

At this critical moment in environmental law, the Emmett Institute at UCLA School of Law keeps growing stronger. We are pleased to welcome Alejandro Camacho, a renowned regulatory scholar, as a professor of law.

Camacho will be a core faculty member of the Emmett Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and a faculty affiliate of UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center. More importantly for you, dear reader, he'll be a regular contributor to Legal Planet.

Camacho comes from UC Irvine School of Law, where he was Chancellor's Professor of Law and faculty director of the Center for Land, Environment, and Natural Resources. He also serves as a board member of the Center for Progressive Reform, and he has hosted many roundtables that have advanced policy on emerging environmental issues. His addition brings the Emmett Institute to 17 faculty members working on environmental law.

I asked him to introduce himself by answering a few questions.

Q: What first interested you in practicing environmental and land use law, and how did that lead you to academia or inform your scholarship?

A: Besides its importance to the future of life on earth? Seriously, I was initially drawn to it by the sheer importance and complexity of environmental problems: how environmental protection laws were some of the first laws seeking to reconcile so many different values and interests, especially those that historically lacked voice in the halls of power. I also love that it is interdisciplinary and on the cutting edge of science and ethics. This forces attorneys to work directly with uncertainty and politics. This can make it exhausting! But it's awesome because it means that a good attorney is always learning and invaluable to their client.

Q: You've taught, and been a visiting scholar, in other parts of the country. What is special to you about teaching natural resources and environmental law in California?

A: It is not an exaggeration to say that for well over 100 years, California has been a global leader and innovator in environmental protection law. California established what became the first federal lands dedicated to conservation; enacted pioneering air, water, and energy efficiency regulations; pioneered multi-species, multi-agency habitat conservation plans; and of course, keeps leading the world in climate action. For decades it has been at the vanguard of legal innovation and experimentation to address complex environmental issues, among other areas. Yet there is so much more that can be done. What better place could there be to teach and learn about the law?

Q: One throughline in your work is a focus on improving the design, structures and processes of regulation. Can you say a little bit about your work as it relates to improving public participation and regulatory institutions?

A: I have to admit I'm a bit of a dilettante! I've written on endangered species, public lands, land use, housing, infrastructure planning, local government, food safety, public health, and tribal law, policy, and ethics. My institutional design work has also involved investigations into areas such as commodities regulation, banking law, and the U.S. intelligence community. What connects these, at least in my mind, is my interest in governance generally, including the procedural (how to integrate meaningful participation in regulation), the structural (how to better understand and design the allocation of authority *between* public institutions), and substantive (how

the goals and tools of regulation need to be reshaped to better protect dynamic natural systems and manage emerging technologies).

Q: Your forthcoming book "Lessons for a Warming Planet" looks at how American legal institutions have helped exploit and destroy but also protect and restore the environment over the decades. How are you thinking about environmental progress in 2026?

A: In this political moment, it is difficult not to be discouraged, of course. In fact, my primary motivation for writing this book was to find out what if anything we might learn from the ebb and flow of environmental law in the US over the past 250 years. Perhaps the most heartening lesson is how prior generations each deployed legal imagination when faced with what seemed to them to be an insurmountable environmental challenge. Leaders, social movements, political coalitions, information, and technologies were catalyzed by the law and in turn advanced legal change. Why not this generation?

Q: What's exciting to you about joining UCLA School of Law and the UCLA Emmett Institute?

A: I am beyond excited to be part of such an incredibly bright and diverse group of faculty, students, and staff — at UCLA and the Emmett Institute in particular. I am fairly active in policy-relevant advocacy, and I can think of no place better to build on this than at UCLA and the Emmett Institute. I am sure my work will benefit greatly from my new community, and I hope I can contribute something to UCLA as well.

Q: What will you be teaching in the year ahead, and in coming years?

A: This spring, I'm teaching property law. I expect that I'll probably teach courses in natural resources law and perhaps an environmental law practicum I've enjoyed teaching before, in which students work with scientists, scholars, government officials, and communities on emerging issues of environmental and natural resources justice, law, and policy. In the past, I also taught various courses in environmental law and ethics, property law, and institutional design.