

National Animal Law Conference Reflects Recurring Themes, New Issues to Consider

By Melody Finnemore

The National Animal Law Conference marked its 10th anniversary in February and brought a diverse array of participants to Lewis & Clark Law School. The broadness of the topics presented and discussed during the conference reflect the many ways in which some animal law issues remain steadfast as an area of interest or concern. Yet there were plenty of new topics to delve into as well.

Among the themes that have remained consistent over the last decade are a Student Career Summit, a session on new developments in legislation and litigation, and a panel on animal agriculture. This year's panel included representatives from large farming operations, a family-scale farm and the vegan community.

"The conference is mostly geared toward people who practice law, and we are trying more intentionally to build bridges between folks who don't always necessarily agree," says Kathy Hessler, clinical professor and director of Lewis & Clark's Animal Law Clinic and Center for Animal Law Studies. "It was wonderful to see that people can have a respectful dialog, even when they disagree strongly, and it presented the audience with different perspectives."

New topics included legal protection for animals in China, and changing laws in Oregon that provide stronger protections for domestic animals. The 2010 SeaWorld tragedy, in which a killer whale drowned his trainer, set the stage for a session on the lessons learned from that and other difficult cases.

This year's speakers included Rep. Earl Blumenauer, who spoke about animal welfare in a liveable community. A keynote speech from Nancy Perry, senior vice president of government relations for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, addressed persistence and progress in animal law. Keynote speaker Carol Adams, an author, scholar and activist, highlighted 20 years of animal activism, a timely topic given that the law school celebrated the 20th anniversary of its Animal Law Conference last fall.

"This year gave us an opportunity to celebrate where we've come in the development of animal law and the work people have been doing," Hessler says. "It also gave us a chance to reflect on what we've been able to achieve in the last couple of decades — not just at Lewis & Clark but generally the work everybody has been doing — and then look at the challenges as we go forward."

Pam Frasch, assistant dean of Lewis & Clark's Animal Law Program and executive director of its Center for Animal Law Studies, says the conference also reflected students' growing interest in policy work related to animals.

"Students want to be able to draft legislation, ordinances and other laws and have moot court opportunities because they have a greater interest in the more hands-on activities and more policy work," she says, noting the law school has bolstered its roster of animal law courses and now offers 35 in rotation.

"The field of animal law has grown and broadened so much that we want students to have as wide a variety of courses as possible," Frasch says.

Hessler and Frasch, pioneers in the animal law movement, say the annual conferences continually teach them new elements of the law and new perspectives from those who are involved in animal-related legal issues.

"I always learn things from my colleagues, and I learn more about what the students are doing as far as developing their own activism and legal skills," Hessler says. "The great thing about animal law is that it continues to develop, and it's really nice to have the conference as a snapshot of a moment in time."

Podcasts from the 10th annual National Animal Law Conference are available online at <http://tinyurl.com/lclark-animal-law-podcasts>. 🐾