



## 2nd Annual Western Agricultural & Environmental Law Conference

### Speaker Biographies

**Haig Baghdassarian** has served as Deputy Secretary and Chief Counsel of the California Department of Food and Agriculture since January 2021, having been appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom. He has been a practicing attorney for over 20 years, with significant public service experience: he has served as a San Francisco Human Rights Commissioner, as Deputy City Attorney in San Francisco, and as Legislative Coordinator for the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission. Early in his career, he also represented government entities while working for the Renne Public Law Group and Meyers Nave. Subsequently, he had a solo practice, primarily representing small businesses regarding regulatory and employment matters. Baghdassarian earned a Bachelor of Arts from UCLA, and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. He and his wife have resided in San Francisco for 25 years, and have a college-bound daughter.

**Jessie Barrington** is the executive director at Western Resources Legal Center, located at Lewis & Clark Law School. Jessie is an experienced litigator and educator with extensive experience in the fields of natural resources and environmental law, Federal Indian law, civil and criminal litigation, and public policy.

Before taking on her leadership role at WRLC, Jessie served as an Assistant United States Attorney in Portland, Oregon. During her tenure, she handled hundreds of cases lead the Financial Litigation Unit for the District of Oregon. Her legal acumen was demonstrated in her significant win at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in the case of *United States v. Smith*, which had a major impact on federal criminal jurisdiction in Indian Country.

Prior to her role as an Assistant United States Attorney, Jessie contributed to national policy as a Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. Her role was pivotal in shaping Indian Affairs policy within the U.S. Department of the Interior. Jessie also served at the Department of the Interior as an Attorney-Advisor with the Office of the Regional Solicitor in Portland, Oregon, and exhibited deep expertise across an expansive range of legal domains.

At Lewis & Clark Law School, Jessie has taught courses on Federal Indian Law, NALSA Moot Court, and more. She holds a Juris Doctorate from Lewis & Clark Law School, where she was honored with membership in the Cornelius Honors Society and received the 2011 Community Service Award.

**Rosy Brummette** serves as a Policy Advisor to Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet handling agriculture and natural resources policy issues, including his work as Chairman on the U.S. Subcommittee on Conservation, Climate, Forestry and Natural Resources. Previously she worked for the National Corn Growers Association and on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, under then Ranking Member Stabenow. During her tenure with the Committee, Brummette led Conference Committee negotiations on the conservation title of the 2018 Farm Bill. Brummette grew up on her family's fourth generation row crop and sheep farm in mid-Michigan. She holds a B.S. in Agribusiness Management and a minor in Environmental Economics from Michigan State University.

**Karen Budd-Falen** has returned to the Budd-Falen Law Offices after her two-year appointment in the Trump Administration, Department of the Interior, as the Deputy Solicitor for Wildlife and Parks. As Deputy Solicitor, Karen was the lead attorney in revising the regulations implementing Endangered Species Act, including the

regulations recognizing the rights of local governments to protect the economic stability and customs and cultures of their constituents. She was also heavily involved in drafting regulations giving landowners the rights of appeal of wetland maps on the National Wildlife Refuge System lands. Karen also served as Interior's representative on the task force that revised the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. Karen's first stint in Washington D.C. was for three years in the Reagan Administration, U.S. Department of the Interior, as a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. She later served as a law clerk to the Assistant Solicitor for Water and Power.

As an owner of Budd-Falen Law Offices, Karen has assisted local governments in asserting their rights of consistent review, cooperation and coordination in federal agency decisions; private property owners in protecting their Constitutionally guaranteed property rights, other multiple users in supporting grazing and multiple-use on federal/public lands; and exposing radical environmental groups' abuse of the legal system and the attorney fee-shifting statutes.

**Theresa Dunham** is a partner in Kahn, Soares and Conway. Her practice has been laser-focused on California and federal water quality laws for more than 20 years, during which she has become known statewide for expertise on the Porter Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the Clean Water Act, and other related regulatory schemes. She appears regularly before the State Water Resources Control Board, and the state's regional water quality control boards on various and complex water quality issues.

