



3rd Annual Western Water, Agricultural, & Environmental Law Conference Speaker Biographies

Lauren J. “Larry” Caster, a Director at Fennemore, practices in the areas of water and environmental law as it relates to the exercise of water rights. He represents clients in both the Gila River Adjudication and the Little Colorado River Adjudication pending in the state courts. He also represents water users in the Upper Gila River Valley in federal court litigation. He has extensive experience litigating in federal court in Arizona and elsewhere.

Larry is a former Chair of the American Bar Association’s Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources, and held numerous other leadership positions in that Section as well. He is admitted to practice in Arizona, California, Montana, Nebraska and Oregon.

David Claiborne is an attorney, partner, and founding member at Sawtooth Law Officers, PLLC. He has over 20 years of experience with court and jury trials in both state and federal courts. He counsels clients involved in litigation and business matters, including alcohol beverage licensing. David also provides estate planning services, trusts and probate, and has experience lobbying before the Idaho legislature.

Christy Clark serves as the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. A fifth-generation rancher from Choteau, Montana, she understands the importance of working together to protect the things that make Montana, Montana – healthy fish and wildlife populations and the habitat they need to thrive, access for people to enjoy the outdoors, and the working landscapes that continue to be the backbone of our state.

At Montana FWP, Christy brings her background in ranching, public service, and business together with a passion for the outdoors to lead FWP in focusing on collaboration with partners, managing a growing interest in outdoor recreation, providing excellent customer service, and bringing the best science and research to fish and wildlife management.

Christy was most recently the Director at Montana Department of Agriculture, an agency she had worked for since 2015. Prior to that, she served three terms in the Montana House of Representatives before choosing to follow her passion for agriculture by working for the Montana Department of Agriculture. She graduated from California State University Sacramento and raised three children on the family ranch alongside her husband.

Ernest Conant is counsel at Downey Brand, LLP in Sacramento. Ernest has been at the forefront of California water law for more than four decades, managing and resolving water resources management issues, particularly those involving water rights and supply, endangered species, and environmental challenges.

Prior to his tenure at Downey Brand, Ernest held the position of Regional Director for the California-Great Basin Region of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation from 2019 to 2024. In this role, he spearheaded the management, development, and protection of water and related resources across California, Nevada, and Southern Oregon. Notably, he led one of the nation’s largest and most complex water projects – the Central Valley Project (CVP) – which supplies water to communities and agricultural areas in northern and central California. He also oversaw Oregon’s Klamath Project, Nevada’s Truckee Storage projects, and California’s Cachuma, Orland, Solano, and Ventura River projects.

Before joining the Bureau of Reclamation, for nearly 40 years Ernest represented water and irrigation districts, community services districts, and joint power authorities (JPAs) on a wide variety of matters,

including [water](#) and [infrastructure](#) projects, developing groundwater banking and storage projects and negotiating complex water contracts.

Jamie Dreher, Partner/Chair, Litigation Department at Downey Brand, helps clients navigate the maze of options in complex corporate reorganizations and bankruptcy cases, under both Chapters 11 and 12.

As the firm's lead bankruptcy attorney, Jamie advises and represents debtors, creditors committees, and both secured and unsecured creditors in financial restructuring, commercial litigation, workouts, transactions, and planning for and navigating complex corporate reorganizations and bankruptcy cases. In addition to representing companies and individuals as lead trial counsel in state and federal court litigation and bankruptcy courts, he is called on to counsel clients facing insolvency-related issues, on both sides of the Debtor/Creditor aisle.

Jamie frequently represents commercial and multiple Ag lenders in pursuing defaulted or distressed obligations, including both judicial and non-judicial enforcement mechanisms, suits and arbitrations enforcing guarantees, and foreclosures of deeds of trust. He also represents banking, financial institutions and other lenders in protecting their collateral through receiverships, and receivers in their capacity as court-appointed fiduciaries.

