependent members of an interdependent community of living creatures that together derive their existence from the Sun," a view that echoes some of North America's earliest cultures, today's wilderness stewardship has largely failed to elevate the interests and needs of its non-human inhabitants. We will explore the current philosophical shortcomings in narratives at the heart of the wilderness story and philosophy, and how these shortcomings impact the non-human needs in the administrative, judicial, and legislative realms. The panel will explore how the next 60 years of wilderness management and storytelling can centralize the

interests of non-human animals, and will explore potential implications for recreation, research, and other human uses of these special places. The legal system in the U.S., while slow moving, has expanded rights from land-owning white men to men and women of all colors, whether or not they “own” anything. The legal field is expanding into rights for non-human animals. The Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. §§1131 et seq., has protected some of these rights, and has been wielded to stop stream poisoning projects that elevate one human-chosen species, while killing all others, or enjoin shackling animals with collars for “research.” These are matters of justice for non-human animals. This panel will discuss these cases and explore the current narrative, which has far reaching implications on the trajectory of judicial analysis and proposed legislative “fixes” that will flip the traditional judicial analysis. The panel will explore how wilderness management and storytelling can centralize the interests of non-human animals moving forward, and will explore the potential implications for recreation, research, and other human uses of these special places. Lawyers will leave with a deeper understanding of how they can use the Wilderness Act to advance justice for non-human animals in Wilderness.

B. Speaker

Katie Bilodeau, Attorney, Wilderness Watch, ID

Katie is an attorney who joined Wilderness Watch in 2024 as its legislative director and policy analyst. Katie’s academic and professional credentials include natural resources and law. She completed a short fellowship with Wilderness Watch and represented environmental groups privately before serving as Friends of the Clearwater’s staff attorney for five years, fighting to keep the wild in Idaho’s Wild Clearwater Country.

1:55-3:10 pm

VII. 20 Years Later: Reflections on Mountain Justice Summer 2005

(6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

In 2004, a young boy was killed by a boulder accidentally pushed off a mountaintop removal mine in southwest Virginia. The boulder crashed through his home in the middle of the night and killed him in his bed. Following the tragedy, the local community of Inman Virginia invited Earth First members and student groups, plus organizations such as Sierra Club, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and Coal River Mountain Watch to participate in a protest march and memorial in their community. Out of that protest was formed Mountain Justice Summer, which was intended to be a non-violent summer of action

against Big Coal, in the spirit of Mississippi Freedom Summer and Redwood Summer. The summer of 2005 saw a number of significant direct actions in the mountains of Appalachia as a group of 250 people moved from West Virginia to Kentucky to Tennessee, staying in large encampments. Some actions accomplished the desired goals of bringing national attention to the MTR issue; others resulted in some internal divisions. The campaign continued through 2013 until the passings of some key members and internal disagreements on process and focus led to the dissolution of MJS. The panel will reflect on the successes and failures of the MJS campaign and talked about lessons learned.

B. Speakers

Dave Cooper, Participant, Mountain Justice Summer, KY

Dave Cooper of Lexington, Kentucky was a key organizer in MJS from 2006 until the end, organizing several of the summer camps and recruiting new MJS members through the Mountaintop Removal Road Show (2003-2011), which travelled to 22 states doing over 800 presentations to community, church and environmental organizations about mountaintop removal.

John Johnson, Co-Founder, Mountain Justice Summer, TN

John Johnson (aka johnthetreehugger) is an activist, amateur naturalist, assistant research forester and anti-capitalist. He's almost an expert in Appalachian tree and spring ephemeral wildflower identification and eastern forest ecology. John got his start learning the details of nature in the grassroots radical environmental movement of the 1990's. Living at the Sequatchie Valley Institute for 6 glorious years and co-leading the annual Spring wildflower hikes for 20 plus years were a crucial part of his ecological education. Getting more education in forestry and working in the research end of the field for the last 15 years have deepened his knowledge and connection to the Appalachian forests of the Cumberland Plateau and Blue Ridge Mountains. He remains a student of the school called life and a committed anti racist.

Corr de Joch, Organizer, Mountain Justice, NC

Corr took direct action as a Knoxville First Amendment Radio pirate known as dr. hyena in 2001, already working alongside future Mountain Justice founders, activists and organizers. By 2002, he was the Free Radio Asheville pirate station's host. As a part of Eastern Forest Justice League, he focused on forest defense. Specializing in scouting, security, and direct action for anti-clearcut campaigns until being convinced that far more forests could be saved by effective resistance to mountaintop removal coal mining, doc shifted this skillset into Mountain Justice Summer in its very early days. This also led to teaching action camp workshops and a collaborative organizing role for the last 7 years of the organization's peak.

