

Cody Phillips

■ University of Colorado Law ■ Word Count: 497

By the time I graduated college I had realized that, despite my degree, I did not want to be a career scientist. Although studying biology and geology provided incredible insight into the workings of the natural world, it had also illuminated the necessity of educated actors outside those fields capable of learning from scientific research to implement sound environmental policies. After graduation I sampled a variety of environmental jobs, looking to find one where I could use my degree beyond research to make an impact. That year I worked as an environmental consultant, a private tutor for biology and geology, and volunteered as a naturalist guide where I lead elementary school students on hikes while teaching them about nature. Spreading awareness, though not sweeping change, felt like action in the right direction. And admittedly, I loved the idea of hiking for a living. I pursued the job professionally and eventually became a naturalist guide in Denali National Park.

In Denali I worked in the Kantishna foothills leading guests on old mining trails through the Alaskan wild. In 1985 the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations sued the National Park Service for allowing mining in a National Park and, as a result of the lawsuit, the Park Service attempted to buy all valid claims in the region. Although some refused to sell, by the 1990s mining in the Kantishna foothills had nearly stopped. I hiked by the remnants of these mining operations every day - tangible examples of how the law can protect the land - and it fascinated me. Working in Alaska made me realize how powerful a tool the law can be when used to manage the environment.

I spent the next year applying to law school while experiencing as much of the natural world as I could. I took the LSAT while working at a ski resort, wrote my application essays while working in Yosemite, and the summer of my acceptance, I hiked 2,000 miles

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over public lands from the Mexican border through Portland, Oregon, finishing two weeks before orientation.

Since enrolling in law school, every decision I have made has been to become someone capable of protecting the environment. I chose classes that would teach me the strengths and limitations of environmental laws and agency decision-making and only applied to work for environmental jobs. In the past year and a half I have managed to work on issues regarding fracking regulations and management, the Clean Air Act, and suits involving the Rocky Flats Wildlife Preserve. These jobs have allowed me to learn by doing and better understand the possibilities that a law degree provides in the field of environmental management. This summer, I plan on continuing this trend and have been accepted to work as a law clerk for the Sierra Club.

With my legal degree I plan on ensuring that we manage our lands well and in accordance with science, that our powerful environmental laws are followed and, that the natural world is protected.