Based in Sacramento, Jamie serves clients throughout California, Nevada, and in major bankruptcy cases nationwide.

Theresa Dunham is a partner in Kahn, Soares and Conway. Her practice has been laser-focused on California and federal water quality laws for more than 20 years, during which she has become known statewide for expertise on the Porter Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the Clean Water Act, and other related regulatory schemes. She appears regularly before the State Water Resources Control Board, and the state's regional water quality control boards on various and complex water quality issues.

For the last decade, Tess has represented the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC), and served as one of the chief architects of the Central Valley Salt and Nitrate Management Plan. Tess actively participates in the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) Executive Committee along with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, environmental justice advocates, state agencies, federal agencies and others. Most recently, Tess has been selected by the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority to assist in providing water quality regulatory and facilitation services to the Basin Monitoring Task Force. Tess is also providing regulatory facilitation assistance to the Middle Santa Ana River's Bacteria TMDL Task Force and the Lake Elsinore/Canyon Lake Nutrient TMDL Task Force.

Tess earned her J.D. from McGeorge School of Law and studied history at Boston University as an undergrad. She is a graduate of the California Agriculture Leadership Program and received a certificate in Executive Leadership from the University of California, Davis.

James Eklund is a partner at Taft in Denver. He leads Taft's Water and Natural Resources practice area. He is a strong advocate for smart water infrastructure and a recognized authority on water management in the American West.

James works with sovereign governments, multi-state authorities, state agencies, and private interests to deliver critical water infrastructure projects and to design policy regarding water law, natural resources, infrastructure, and environmental protection. He uses his depth of policy-making experience and notable connections with federal, state, and local decision-makers to assist clients on a wide variety of matters,

including environmental, regulatory, and legislative issues and matters involving the use of public-private partnerships.

Fitz Elder serves as Staff Director, United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Prior to that role, Mr. Elder served as Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. He has nearly two decades of experience in Senate service, including as Staff Director for the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies; Deputy Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Appropriations; Republican clerk for the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; and in the office of former Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT).

Lawson Fite supports clients in the natural resource and energy sectors as they manage the complexities of environmental regulation, compliance, and permitting, as well as related litigation. He has significant experience helping clients navigate the legal intricacies required in renewable energy development, forestland management, and endangered species and public lands concerns. His clients include resource owners, developers, and associations who pursue responsible use of these resources.

Lawson is a seasoned litigator who has argued numerous cases in state and federal trial and appellate courts, including ten cases before the Ninth Circuit. He has also testified before Congress on matters concerning proposed reforms to resource management, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Prior to joining Schwabe, Lawson practiced at a boutique law firm that specializes in environmental, energy, and natural resource issues. He began his legal career at the U.S. Department of Justice working on endangered species and wildlife matters. He also spent a year as a law clerk for the Honorable Justice Walter L. Carpeneti of the Alaska Supreme Court.

Robert Frommer serves as a senior attorney with the Institute for Justice. He joined the Institute in August 2008 and litigates cases both to secure individuals' rights to private property and to protect free speech.

Robert is the co-director of the Institute for Justice's Project on the Fourth Amendment, which litigates to increase search and seizure protections for all Americans. As part of that effort, Robert was counsel in *Snitko v. FBI*, where the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that the FBI violated the Fourth Amendment rights of hundreds of safe-deposit box owners by rifling through their belongings based on a warrant it obtained with a ruse. Robert is also counsel in *Schmidt v. City of Norfolk*, which challenges the city's use of 170+ ALPR cameras to track the entire driving population.

Robert is also part of the Institute for Justice's efforts to end civil forfeiture. He was lead counsel on *Sourovelis v. City of Philadelphia*, a case in which IJ brought an end to Philadelphia's "forfeiture machine" and secured millions of dollars in restitution for its victims.