In brainstorming with the organizer Petunia-Michelle, the two co-invented a non-resistance-based creative activism arm called Appalachian Community Economics (ACE), as well as the Coup Clutz Clowns, and Sticktag (the unofficial dueling-fitness sport of MJS). Corr currently endeavors to be effective at stoking the mass consciousness into direct action as a 100%-legit community radio DJ at 103.3 Asheville fm, and as a professional standup comedian, storyslammer, and absurdist playwright. Check out his work at corrdejoch.weebly.com.

VIII. Won't You Be My Neighbor? Increasing Public Engagement in Air Pollution Permitting [CLE session] (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Panel Description

The Title V permitting process was added to the Clean Air Act in 1990 in order to “enable the source, States, EPA, and the public to understand better the requirements to which the source is subject, and whether the source is meeting those requirements.” 57 Fed. Reg. at 32251. The public participation process, however, remains uniformly opaque across states. This panel would discuss efforts in several places to work with community groups, local residents, and permitting agencies to improve the accessibility of the process and meaningfully understand the content of permits and how to improve them.

B. Speakers

Caroline Cress, Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center, NC

Caroline is a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC). Caroline supports SELC’s regional air quality work, focusing on reducing industrial air pollution in overburdened communities. She has worked alongside community groups participating in air permitting processes in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Caroline previously served as an Assistant Attorney General in Washington State where she represented the Department of Ecology, including as the lead attorney for the agency’s Air Quality Program.

Byron L. Gary, Attorney, Kentucky Resources Council, KY

Byron is a program attorney with the Kentucky Resources Council (KRC). Byron has worked on air pollution issues in Louisville and across Kentucky for over a decade, first at the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District and more recently as a part of KRC’s Kentucky Environmental Accountability Project (KEAP). As a part of KEAP he has worked with activists and academics at Rubbertown Emergency Action (REACT), Air Justice,

Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC), and others to increase understanding of and engagement in the air pollution permitting process.

3:20-4:35 pm

IX. Stronger Together: Lessons from a Community-Led Approach to a Resilient, Affordable Just Transition Before the Kentucky Public Service Commission
[CLE session] (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Panel Description

The “Joint Intervenors” are an alliance of Kentucky and Appalachian-based housing, grassroots, solar, community development, and nonprofit legal organizations intervening in Kentucky PSC cases along with legal support from Kentucky Resources Council and Earthjustice. Together, the Joint Intervenors pool their time and resources to advocate before the Kentucky Public Service Commission for an affordable and just transition away from fossil fuels. This panel would include perspectives from multiple attorneys (and possibly a client or two) on the joint intervenor model, as well as obstacles to advocating for a just transition as well as utility affordability, resilience, and reliability in both the energy and water utility worlds.

B. Speakers

Byron L. Gary, Attorney, Kentucky Resources Council, KY

Byron is a program attorney with the Kentucky Resources Council (KRC). Byron has worked on air pollution issues in Louisville and across Kentucky for over a decade, first at the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District and more recently as a part of KRC’s Kentucky Environmental Accountability Project (KEAP). As a part of KEAP he has worked with activists and academics at Rubbertown Emergency Action (REACT), Air Justice, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC), and others to increase understanding of and engagement in the air pollution permitting process.

Cassandra McCrae, Senior Attorney, Earthjustice, PA

Cassandra is a Senior Attorney with Earthjustice’s Clean Energy Program. Cassandra’s practice largely consists of representing organizations in litigated state administrative proceedings on a variety of energy transition, equity, and affordability issues. Before joining Earthjustice in 2017, Cassandra was a Staff Attorney at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, where she was part of the environmental justice and housing justice practice groups. She clerked

for the Honorable Robert C. Chambers in the Southern District of West Virginia and at the First Court of Appeals of Texas for Justice Rebeca Aizpuru Huddle, now at the Supreme Court of Texas. Cassandra earned her JD at The University of Texas School of Law, after working for several years for community-based organizations addressing legacy and ongoing impacts of coal and gas extraction in western Maryland and southwest Pennsylvania.

Mary Cromer, Attorney and Deputy Director, Appalachian Citizens Law Center, KY

Mary is Deputy Director of Appalachian Citizens' Law Center (ACLC). Mary joined ACLC's staff in October 2008 to expand ACLC's community-based environmental law work. Mary represents individuals in Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky on a variety of environmental justice issues related to the legacy costs of coal mining, including landowners' rights issues, toxic waste disposal, and safe drinking water. Mary has served on the Virginia Governor's Advisory Council on Environmental Justice. Prior to joining ACLC, Mary worked as an Associate Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center and clerked for the Honorable Glen Conrad of the United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia. She earned her JD magna cum laude from Washington & Lee University School of Law. Mary and her family live on a farm in Wise County, VA, that has been in her family since the 1840s.