For the last decade, Tess has represented the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CVSC), and served as one of the chief architects of the Central Valley Salt and Nitrate Management Plan. Tess actively participates in the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) Executive Committee along with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, environmental justice advocates, state agencies, federal agencies and others. Most recently, Tess has been selected by the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority to assist in providing water quality regulatory and facilitation services to the Basin Monitoring Task Force. Tess is also providing regulatory facilitation assistance to the Middle Santa Ana River's Bacteria TMDL Task Force and the Lake Elsinore/Canyon Lake Nutrient TMDL Task Force.

Tess earned her J.D. from McGeorge School of Law and studied history at Boston University as an undergrad. She is a graduate of the California Agriculture Leadership Program and received a certificate in Executive Leadership from the University of California, Davis.

**Fitz Elder** serves as Staff Director, Ranking Member, for the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Prior to that role, Mr. Elder serves as Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. He has nearly two decades of experience of Senate service, including as Staff Director for the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies; Deputy Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Appropriations; Republican clerk for the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; and in the office of former Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT).

**Elizabeth Ewens** is a water resources attorney who practices in Stoel Rives' Environment, Land Use & Natural Resources group, where she emphasizes the preservation and defense of water rights, water right management and regulation, and the representation of parties in water and environmental litigation including comprehensive groundwater adjudications. Elizabeth has represented public water suppliers, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, State Water Project (SWP), Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors, and private individuals and entities in complex water resources litigation in the western U.S. involving both surface and groundwater rights. Her practice also includes the representation of clients in state and federal administrative, trial court, and appellate proceedings, as well as in complex mediations and dispute resolution proceedings to achieve negotiated solutions to complex water and environmental issues.

**J.J. Goicochea**, DVM, attended the University of Nevada, Reno for his undergraduate studies in Veterinary Science. He then attended Colorado State University where he earned his Doctorate degree in Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Goicochea spent over twenty years practicing Veterinary Medicine in central Nevada and rural America. Prior to being appointed Director for the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) in January of 2023, he served as the Deputy Administrator of the Animal Industry Division as well as the State Veterinarian for 3 years. He was elected the Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners during his first year of office and held that seat for ten years while serving three terms as the Eureka County Commissioner. He also served as the Chair of the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council for ten years, President of the Nevada Veterinary Medical Association, on the Public Lands Council and as a board member for the National Cattleman's Beef Association.

When he is not doing business on behalf of the NDA, he can be found on his family's fourth-generation cattle ranch with his wife and two daughters, happily bringing up the fifth generation of ranchers.

**Cort Jensen** was raised on a farm and ranch in Circle, Montana. He went to college at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN before returning to his home state to go to law school. Mr. Jensen has been a state attorney for over twenty years. For the last 15 years, he has served as the chief attorney for the Montana Department of Agriculture. Mr. Jensen has served as the head of the governmental section of the Montana State Bar and still serves on the State Bar's Technology and the Law working group. He now serves on the board of the American Agricultural Law Association and has previously been awarded their Excellence in Governmental Law Award. In his spare time, he loves to play board games and teaches Food and Agricultural Law at the University of Montana Law School.

**Lauren Layne** is a shareholder at Baker Manock & Jensen, PC and the firm's Business Department Chair. She also leads the firm's Water Law and Public Agency practice groups. In addition to representing private farming clients, she serves as general counsel to various irrigation and water districts, flood control districts, and a number of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies. Lauren attended California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, where she majored in Soil Science, chaired the National Agricultural Ambassador Conference, and competed on the Livestock Judging Team. While attending McGeorge School of Law, Lauren competed on the Mock Trial team and was a judicial extern for the Honorable Ronald B. Robie at the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District.

