

## **Meralina Morales**

This summer I had the opportunity to work at the Department of Justice in the Environmental and Natural Resources section, specifically, the Office of Environmental Justice. Our division does not litigate, instead, our department works on implementing environmental justice priorities throughout the federal government and its agencies, as well as holding community meetings in communities with environmental concerns, to aid in negotiations to ensure community needs are heard. I worked mostly on internal federal documentation such as guidance documents and drafting doctrinal research documents to aid Environmental and Natural Resources Division attorneys in litigation.

My major project for the Summer was drafting a guidance document for President Joe Biden's Executive Order 14096 "Revitalizing Our Nations Commitment to Environmental Justice". Guidance documents are binding on agencies but not on the public. They essentially elaborate on laws or regulations and how an agency will enforce them, interpret them, or operate internally to abide by them. The guidance document I drafted instructs all agencies on their new responsibilities internally and to the public and the executive order. From this guidance document, I created a presentation to train various officials on their new roles and responsibilities.

My other large project was updating an internal doctrinal resource regarding lead discharge under the Clean Water Act. This document has explanations of the major doctrines of the Clean Water Act and applications of federal laws lead discharge falls under. This includes synopsis of major cases that attorneys can use to support their affirmative or defensive cases. A major role I played in this document was finding case law initiated by government agencies (which is incredibly sparse), as well as private-party initiated cases that ended in environmental justice victories. The other major role I played was updating the document to reflect the recent Supreme Court decision *Sackett v. EPA*, which changed how wetlands are protected under the Clean Water Act, in a way that offers less protection, and changes the way the federal government may bringing cases against private citizens and corporations. This took many weeks of legal research however, because I am still feeling imposter syndrome over my abilities in legal research and second guess if I did enough research or looked in the right places.

Throughout my internship, I have seen how essential taking Administrative Law was to my success this summer. Particularly, the sections about rulemaking as it was essential to almost all of my assignments this Summer. Unfortunately, I did not get any litigation experience this summer.

Overall, I learned a lot this summer in how the federal government approaches environmental justice and affirmative environmental cases. I am glad to have had the opportunity to learn about the law in a public service-oriented environment like the Department of Justice. I am also thrilled that I have a continuing mentorship with an attorney from our "sister" section, who was very friendly and eager to teach me, and acted as a sounding board to help me through questions I was afraid to ask my direct supervisor.