

Aubrey E. Baldwin

My summer at Cascade Resources Advocacy Group (CRAG) was one of the most enlightening and enjoyable of my life. CRAG is a non-profit law firm that defends the resources of the Pacific Northwest through education, organizing, and strategic litigation. CRAG consists of three public interest attorneys who served as inspirational mentors and wonderful co-workers. Working with them at CRAG exposed me to a variety of environmental and community based legal problems, and allowed me to make a positive impact. Without PILP and other public interest fellowship programs CRAG would be unable to offer summer associate positions to law students, leaving the firm with fewer resources and students without valuable hands-on, community based experience. Therefore, I am grateful to PILP and the students, faculty, and community members who support it.

From our busy office in downtown Portland, I had my hands in state and federal actions from the eastside to the coast serving diverse citizen-activist clients whose commitment to protecting the bountiful diversity of the Northwest ecosystem formed the foundation of our work. Without any support staff or the other trappings of a law office, the pleadings, public relations materials, and correspondence leaving our office was equal to those received from high priced corporate attorneys and the government. This ability to provide parity in service for the public interest was a point of pride for everyone in the office. That attorneys, students, and volunteers alike pitched in to stuff envelopes, make copies, and clean up was another.

The quantity and diversity of active cases enabled me to do work I never imagined being able to perform as a law student. I even took the “first cut” on a few pleadings, taking the evidence submitted by our clients, researching the applicable law, and fitting the two together into a coherent and persuasive legal argument. The subject matter of my work ran the gamut: defending defamation claims against a local land use activist; shielding coastal rainforest from timber corporations hoping for new tree farms; protecting Mount Hood from expanded corporate development; and fighting ill-conceived post-fire commercial logging projects on our public lands. I played a role in almost every imaginable type of proceeding, before agencies, state courts, federal district and appellate courts, complex mediation, settlement agreements, legislative lobbying, and grassroots organizing. The news took on a new significance as the cases and issues I came to care passionately about became front-page headlines. For all these reasons, my PILP experience cemented my commitment to practicing in the public interest.