Lauren is a native of Porterville and has an agricultural background that includes farming, growing citrus and olives, and raising sheep. She was very involved in both 4-H and FFA, is a past 4-H Leader, and received her American FFA Degree. She is currently serving as the President to the Cal Poly Alumni Association Board of Directors and as an Executive Committee Member on the Dean's Advisory Council for the Cal Poly College of Agriculture Food and Environmental Sciences. Lauren also serves on the Executive Committee of the McGeorge Alumni Association Board of Directors. She is the Vice Chair of the Association of California Water Agencies ("ACWA") State Legislative Committee and serves on the ACWA Legal Affairs Committee. Lauren is co-chair of the Fresno County Bar Association Ag Law Section and serves as an Advisor to the California Lawyers Association Business Law Section – Agribusiness Committee. Additionally, Lauren is a member of the Fresno County Women Lawyers and Fresno County Farm Bureau.

**Joe Marchini** began his legal career with Baker Manock and Jensen in 1978 immediately upon his graduation from law school. He is currently Chair of the firm's Litigation Department and serves as the firm's General Counsel. His experience includes PACA litigation, crop loss cases, water rights litigation, issues arising from the operation of agricultural cooperatives, breach of fiduciary duty litigation, partition actions, and general business disputes. Joe's other area of emphasis is providing general business advice to various clients engaged

in farming, packing, food processing, produce brokerage and the food import/export industry. Joe has negotiated and drafted various types of marketing contracts and loan agreements for both domestic and international transactions. He also provides cooperative marketing associations' advice on issues of law unique to that business form.

He is a member of the American Agricultural Law Association, the National Society of Accountants for Cooperatives, and the Association of Business Trial Lawyers. He has served as Co-Chair of the State Bar of California's Agribusiness Committee. Joe has been recognized as an AV Preeminent attorney by the Martindale-Hubbell organization for over twenty years. He has been named a "Top Rated Lawyer" in both the Appellate and Commercial Litigation categories. He is a Northern California Super Lawyer. He is a member of the Alumni Board of Governors of UC Hastings College of the Law, past Chairperson of Nancy Hinds Hospice, past member of the boards of the Fresno Business Council and the Fresno City and County Historical Society. He has provided pro bono legal seminars to directors of various entities served by the United Way.

**David McCarville** focuses his practice on succession planning, business and finance issues for partnerships and family-owned businesses. This often involves working closely with his clients and their professional advisors, as well as other Fennemore attorneys in various practice areas to provide expertise as needed. His clients appreciate his ability to identify and resolve legal issues in a timely and efficient manner.

Since 2018, he has been an Adjunct Professor at Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law teaching a course titled Blockchain & Cryptocurrencies: Law and Policy.

David is co-chair of the Arizona Banking Association's Emerging Technology Committee, and is a member of the firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, as well as the Fennemore Foundation.

**Devin McComb** is a commercial real estate attorney with Perkins Coie LLP. He has a diverse practice reflective of the fast-growing Pacific Northwest economy during the past decade. His primary focus is on the acquisition, disposition, financing, leasing and development of commercial, industrial and agricultural properties, and his clients include national and regional building owners, healthcare companies and investors and developers in all varieties of commercial, residential and agricultural transactions.

Devin has built a substantial leasing practice, in which he represents both landlords and tenants on transactions ranging from hotel development ground leases to single tenant retail or office leases. Additionally, Devin has in-depth experience within the retail real estate sector, and he has represented retailers in several bankruptcy acquisitions and regional mall purchases, sales, retail leasing and financings.

Skilled at keeping complex deals on track, Devin has coordinated the legal team on behalf of a municipal port district in a 65-acre mixed-use development that includes apartments and other housing, a hotel, offices, retail spaces, restaurants and marine sales and service businesses over the course of several years. Devin has also led teams and created unique approaches for pension fund management groups and investors to maximize their processes for acquiring and leasing office and retail spaces.

Devin currently serves as a mayoral appointee to the governing council of the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority.