J.J. Goicoechea, DVM, attended the University of Nevada, Reno for his undergraduate studies in Veterinary Science. He then attended Colorado State University where he earned his Doctorate degree in Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Goicoechea spent over twenty years practicing veterinary medicine in central Nevada and rural America. Prior to being appointed Director for the Nevada Department of Agriculture in January of 2023, he served as the Deputy Administrator of the Animal Industry Division as well as the State Veterinarian and interim State Veterinarian for Nevada. JJ served 10 years as a Eureka County Nevada Commissioner and chaired the board all those years before being appointed to his current position. He also served as the Chair of the Nevada

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council for a decade under three Governors, is a past president of the Nevada Veterinary Medical Association, past president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, past Region 6 Vice President for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and currently serves on the N4 Grazing Board and the Public Lands Council Board. JJ and his wife Sally have two daughters, Julieanna and Amelia who represent the 5th generation on the family ranching operation in northern Nevada.

Quinn Kendrick is General Counsel for Peoples Company and its affiliates, responsible for overseeing the company's legal functions across the nation. Quinn provides strategic legal counsel to the company's business divisions and supports its mission of being the leading agricultural land transaction firm in the United States. Quinn works directly with the President to proactively identify opportunities and mitigate risks throughout the organization. In addition to driving the company's overall objectives, Quinn is actively involved in the Capital Markets and Corporate Services divisions.

Quinn is licensed in Kansas and Iowa.

Emily Lewis has 15 years of experience assisting clients in navigating and solving complex water problems. She regularly advises water right owners, wholesale water providers, municipalities, mining companies, investors, agricultural users, and non-governmental organizations. Her water policy work includes overseeing strategic projects like the [Utah Statewide Water Marketing Strategies Project](#) and the [Utah Water Law Policy Inventory and Assessment for the Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan](#). Emily's work focuses on designing and implementing practical solutions that secure clients water resiliency in the face of challenging and changing conditions.

Emily hosts a popular weekly podcast, [Ripple Effect – A Podcast Putting Water in Context](#), is the Chair of the Utah Bar Association's Water Law Committee, and an Adjunct Professor at the SJ Quinney College of Law. Emily is curious, creative, and an upcoming thought leader in the water space.

Hannah Mink is an associate at Taft in Denver. She works in Taft's Environmental Practice group, focusing on the complex legal requirements surrounding water and natural resource use. She works with a range of clients throughout the Colorado River Basin, including public and private interests, and collaborates on policy initiatives aimed at improving local and basin-wide water resource management.

Prior to her experience at Taft, Hannah worked as a law clerk with the Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division in Denver. She served as an extern to Chief Magistrate Judge Rankin in the District of Wyoming.

Before law school, Hannah worked as a paralegal for a water law firm in the Roaring Fork Valley, as a raft guide and ski instructor, and interned with the American Rivers Organization in the Pacific Northwest.

Alyssa Moir is a partner in K&L Gate's Seattle office. She works closely with clients to address their business and legal needs concerning water resources, carbon management, air quality, and hazardous wastes. She counsels agricultural, timber, municipal and energy clients in evaluating and securing water rights in both the near- and long-term, including building and managing water banks and participating in water rights adjudications. Alyssa also advises clients in compliance, due diligence, and permitting strategies for large infrastructure projects in a range of industries, including conventional and renewable energy generation, agricultural production, and data centers.

Alyssa has represented local businesses, national companies, transnational corporations, municipalities, public library systems, and ports in negotiations with state and local regulatory agencies, before administrative hearings boards and in state courts. She has extensive experience working with the frameworks of various state water codes, the Washington State and federal Clean Air Act (CAA) the National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and the federal Clean Water Act (CWA).

Dave Muth leads the Capital Markets team as the Director of Capital Markets by overseeing asset management strategy and execution, integrating technology into workflow processes, and publicly representing the company through industry presentations. He utilizes his extensive experience with farmland investing and operations across the United States to acquire and manage investment grade assets on behalf of clients and capital partners. Dave is responsible for ensuring assets are managed according to investment structures as well as optimizing farm revenue potential and mitigating risks when possible.

