

TEXAS ENVIRONMENTAL LAW JOURNAL

Member Spotlight: Kathleen Pritchard



Kathleen Pritchard, '15, has been a member of the Texas Environmental Law Journal member since 2013. This summer, she was selected by the Honorable Sam Sparks of the United States District Court for the Western District of Texas for a two-term clerkship following graduation.

Kathleen hails originally from Florence, a small city in the northwest corner of Alabama. She received an undergraduate degree from Wake Forest University in North Carolina where she majored in Political Science and minored in Biology and Environmental Science. She recently sat down with C.C. Huang, '15, Managing Editor, to talk about her interest in Environmental Law and her experience with the Journal.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

CH: What inspired your interest in the environment?

KP: My interest grew organically from doing outdoor activities – I grew up hiking and backpacking, so an interest in conservation was spurred from that.

CH: Is that interest what led you to apply to Texas Environmental Law Journal?

KP: Exactly. I came to law school because I wanted to practice environmental law and so it just seemed natural to pursue all the options in environmental law that I could.

CH: Did you also take Environmental Law your 2L year?

KP: Yes – I took it fall semester of my 2L year with Professor Adelman. (*Professor David Adelman is the Harry Reasoner Regents Chair in Law at the University of Texas School of Law, teaching and writing in the areas of environmental law, intellectual property, and climate change policy. As of 2014, Professor Adelman is also the Faculty Advisor of Texas Environmental Law Journal – Ed.*)

CH: In addition to a natural interest in environmental issues, would you recommend TELJ to law students for any other reason(s)?

KP: With regard to this journal in particular, I think it helped in the clerkship application process that I had expressed an interest in environmental law. For example, Judge Sparks (as well as other employers I've interviewed with) seemed to value the fact that I had followed through on my interest; this activity was not just a filler on my résumé. My exposure to environmental law

through this journal was helpful in demonstrating my commitment to practicing in this area after graduation.

CH: Do you think any of your work on the Journal will translate to your future work?

KP: I think the technical aspects of what we do, like Bluebooking, will obviously help me in my work. Besides that, I have gained more exposure to issues in environmental law that I would not have been exposed to otherwise.

CH: What did you do your 1L and 2L summers?

KP: My first summer, I worked for two regional law firms in Birmingham, Alabama. I was able to help with some appellate, environmental, and financial services matters. My 2L summer, I worked for the Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 Office in Denver, Colorado, and that was an awesome experience. I was with the Office of Regional Counsel, and there was a separate office there handling enforcement. I got to work on permits being considered for approval and regulations that the EPA wanted promulgated – it was mostly dealing with prospective legal issues rather than being reactive.

CH: And after this experience, which side do you think you like better? (Counsel or Enforcement)

KP: That's an interesting question because I definitely want to do litigation, which seems to be more in line with enforcement. But I thought it was useful to see the counsel side of things where I got to work with program engineers and scientists; I am not sure how frequently or closely the enforcement attorneys work with the policy side of things. I liked the scientific aspect of my work this past summer, but I am still interested in environmental litigation. I think I could still go either way right now.

CH: Turning to your future work, what kind of cases do you think you'll encounter on Judge Sparks's docket? Will there be any environmental cases?

KP: I believe Judge Sparks's docket runs the gamut like most federal district judges. Judge Sparks does the criminal cases himself, so I will be helping him handle his civil cases along with another law clerk. The other clerk and I will split the 600 or so civil cases that are filed in one year. Judge Sparks has had some big environmental cases in the past, including the Barton Springs salamander case (*Hamilton v. City of Austin*, 8 F.Supp.2d 886 (W.D. Texas 1998)) – I read his environmental cases before my interview – and he may have some environmental cases during my time with him.

CH: You mentioned you read Judge Sparks's environmental cases – did you think he would bring up your interest in environmental law and work on the Journal and over the summers?

JP: Absolutely. He definitely talked about my interest in environmental law and the fact that I was interning at the EPA. I think some people look at my record and do not think "future clerk," but Judge Sparks seems to think it was natural for me to want to clerk because many district judges deal with environmental cases.

CH: When did you start thinking that you were going to apply for federal clerkships?

KP: I didn't even really know what federal clerkships were until my second year of law school, and I began applying in February [2014] of my second semester. And it took a while, I did not begin hearing from anyone until June, so it was a long process.

CH: What inspired to actually apply, considering some law students begin the clerkship application process much earlier?

KP: I think it was a number of things – while I have always been interested in environmental law, I also wanted exposure to a wide variety of procedural and substantive law. And while I had a great experience with the EPA, it was not a position that would immediately lead to a job after graduation. Finally, this federal clerkship provides a great opportunity to learn more about what I truly want to focus on.

CH: What kind of advice would you give to other Journal members about federal clerkships? If they are thinking about applying for a clerkship, how should they go about doing it?

KP: I would say the biggest thing would be to focus on your writing. It seemed to me that Judge Sparks honed in on that from the beginning of our interview. Take any writing course that you can and improve your writing as much as you can, because I think that is what being a clerk is all about – reading and writing. The second thing would be to focus on forming strong relationships with your professors. I think it was particularly important that I had taken a writing class – Writing for the Court – with Judge Smith (*Judge Bea Ann Smith is with the Texas Court of Appeals in Austin and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Texas School of Law – Ed.*) in the spring. She read about eight of my papers and I think having that relationship with her helped a lot. She was able to recommend my writing first-hand.

CH: Is there anything about your clerkship that you are particularly looking forward to?

KP: I am excited to be inside the courtroom during trial; Judge Sparks said he gets about ten to fifteen trials a year. I can't wait to learn from the inside and experience the judge's thought process and help him write the law.

CH: How do think this clerkship will shape your long-term career plans?

KP: I think at this point that I will want to start out in environmental litigation, and being a federal district clerk will help in observing how attorneys handle cases, how they interact with each other, and how the judge responds to their arguments. I think long-term I may be interested in transitioning from litigation to counsel work, but it would depend on where I am, whether with the private sector or the federal government. I am very excited about this clerkship because I think it will provide some clarity.