**Jen Modjeska** started her career in the commercial real estate industry as a paralegal in North Carolina specializing in affordable housing finance. After graduating The Penn State University Dickinson School of Law in 2006, she moved to Seattle and briefly acted as a paralegal in T-Mobile's Lease Compliance division. She was then in private practice as a commercial transactional real estate and healthcare attorney for eight years.

In the Spring of 2015, Jen joined the Seattle branch of First American Title Insurance Company's National Commercial Services division. She served as Senior Underwriting Counsel in the Seattle office for 8 years, where she focused primarily on agricultural and large commercial development transactions, before becoming Division Underwriting Counsel, where she now provides commercial underwriting support to the western region.

Jen also serves as founding co-chair of First American's Agricultural Lands Practice Group.

**Merissa Moeller** is an associate at Stoel Rives LLP. She advises clients on the use and development of natural resources, with emphases on water resources and rural land use matters. Merissa brings nearly a decade of experience working with Oregon's natural resource users. During that time, she has represented individual landowners and developers, businesses and local governments, state natural resources agencies, an interstate land use planning commission, and the courts. With that broad policy perspective, Merissa is a strategic problem solver who helps clients tackle complex regulatory issues from multiple angles.

Merissa's water and natural resources practice includes strategic counseling, regulatory compliance, and permitting work on behalf of the hydropower industry and other renewable energy developers, municipal water utilities, irrigation districts, wineries, the timber industry, and other natural resource users. She advises clients on water resource development, water rights and water quality, and fish and wildlife laws.

In her land use practice, Merissa represents developers before local governments, the Land Use Board of Appeals, and Oregon's appellate courts. She has particular experience working with rural developers, including renewable energy companies, to site projects on agricultural and forest land protected for its natural resource values. Merissa's cross-disciplinary expertise enables her to approach permitting and compliance challenges strategically and holistically.

During law school, Merissa worked on behalf of Oregon's natural resource agencies with the Oregon Department of Justice and as a legal extern for the Columbia River Gorge Commission. Merissa also served as a judicial clerk at the Oregon Supreme Court and Oregon Court of Appeals for the Honorable Lynn Nakamoto and Honorable Roger DeHoog.

**Harrison Pittman** is the director of the National Agricultural Law Center. Harrison received his Juris Doctor from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law, after attending Mississippi State University and graduating from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He then earned an LL.M. in Agricultural Law from the University of Arkansas School of Law's Graduate Program in Agricultural Law. Harrison has worked at the NALC since 2001. During that time, his title and job duties have spanned the range of graduate assistant, staff attorney, co-director, interim director and currently, director; in which capacity he has served since 2007.

He has taught at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law as part of the Ben J. Altheimer Distinguished Professorship for Agricultural Law, and has also served as a visiting professor at the Drake University Law School. In addition, he has taught Environmental and Natural Resources Law and Introduction to Agricultural Law in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, & Life Sciences, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness. In that role, he was awarded the 2011-2012 Agricultural Business Club Teaching Award.

**Deanie Reh** moved with her family to the Grand Canyon State from North Carolina when she was five years old. She graduated from Arizona State University (ASU) with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, and later earned her Doctorate of Jurisprudence from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at ASU. Reh has practiced law for almost 46 years, starting out as a criminal prosecutor. Ultimately, her career path took her in many

different directions: Town Attorney for Prescott Valley; private civil law practice; and employment as an in-house attorney for private corporations. Throughout some of her career, Reh was appointed as a part-time judge, serving the municipalities of Scottsdale, Tempe, Peoria, Glendale, and Phoenix. For the last eleven years, Reh has worked in the capacity of agency counsel with the Office of the Arizona Attorney General, representing the Arizona Lottery; the Arizona Department of Gaming, including the Racing Division and the Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts Commission; the State Board of Land Appeals; the Arizona Board of Technical Registration; the Psychiatric Security Review Board; and the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control. Since 2019, her primary client has been the Arizona Department of Agriculture. In addition to the more traditional areas of regulation, the Arizona Department of Agriculture regulates pesticides, weights and measures, native plants, the State Lab, and a local wild horse herd. Agriculture legal representation also includes multiple agricultural boards and commissions. Reh is a horsewoman, and owner-manager of a small horse-boarding facility.

