

Travis Eiva

This summer I worked for Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild). Every morning I woke up to the sun pressing through the canvas of my tipi. Cool morning air settled in my exposed face. I would step out into the tall grass and walk to the nearby trailer. There I would make a cup of tea and watch the land and wildlife unfold to the early sun. My place was forty acres of oak, madrone, and ponderosa pine across the valley from the Siskiyou crest in Southern Oregon. Before work, I could shower if I want, or just as is, it was up to me. Either way a nearby stream always held the promise of an afternoon bath when the sun came on real hot. I loved mornings there, quiet, meditative, and at peace. Around 8:30 I would ride my bicycle about two miles to my work. “Work” was a barn with computers, fax and phone, supporting two attorneys who regularly sued the U.S. government for poor management practices on our public lands. It is hard to believe but this little barn, run on a shoestring, housed an operation that consistently held government officials accountable in federal court both at the district and appellate level.

Specifically, KS Wild was committed to preserving wild lands in the Siskiyou mountain corridor. The Siskiyou Mountains stretch across southwest Oregon connecting the Coast range to the interior Cascades. These mountains are full of unique species and characteristics that exist nowhere else in the world. For the people who make up KS Wild, the unique qualities of this area are seen as precious and inspiring. And accordingly, these people give their time and efforts to prevent actions promising to absently disregard and damage what they have come to love.

KS Wild consistently challenged my newly acquired legal skills. The learning curve was steep and by my fourth week I was well engaged in the work. Through the summer I worked on many aspects of environmental law: press releases; administrative comments and appeals; drafting of complaints; motions for injunctive relief; reply briefs to motions to strike an expert witness; appellate briefs; and even field surveys of red tree voles. Every week, I was working on something new while applying the skills I had gathered the previous year. And one of the best parts about it is that to do so I was not required to spend my summer in some office wearing a suit and worried about what my boss thinks of me.

For me this was the perfect answer to the intense immersion of first year. By May I was tired of all my efforts and energy being locked up in the feckless work product of exams. I was looking to be useful toward something outside of myself. At KS Wild I was reminded of what it feels like to take a position on an issue and actually do something about it. And each evening, I would come home and look across the valley at the Siskiyou crest and I knew exactly what I was working for.

Well, this is one of the uses of the Public Interest Law Project (PILP). You can do legal work for a public interest organization in whatever setting and capacity that suits you and PILP will support it. PILP offers a rare opportunity to work with people who have a different approach to the law, do great work, and are not driven by a monthly paycheck. And as far as I am concerned, people like that can really teach you something about what it means to be a good lawyer.