Katy Riker is an associate at Holland & Hart. She advises clients on environmental and natural resource matters including permitting, regulatory compliance, due diligence, and litigation.

Katy assists clients with addressing environmental quality concerns, navigating permitting obstacles, and defending project approvals and operations. As a former Deputy Attorney General representing the Idaho Department of Agriculture, Katy is uniquely positioned to understand both sides of enforcement actions, the operational aspects of state agencies, and the particular regulatory issues facing clients in the environmental and agribusiness industries.

In addition, she provides support in government affairs matters both among executive agencies and at the Idaho Legislature.

Prior to joining Holland & Hart, Katy served as an extern to Judge B. Lynn Winmill of the US District Court for the District of Idaho.

Brigit Rollins is a staff attorney at the National Agricultural Law Center. At the NALC, her primary area of research and scholarship is environmental law as it intersects with agriculture. She maintains an interest in promoting sustainability and environmental health through agriculture and resource use. Brigit earned her B.A. in environmental studies with a minor in studio arts from Sonoma State University and her J.D. from Lewis & Clark Law School. She began her work at the NALC as a research fellow during her second year of law school. As a research fellow, Brigit worked on a wide variety of agricultural law topics ranging from liability issues to the new frontier of lab-grown meat. After graduating from Lewis & Clark in 2019, Brigit joined the NALC full-time. She is licensed to practice law in Oregon.

Wes Ward is serving as the 3rd Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas. He was first appointed to the position in 2015 by Governor Asa Hutchinson and reappointed in 2023 by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. He is currently the 2024-2025 President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, or NASDA.

Wes is from the small town of Lake City in Northeast Arkansas and is a graduate of Riverside High School. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Business with an emphasis in Agricultural Finance from Arkansas State University. Wes has also earned a law degree (JD), a Master of Laws degree (LL.M.) in Agricultural and Food Law, and a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Arkansas.

Wes has been serving in the United States Marine Corps for over 24 years and has completed deployments and exercises in Afghanistan, Jordan, Japan, Indonesia, and South Korea. He is currently serving in the Marine Corps Reserves as the Executive Officer of the 1st Civil Affairs Group in Camp Pendleton, California.

Joshua Windham is a senior attorney at the Institute for Justice. Josh joined IJ's headquarters office in 2016. He received his law degree earlier that year from the University of North Carolina School of Law, where he served as president of the Federalist Society and externed for the Honorable Robert Numbers in the Eastern District of North Carolina. Before that, Josh graduated summa cum laude from North Carolina State University with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

Since starting at IJ, Josh has litigated in defense of economic liberty and property rights, with a focus on state constitutions. In 2020, he secured a major Pennsylvania Supreme Court victory holding that the Pennsylvania Constitution demands greater protection for economic liberty than the U.S. Constitution. In 2024, he convinced a state appellate court that the Tennessee Constitution offers more protection from warrantless searches of private land than the U.S. Constitution. Josh is also the co-director of IJ's Project on the Fourth Amendment, which aims to bolster all Americans' right to be secure in their persons and property.

Jeff Witte grew up on his family's ranch on the Rowe Mesa between Moriarty and Las Vegas, New Mexico. He graduated from New Mexico State University (NMSU) with a bachelor's degree in agricultural business management and a master's degree in agricultural economics and economics.

Jeff was named New Mexico's fifth permanent Director/Secretary of Agriculture in May 2011. He is past president of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), past president of the Western Association of State Departments of Agriculture, past president of the Western United States Agriculture Trade Association, past chair of Natural Resources, Pesticide Management & Environment Committee for NASDA and current vice chair of the Natural Resources and Environment committee.

Jeff currently serves on the Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Committee (FRRCC) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator. This committee provides advice and recommendations to the EPA Administrator to assist in developing sound policies.

Jeff was also appointed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a member of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics (ACAS). The purpose of ACAS is to advise the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the National Agricultural Statistics Service on the conduct of agricultural census and surveys.