

Sheppard Mullin's Trout Unlimited and Oceana Litigation Teams Awarded Inaugural Gardner Gillespie Environmental Pro Bono Award

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Sheppard Mullin is proud to announce on Earth Day the inaugural recipients of its new Gardner Gillespie Environmental Pro Bono Award to the litigation teams for pro bono clients Oceana and Trout Unlimited. The award is named in honor of former Sheppard Mullin Business Trial partner Gardner Gillespie, who was known for his commitment to environmental protection and teamwork. Gardner inspired many lawyers to engage in pro bono work to preserve and protect natural habitats and endangered species, including on the Oceana and Trout Unlimited teams.

"This award is a fitting tribute to Gardner, who has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to protecting our environment and inspired so many other lawyers to join him in that fight through impactful pro bono litigation to save endangered creatures and precious natural wonders for future generations," said partner Paul Werner, who leads the Trout Unlimited pro bono litigation team for Sheppard Mullin.

Werner, along with partner Steve Hollman and associates Abram Shanedling, Chris Bauer and Tifenn Drouaud, are being recognized for their exceptional work on federal litigation concerning the Bristol Bay watershed in Alaska. The team challenged the Environmental Protection Agency's withdrawal of critical Clean Water Act protections intended to prevent commercial mining operations that posed severe risks to the region's biodiversity, including its world-renowned salmon fishery. Although initially dismissed on jurisdictional grounds by the district court, the team's perseverance led to a landmark victory at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which affirmed that the EPA's actions are indeed subject to judicial review, a significant legal precedent. This critical win enabled the EPA to reinstate permanent protections for the watershed, safeguarding it from destructive industrial activities.

The Oceana pro bono team, initially led by Gardner Gillespie, and now led by Werner, partner Imad Matini and associates Hannah Wigger, Amanda Witt, Angelo Pavone, Cortney Inman and former associate Charlie Spencer-Davis, is being recognized for over a decade of advocacy on behalf of Oceana, the largest international organization focused solely on ocean conservation. The team's legal battles against the National Marine Fisheries Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration challenged inadequate scientific evaluations and regulatory oversights in biological opinions related to the protection of threatened and endangered sea turtles in commercial fisheries along the Eastern seaboard. Through a series of lawsuits, the team secured significant court mandates requiring the government to revise its assessments and policies, taking into account the impacts of climate change and ensuring stricter monitoring of sea turtle "takes." The team's persistent efforts not only influenced environmental policy but also established a more transparent and scientifically grounded approach to wildlife protection.

“The Gardner Gillespie Environmental Pro Bono Award highlights Sheppard Mullin’s dedication to environmental advocacy and a diverse range of pro bono initiatives. We look forward to recognizing future environmental pro bono warriors,” said Pro Bono partner Daniel Brown.

Attorneys

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Practice Areas

Environmental Litigation

Litigation