



## Environmental Law Section

# Interview Series



## Alexandria J. Pike

### Partner at Davies

#### Tell us about your background.

I grew up in the Niagara Peninsula, a beautiful rural area. We had several acres of property at the edge of the Niagara River. I spent most of my playtime outdoors. Hence, I have appreciated the outdoors since the early days.

#### A fun fact about yourself.

I backpacked around Asia as a young person by myself for about 5 to 6 months. Travelling alone for that long gave me the independent nature I needed. It gave me a lot of fortitude. I loved it and would go again tomorrow if I got rid of all my responsibilities.

#### Do you have any hobbies?

Right now, I am part of a group called [Toronto Nature Stewards](#). We are trying to add more support because the City of Toronto cannot look after the issue on its own, removing invasive species from our ravines and Parklands.

I lead a group every week that goes out to remove invasive species from a ravine park in the city.

#### What motivated you to study law?

I have always been interested in social justice issues and environmental issues both. When my friends were leaving undergrad, I watched the jobs that people were taking ahead of me, and I was not very interested in any of them. I picked law because people said it was flexible, that you could do lots of things with it, and I thought that matched my interests, which were varied.

#### Office

Toronto

#### Bar Admission

Ontario, 1995

#### Expertise

Environmental and Indigenous  
Energy





### What made you choose a career in environmental law?

I did not start in this area but was interested in it. I did a summer internship at the [Canadian Environmental Law Association \(CELA\)](#) but didn't know people doing this work full-time, so I did not think it could be a career.

I started doing litigation and then focused on a smaller subset of litigation, planning law, in front of the Ontario Municipal Board. I started to do work regarding contaminated lands. Ontario had just begun to put in place its regime to deal with contaminated lands, and I was very interested in that work. I tried to do more of that work, so I went into the market to see who was doing this work full-time and found a handful of people. I talked to them and ended up at [Davies](#). They had two people doing it full-time and wanted more support in the group. I did not come in with much expertise in the broad area of environmental law. I only knew about contaminated lands and had to learn a lot. The first few years at the firm were a very steep learning curve. However, I started feeling comfortable within a few years and loved the practice. It is very diverse. I deal with different issues every single day. The knowledge of contaminants is changing, the knowledge of the effects of a contaminant is changing, and the knowledge of what we can and need to take action on climate change is changing all the time. I love the variety.

### Speaking of contaminants, have you watched the movie, Erin Brockovich?

I have. I watched it after I became an environmental lawyer. This type of case is still going on today. The company 3M, which makes firefighting foam with PFAS, has just settled a case in the US. There are very big cases still coming regarding emerging contaminants.

**Author's note:** If you are interested in reading about the recent preliminary approval of the 3M's \$10.3 billion PFAS settlement to which Alexandria refers, you may consult the following link:

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-states-withdraw-objections-3ms-103-billion-pfas-settlement-2023-08-29/>

### What recommendation do you have for future environmental lawyers?

I would say to combine foundational, practical skills, such as litigation or corporate skills, along with your specialty interest. Try to pursue both because you need to have excellent skills if you're going to be a good environmental lawyer. You cannot just deal with the policy side of the issues; you have to really hone your skills. If you are interested in environmental law, you should always follow the headlines on the issues. We say practice in a general area before you move into the specialty. We encourage that. We have very few lawyers who come straight into our group who have not had a more general background first.

### That sort of answers my following question: what skills should an environmental lawyer have?

In my practice, we support *corporate transactions*. Therefore, I need to understand how corporate deals work and how due diligence is done. We also work on *litigation cases*, so having that background has been helpful to me. Although we work with our litigation team here, I don't gown and stand up in court. We also do *compliance defense* and assist our clients in *remediation projects*, where we are helping them with the regulatory process and the liabilities around that. It is very diverse, and having solid skills is essential to be able to move between these different areas.

However, accepting that you cannot know everything is also essential. Do not drive yourself crazy because you could put a lot of stress on yourself if you want to be a preeminent expert in every aspect of environmental enforcement and regulation. It would be too much for one person to do. When the file comes, you will gain the knowledge you need. Keep your broad skills strong until the specific issue arises. For instance, if you never had a file on your desk on Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) or the Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG),

you would be sorry for the time spent studying the regulations on PCBs and TDG. Try to understand the regimes more generally and then be prepared to dive down more when files actually arrive.

