

Environmental Lawyer

Permits, pollution and land. Most of the work is paperwork that stops a problem before it starts.

TYPICAL PAY

\$159,670

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$78k to \$352k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Law firms, government agencies, nonprofits, company legal depart...

How you get there

- 1 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Any major is allowed. Science, engineering, geology or economics gives you something most law students do not have, which matters in this field.
- 2 LSAT (Law School Admission Test)** Junior year
 The test every law school accredited by the American Bar Association accepts. Your score and your grade average decide where you get in.
- 3 Law school** 3 years
 Three years for a juris doctor degree. Take environmental law, administrative law and natural resources, and join the environmental clinic.
- 4 Bar exam and admission** About 6 months after graduating
 Pass your state's bar exam plus the ethics exam, then clear a character and fitness review before the state will license you.
- 5 First job** Ongoing
 An agency, a firm environmental group, a clerkship or a nonprofit. The first three years are where you actually learn the work.

Pros and cons

- + Work that decides what gets built and what gets cleaned up
- + Science and law in the same job
- + Government and nonprofit routes qualify for federal loan forgiveness
- Seven years and often six figures of debt before you start
- The nonprofit jobs you want pay the least and get the most applicants
- Cases can take five years to resolve

Optional boosts

Permits and compliance. Contaminated land. Energy and utilities. Environmental justice.

Good to know

Ordinary people can sue polluters themselves

The Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act both contain citizen suit provisions. If a company is breaking its permit and the government does not act, a private citizen or a local group can take them to feder...

Superfund makes you pay even if you did nothing wrong

Under the 1980 federal cleanup law, liability for a contaminated site can land on the current owner, past owners and the companies that sent waste there, whether or not anyone broke a rule at the time. Sor...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lawyers (23-1011.00)

National Conference of Bar Examiners: exams

Law School Admission Council

Lewis and Clark Law School: environmental and natural resources law

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/environmental-lawyer>



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