**Brigit Rollins** is a staff attorney at the National Agricultural Law Center. At the NALC, her primary area of research and scholarship is environmental law as it intersects with agriculture. She maintains an interest in promoting sustainability and environmental health through agriculture and resource use. Brigit earned her B.A. in environmental studies with a minor in studio arts from Sonoma State University and her J.D. from Lewis & Clark Law School. She began her work at the NALC as a research fellow during her second year of law school. As a research fellow, Brigit worked on a wide variety of agricultural law topics ranging from liability issues to the new frontier of lab-grown meat. After graduating from Lewis & Clark in 2019, Brigit joined the NALC full-time. She is licensed to practice law in Oregon.

**Ryan A. Semerad** is the managing member of Fuller & Semerad, LLC, a Casper-based Wyoming law firm founded in 1992. Ryan is a trial attorney who defends the rights of individuals in criminal cases and related matters in federal and state courts across Wyoming.

Ryan is a graduate of Union College (NY) and the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. He began his legal career as an associate at Jones Day in Cleveland, Ohio. Ryan then clerked for the Honorable Michael P. Gibbons of the Nevada Court of Appeals in Las Vegas, Nevada. After his clerkship, Ryan practiced in Las Vegas at Holland & Hart LLP.

Ryan relocated to Casper, Wyoming, in 2020. In 2023, Ryan was elevated to the managing member and owner of the law firm.

Ryan lives in Casper, Wyoming, with his wife, his son, and his dog.

**Paul Simmons** is Special Counsel at Somach Simmons & Dunn. He has built a respected career in water law and has a reputation as a go-to expert and problem-solver for clients in water resource and environmental issues.

For 30 years, Paul has focused on water rights and environmental issues affecting water resources. He is widely known for his extensive involvement in the Klamath Basin of Oregon and California, where he represents irrigation interests from both states and has led a coalition of 20 parties in an ongoing general stream adjudication involving hundreds of parties; and counseled, litigated, and represented clients in state and federal legislative forums on matters involving bi-state water rights, endangered species, water quality, tribal, and public land issues. He has been a lead negotiator for multi-party settlement agreements.

That work has typified his overall practice, which has served clients throughout California and in other states on surface and groundwater rights, endangered species, and water quality matters. He is a frequent speaker

on issues of water and environmental law. Recently, Paul, with support from the firm, decided to focus on work for the Klamath Water Users Association as its Executive Director and Counsel.

**Judge Stephen Vaden** serves as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade following his confirmation by the United States Senate on November 18, 2020, and appointment by President Donald J. Trump on December 21, 2020. Before joining the court, Judge Vaden served as General Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture. Judge Vaden supervised more than 250 legal professionals in thirteen offices across the United States who handled all legal matters on behalf of a Department with more than 100,000 employees and an annual budget approaching \$150 billion. During his nearly four-year tenure as head of the Office of General Counsel, the Department won two cases before the United States Supreme Court, relocated and reorganized the agencies that comprise the Department to better serve rural America, engaged in substantial regulatory reform, developed new regulations to allow for the legal sale of hemp and the labeling of bioengineered products, and implemented the 2018 Farm Bill. The Department averaged more than 5,000 matters in litigation before federal legal and administrative tribunals at any one time. Judge Vaden also served as a Member of the Board of the Commodity Credit Corporation, a government corporation devoted to helping American agricultural producers. During his tenure from 2017-2020, the Board developed programs to assist American producers affected by foreign trade barriers. In the private sector, Judge Vaden worked for two law firms – Jones Day and Patton Boggs. At both, Judge Vaden served as an appellate litigator and as part of the firms’ political law practices. In this role, he counseled political candidates, donors, and others involved in the political process on compliance with the litany of federal and state laws that govern seeking and holding elective office.