I get asked fairly often for advice on choosing a law school, and I thought it might be worth offering some ideas in a more public setting. Here are some thoughts you might consider as you're looking for a place to study environmental law.

Program Rankings. Berkeley does well in the U.S. News ranking of environmental programs, but you shouldn't rely too heavily on rankings as a source of information. Ranking are useful information but they all have weaknesses. There are some schools that I would definitely put in the top ten myself that aren't listed by US News. To get a broader perspective, you should look at other rankings like Top Ten's list of the top twenty environmental law programs.

Overall Quality of School. The overall quality and reputation of the law school shouldn't be ignored. Law school reputation is important in terms of opening career doors. It also matters because being a good environmental lawyer isn't just about specialized environmental knowledge; it's also about overall legal education. You should also keep in mind the possibility that you might change your mind about specializing in environmental law, so the quality of other programs at the school could become very relevant for you.

Interdisciplinary opportunities. Environmental law involves working with environmental scientists, engineers, and economists. This may be more important for some students than others, but you should think about the overall quality of the university and whether it is strong in terms of environmental science, civil and environmental engineering, and environmental economics.

Environmental Faculty. The environmental faculty will have a big influence on your educational experience. Many law schools have a listing of environmental faculty on their websites. Don't go just by numbers. Not only is quality critical, but the numbers are often inflated by listing faculty who have only a tangential relationship with the field. (The same thing is often true of course listings — you should try to find out what classes have actually been offered the past year or two, because catalogs may list courses that are infrequently offered or no longer offered at all.)

Opportunities for Practical Experience. Many schools have environmental clinics, offer externships with environmental groups, or other kinds of practical experience. Don't just look at labels. What one school calls an environmental policy clinic might be called a practicum or a workshop or seminar at other schools.

Environmental law reviews and other student activities. What kinds of opportunities does the school offer to work on environmental issues with other students? This is important because a lot of learning in law school comes from student discussions and because your fellow students can become an important part of your professional network. Environmental law reviews offer a valuable opportunity to engage with cutting-edge work in the field. Whether a school has an environmental law review may also be a signal of the school's commitment to the environmental area.

This is fairly general advice, but hopefully would be helpful as you think about where to go. Of course, picking a law school is a complicated decision, involving academic quality but also finances, family issues, and quality of life.