One of my partners in Montreal would say that environmental law is more complex than tax law. We are constantly being expected to be current on regulations that just came out yesterday, last week, and last month.

### How do you keep yourself up to date with changes in environmental law?

I always read the newspaper and listen to the news. That is the starting point.

The firm has various systems set up through our library to keep us notified, and updates are given to us every week. We track legislation from when it is first introduced and will often comment on it at the early stages.

We also belong to associations that help us with that. For instance, my affiliation with the [Canadian Bar Association \(CBA\)](#) [National Environmental Energy and Resources Law Section \(NEERLS\)](#) started because I wanted to understand the perspective of environmental law across the country, and I felt that their conferences kept me current. I have missed very few of them in the 20-plus years I have been practicing. I go to most of those conferences. We are also very fortunate the [Ontario Bar Association \(OBA\)](#) does a very good job and has many worthwhile conferences.

### From your perspective, how much has environmental law practice changed in the last 20 years?

When I was interested in the practice, in the very early days when I started practicing law, I didn't know any environmental lawyers, except for the very few lawyers at the CBA. I thought it was a practice for non-governmental organizations. I knew







enforcement officers and prosecutors dealt with it in the government, but I did not know that other people were doing it.

In the mid-90s, few people were doing it full-time. It was often an adjunct to a real estate practice or an adjunct to an advocacy practice. There was a core group of people practicing when I joined, and I am probably the second wave of people coming in to do this practice. I'm very appreciative of how generous those people were with their time and how collegial they were. I felt that people were willing to talk about a plethora of unresolved issues and questions. We had fascinating discussions when I started doing this full-time in 2001.

Now, I feel like the liability questions are clearer. What is constantly changing is the expectations around which substances, which management systems, what level of expertise, and what level of management is expected. It's more rigorous today. We expect more from companies today.

Luckily, the collegiality has not changed. I think that part is still a part of the bar doing environmental work, and I am proud to be part of it.

**You have been involved in many high-profile matters. Is there any memorable case that you have worked on?**

Anytime we can help a client deal with serious contamination issues and improve the situation from an environmental perspective, I am proud of what we can do.

Regarding high-profile cases, my partner Sarah Powell and I worked on various wind power developments. We helped develop numerous wind farms when there was a lot of resistance slowing down those projects.

We not only got a good result for our client in terms of pushing back on the resistance that was arising (people did not want those turbines in their backyard) but also helped clarify the law. It's not enough that you are annoyed; that is not an adverse effect that is going to be given attention under the legislation. It helped in other jurisdictions, so they have not had that level of resistance.

**You have a successful career; what do you feel you still need to accomplish?**

As environmental lawyers, we have much to do about climate change. I have been working with small groups over the last two years, trying to talk to different people about what is emerging regarding climate change issues, where things are going, how we can support clients, and how we can help advance the situation. For me, it is a sort of extracurricular project. Would I end up in a situation where it is a bigger part of my practice? I do not know. It is starting, and I am excited to see that I have clients looking to invest in emerging technologies that will help with greenhouse gas reduction and are considering alternative energy approaches and forms. I am excited to be part of all that.

**What are you most proud of? It does not have to be work-related; it could be at a personal level.**

I am proud that I have been able to have a career that has been very interesting and dynamic, always changing, always challenging. It is quite amazing that I have not been bored at my job a day in my life. I am proud that I found something that I could do that has been that exciting. Additionally, I have been able to do it with the family. I am always sad when people feel like they have to pick between the two, when women leave the practice because they cannot accommodate the needs of the job with their families. I have been able to have a very well-rounded career and home life.

**To finalize this interview, is there something you want to share that I have not asked?**

I appreciate the relationships I have developed through associations such as the CBA NEERLS. It is a big reason I have stayed in the profession as long as I have. I feel like I have good friends across the country who are interested in the same questions and issues that I am and are interested in discussing them and exploring

them. I encourage people to be part of it. It enriches your career and is a great way to focus on something other than your day-to-day but still related to what you do.



#### About the Author

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Alegria is a Student Member at Large of the OBA Environmental Law and Natural Resources and Energy Law Sections and a Member at Large of the CBA NEERLS.

If you want to be featured in our Environmental Law Section Interview Series or would like to suggest someone, do not hesitate to contact Alegria at [alegriarosallesruiz@osgoode.yorku.ca](mailto:alegriarosallesruiz@osgoode.yorku.ca)

