This is part of an occasional series on the work of environmental law centers. My goal in this series is to highlight one of the ways that law schools work for the public interest, not just on the coasts but throughout the country. Here, I'll focus on the Interior West — the plains, mountains, and deserts west of the Mississippi and east of the Sierras.

Water is a pervasive concern in that part of the country. Colorado's Getches Wilkinson Center has held convenings and conducted research on Colorado water issues. The Center's focus is exemplified by a recent publication, "Shepherding Appropriated Water Within Colorado and to Lake Powell for Colorado River Compact Security." Given the centrality of the Colorado River to water supply throughout the West, the Center's work has implications beyond its home state. Similarly, Texas Tech has a Center for Water Law and Policy. The premise of the Center is that "[t]he rise of climate variability, changing weather patterns, and increasing water scarcity demands thoughtful and engaged consideration of water resource planning and use." (As an aside, I haven't included the other Texas law schools here because they're in the transition zone between the Gulf states and the West. But the Lubbock location of Texas Tech seems far enough west to count.)

The University of Arizona focuses on the Western working lands in its Natural Resource Users Law and Policy Center. The aim is to be "a nationally recognized leader to provide legal and policy solutions for natural resource use not only in Arizona but throughout the nation" by examining "ranchers, farmers, miners and others whose business involves the use of natural resources." Much of the land in the West, of course, is owned by the federal government. Those public lands are the focus of the Utah's Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources and the Environment. Recent research covers issues relating to national monuments and to the movement seeking to transfer lands away from the federal government.

The University of Wyoming Center for Law and Energy Resources in the Rockies. Energy issues are "are nowhere more acute than in the Rocky Mountain Region, particularly here in Wyoming, which is one of the nation's top energy producing states, providing coal, oil, natural gas, uranium, and renewable resources." A 2018 conference assembled "stakeholders with collaborative interests to engage in a thought provoking discussion on key energy topics currently at play in Wyoming, the region and the nation." Some of the specific issues discussed were "NEPA Expediting for Energy Infrastructure," "Current Issues Facing the Oil and Gas Industry," and "Renewable & Transmission Infrastructure."

Research centers are only one way that law schools contribute to environmental policy. Many schools have strong curricular program that prepare future environmental lawyers, faculty who do important research on the topic, or active environmental clinics. Some, like Michigan or UT excel in all those areas. But trying to survey all of that activity would be too unwieldy. The point is simply that law schools are not (just) factories for producing future lawyers or ivory tower research bastions. They’re also very much involved in addressing pressing social problems, with the environment as just one example.