X. The Shifting Sands of "Forever Chemical" Regulations [CLE session] (4: Gailor auditorium)

A. Panel Description

Tennessee is increasingly the target of the land application of biosolids emanating from Municipal wastewater treatment plants. Dan Firth of the TN Chapter of the Sierra Club has been testing these materials and discovered that levels of PFAS have exceeded EPA's guidance levels. Tennessee has also been targeted for land application of effluents from animal processing plants. Haywood County attorney Sarah Levy has worked to address these issues. Per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) in our water and on our lands poses a persistent and significant threat to the human and fiscal health of communities. Ongoing discharges and land application of biosolids either directly or indirectly continue to increase the reservoir of PFAS in the environment. The PFAS regulatory landscape is rapidly evolving and uncertain. From ongoing sampling and analysis, we are learning more about our exposure. At the same time, the regulatory landscape is changing at both state and federal levels. With a particular focus on Tennessee, we will present the current state of ongoing sampling and analysis results from

the UCMR5 as well as state testing, legislative developments and the impact on policy changes at the federal level and the impact on communities.

B. Speakers

Elizabeth L. Murphy, Attorney, Private Practice, TN

Elizabeth has over thirty years of litigation experience, the last twenty of which have focused on rural land use cases in Tennessee defending landowners from eminent domain takings, industrial pipeline installation, discharges from industry or development of polluted water onto neighboring property, and air pollution from neighboring industry. A specialty area has been landfill litigation representing and consulting for both neighboring landowners and local governmental entities confronted with the complexities of solid waste management, landfills, and resulting consequences such as landfill gas management, rising closure costs and compliance problems. Other representative cases included defeating a proposed quarry in Manchester County and the proposed sale of a prolific spring in Maury County to a Canadian water bottling company. In addition to Tennessee, Ms. Murphy retains a license in California where she spent over seven years in mid-size San Diego law firms litigating complex construction defect cases representing developers, contractors and insurers, along with a host of unique specialty cases ranging from dog bites to a tulip industry battle.

Daniel Firth, Ph.D., Chair, Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter Solid Waste Committee, TN

Daniel is an analytical chemist and adjunct faculty at East Tennessee State University. He lives in Kingsport, TN and works on solid waste, coal and coal mining, and energy issues as a volunteer with the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club and other environmental nonprofits.

Scott Banbury, Conservation Director, Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter, TN

Scott is the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club's Conservation Director. In this role, he works with and organizes communities across Tennessee as they work to protect the natural resources and quality of life in their communities. Scott is also the registered lobbyist for the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club. Scott started working on environmental issues when he was 15 years old and has spent the subsequent years immersed in urban environmental justice, water and air quality, rural resource extraction, voting rights, and open government issues. Scott has helped form and grow numerous local and regional organizations, including the Tennessee Clean Water Network, Tennessee Forest Council, Frack-Free Tennessee, Protect Our Aquifer and the Dogwood Alliance.

4:45-5:30 pm

XI. Revolutionary Conservation: Reviving the Endangered Red Wolf Genome (6: Woods-Blackman auditorium)

A. Presentation Description

Professor vonHoldt will share her journey with how conservation genomics can restore and revive endangered species by recovering lost genetic variation. Using the case of Red wolves and Gulf Coast “ghost wolves,” vonHoldt will highlight how innovative tools—from pangenomes to backbreeding and biotechnology—can inform species recovery, strengthen policy frameworks, and reconnect science with community engagement.

B. Speaker

Bridgett vonHoldt, Ph.D., Professor of Evolutionary Genomics and Epigenetics, Princeton University, NJ

Dr. vonHoldt is an evolutionary biologist who specializes in genomic analysis of North American canines. She earned her PhD at UCLA under the mentorship of Robert Wayne. Bridgett joined the faculty in Princeton University’s Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology in 2013. Her research focuses on evolutionary genomics of admixed canine species across hybrid zones, with her researching having significant conservation applications for endangered species like the red wolf. Bridgett is the founder and director of the North American Canine Ancestry Project, as well as a co-founder and lead geneticist for the Gulf Coast Canine Project.

5:45-6:15 pm

Organizing Meeting for SPIEL 2026 – (6: Spencer-Harris Commons, a.k.a. Spencer Hall atrium) If you’re interested in helping to organize next year’s SPIEL conference, pop in to sign up and give your feedback on what went well and what could be improved from SPIEL 2024 as we look forward to next year’s event.

Helpful Navigational Hints:

- ✓ The number before the location of the listed events corresponds to the number assigned to the building on the map found on page 3 of this agenda.
- ✓ The building identified as “6” on the map goes by multiple names. Often referred to as “Spencer Hall,” it is also referred to as “*Woods Laboratories and Spencer Hall*” and sometimes “*Woods.*”
- ✓ Gailor auditorium is found on the bottom floor of 4: Gailor Hall. When you walk into Gailor’s front door, walk down the stairs and the auditorium is on your right.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A PART OF SPIEL 2025! SAFE TRAVELS HOME
AND WE HOPE TO SEE YOU NEXT YEAR.