

My PILP stipend allowed me to work for Northwest Environmental Advocates (NWEA), a small public interest organization that focuses on clean water and energy issues, primarily in Oregon and Washington. I worked on a Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). After fifteen years of inaction, Oregon finally revised its water quality standards for toxic pollutants (e.g. mercury, PCBs, dioxin) and submitted the standards to EPA for approval. Water quality standards contain the designated uses of a water body and the criteria necessary to support the uses. Uses include human water contact sports and fish propagation. For example, to protect salmon, the concentration of mercury in the water must be below 0.2 parts per billion. Water quality standards are important because discharge permits and regulatory programs are based on the standards. Overwhelming scientific evidence shows that Oregon's proposed water quality standards are not stringent enough to protect its uses of the rivers and lakes, particularly salmon and piscivorous wildlife. This lawsuit seeks to compel Oregon to improve its water quality standards to reflect scientific recommendations.

This experience was personally rewarding because I was able to work on clean water, which is my strongest interest. It was educationally rewarding because I was involved in the early stages of litigation, including strategy planning, notice letters, and comments. I learned a great deal about the Clean Water Act, state and federal politics, and administrative law. In addition, I was privileged to work with two talented attorneys and mentors, Nina Bell of NWEA and Melissa Powers of PEAC.