

# Introduction

*Speakers: Ellie Rubinstein, Liam Chun Hong Gunn\**

**Ellie Rubinstein:** Welcome to the 2025 *Ecology Law Quarterly* Annual Symposium. Thank you all for joining us here today. We would like to begin by sharing the UC Berkeley land acknowledgement. Today we recognize that UC Berkeley sits in the territory of Xučyun, the ancestral homeland of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This region continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band.

We recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has and continues to benefit from the use and occupation of this land since the institution's founding in 1868. Consistent with our values of community, inclusion and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university's relation to Native peoples. As members of the UC Berkeley community, it is vitally important that we not only recognize history of the land on which we all stand but also recognize the Muwekma Ohlone people are alive and flourishing members of the UC Berkeley and broader Bay Area communities today.

**Liam Chun Hong Gunn:** While of course it is important to acknowledge the land we are on, that is not all we can do to address the history of dispossession of Native lands. In particular, we wish to draw your attention to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, which is a local Bay Area Indigenous women-led organization for the Land Back Movement. The Land Back Movement is an Indigenous-led effort advocating for the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship of their ancestral lands. One option to help out is by paying a Shuumi, a voluntary annual tax for non-Native residents to help them fund land acquisition.

**Ellie:** With that, welcome once again to this year's annual ELQ symposium. I am Ellie Rubinstein.

**Liam:** I am Liam Chun Hong Gunn.

**Ellie:** We have the pleasure of being co-Editor-in-Chiefs of *Ecology Law Quarterly* (ELQ) for the 2024–2025 academic year. For those of you who are less familiar with the journal, ELQ is one of the first environmental law journals in the United States. Founded in 1971, ELQ publishes four editions each year, ranging on topics from environmental justice, energy law, natural resource law,

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38CJ87P21>

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\* Editors-in-Chief, 2024–2025, *Ecology Law Quarterly*.

animal law, water law, and so much more. We are an entirely law student-run operation, publishing at the highest caliber of legal scholarship.

We are proud that academics, practitioners, and students all seek to be published in ELQ, and that we have been cited in many decisions by the United States Supreme Court. Just as the global environmental movement has changed since the 1970s, so has ELQ and the focus of our publication. Environmental issues inherently intersect with other issues of social concern.

We seek to publish pieces that push the conventional boundaries of environmental law. The annual symposium serves as the basis of our .4 edition and has become an opportunity to deliberately expand the voices heard in environmental law legal scholarship beyond those of traditional academia. By bringing in lawyers and experts from across the environmental field and other disciplines, we hope to create a resource in environmental law to be shared with you all here today, and with countless readers to come through the edition's publication.

**Liam:** This year, the annual *Ecology Law Quarterly* Symposium, *Toxic Exposures: Within and Without*, will explore toxic exposures through an environmental justice lens, looking at both outdoor and indoor exposures. By participating, we hope that you all, as members of our community and movement, will be encouraged to ask, what are the boundaries of our lived environments and ecosystems? For a long time, our understanding of the environment was limited to nature, a conception of natural features like forests, mountains, and rivers, separate from society and largely untouched by human hands.

Today, we are generally more attuned to the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, particularly as humans drive the climate crisis, which in turn drives a growing stream of environmental catastrophes. This symposium focuses on an intermediate level of interconnectedness between humans and the environment, specifically the type of environmental harms that can build steadily over time without the clear urgency accompanying a hurricane, a fire, or other natural disaster. These environmental impacts occur on a smaller scale, in our homes, workplaces, agricultural centers, built-in communities, and even the scale of our bodies.

As human health directly reflects exposures we experience in our lived environments, environmental justice is an integral framework through which we can understand the experiences of vulnerable communities within these environments. We can employ similarly interdisciplinary frameworks to understand how all of us are impacted by systemic injustices, corporate greed, and limited legal protections, much in the same way we conceive of flora, fauna, and the planet itself as being shaped by the critical impacts of human industrial development.

**Ellie:** Because you're not here to hear us speak, here's what you can look forward to: Our first session this morning will focus on the human impact of pesticides and the impact of exposures for affected communities. We'll hear from community organizers, experts, and environmental lawyers who work firsthand

with Mexican Indigenous farmworker communities who disproportionately face the public health harms here in California. Farmworkers face enormous toxic loads and the risk of exposure cascades throughout communities.

Our second session will focus on beauty justice. We are honored to be joined by Arnedra Jordan from Black Women for Wellness who is here to discuss the environmental impacts of beauty. We will learn how the confluence of Eurocentric beauty standards, systemic racism, corporate greed, and under-regulation results in dangerous toxic exposures, predominantly for Black women. Beauty justice is a novel approach to addressing the root causes of these exposures and employs a positive framing of the issues focusing on strong supports like community education and resources.

**Liam:** In the afternoon, we'll first discuss building electrification and how we can protect public health, mitigate climate change, and support housing justice. We have a fantastic group of experts here to talk about the environmental health risks common in many of our homes and current efforts to address those risks.

As many of you know, there have been legal developments right here in the Bay Area that focus on this issue. We are excited to discuss how we can address environmental health hazards while ensuring a just housing transition and supporting environmental justice communities. We will also learn about the role lawyers can play in this critical effort.

Finally, we will bring you a presentation series on toxic exposures in nearby communities. We will learn about successful strategies and recent victories in the fight for environmental justice. In this presentation series, local activists from Oakland, Richmond, and San Francisco will highlight recent successes they have achieved on behalf of environmental justice communities. This includes nuclear waste remediation in Hunters Point, San Francisco, battles against the Chevron Refinery in Richmond, California, and opposition to the expansion of Oakland International Airport.

First, we'd like to give a huge thank you to our symposium director, Chloe Winnett, who you will hear from throughout the day.

Thank you to Chloe Winnett for putting together this year's symposium. The symposium director is responsible for a whole one-fourth of all of the journal's publications. Chloe reached out to countless potential speakers and experts in preparation. There's so much work that went on behind the scenes for the last year to bring you all the event we present today, and we are so grateful for her efforts.

**Ellie:** Finally, thank you to all the members of ELQ who volunteered their time and energy to run this event, and thank you to everyone who in the audience who is here today. We know there are many places you could be, and we are truly grateful that you're choosing to learn with us all here today. We look forward to an amazing day, and without further ado, back to Chloe.

