

The Public Trust Doctrine in Environmental and Natural Resources Law

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The Public Trust Doctrine in Environmental and Natural Resources Law

SECOND EDITION

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Dedication

Throughout the ages, the public trust has come to life as a result of extraordinary vision and courage on the part of jurists, lawyers, and scholars. We dedicate this book to all of the pioneers, past and present, with particular recognition of the contributions of Justinian,¹ Sir Matthew Hale,² Justice Andrew Kirkpatrick,³ Justice Stephen J. Field,⁴ Justice Stanley Mosk,⁵ Justice Alan Broussard,⁶ Justice Paula Nakayama,⁷ Justice Presbitero Valasco, Jr.,⁸ Judge Gisela Triana,⁹ Justice Ronald Castille,¹⁰ and of course Professor Joseph Sax.¹¹ And, too, we dedicate it to our own children, all children on Earth, and to future generations—all of whom have a stake in the legal evolution of a doctrine that advances their inalienable rights to a balanced and healthy ecology.

1. For his influential code, the Institutes of Justinian, *see* J. INST. (T. Sandars trans., 4th ed. 1867).

2. For his treatise, *De Jure Maris*, reprinted in STUART MOORE, A HISTORY OF THE FORESHORE AND THE LAW RELATING THERETO (3rd ed. 1888).

3. For *Arnold v. Mundy*, 6 N.J.L. 1 (N. J. 1821).

4. For *Illinois Central R.R. Co. v. Illinois*, 146 U.S. 387 (1892).

5. For *City of Berkeley v. Superior Court of Alameda County*, 606 P.2d 362 (Cal. 1980).

6. For the “Mono Lake” opinion, *National Audubon Soc. v. Superior Court of Alpine Cty.*, 33 Cal.3d 419, 189 Cal.Rptr. 346, 658 P.2d 709 (1983).

7. For the “Waiahole Ditch” opinion, *In re Water Use Permit Applications*, 9 P.3d 409 (Haw. 2000).

8. For *Metropolitan Manila Development Authority v. Concerned Citizens of Manila Bay*, 574 S.C.R.A. 661 (Phil. S. Ct. 2008).

9. For a decision recognizing atmosphere as a trust asset, *Angela Bonser-Lain, et al. v. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality*, No. D-1-GN-11-002194 (201st Judicial District Court, Tx., Aug. 2, 2012).

10. For his scholarly opinion in *Robinson Township v. Commonwealth*, 83 A.2d 901 (Pa. 2013).

11. For his path-breaking article, *The Public Trust Doctrine in Natural Resource Law: Effective Judicial Intervention*, 68 Mich. L. Rev. 471 (1970).

Summary of Contents

Table of Cases	xiii
Table of Secondary Sources	xxi
Authors' Note	xxxiii
Preface to the Second Edition	xxxvii
Preface to the First Edition	xxxix
Acknowledgments	xli
Chapter 1 · Introduction	3
Chapter 2 · The Foundation Cases	57
Chapter 3 · Navigability and Its Evolution	95
Chapter 4 · Wetlands	139
Chapter 5 · Water Rights	171
Chapter 6 · The Wildlife Trust	217
Chapter 7 · Beaches	257
Chapter 8 · Parks and Public Lands	289
Chapter 9 · Private Property and the Public Trust Doctrine	313
Chapter 10 · The Public Trust Doctrine Abroad	333
Chapter 11 · The Global Public Trust and Co-Trustee Management	365
Chapter 12 · Frontiers of the Public Trust	407
Index	447

Detailed Table of Contents

Table of Cases	xiii
Table of Secondary Sources	xxi
Authors' Note	xxxiii
Preface to the Second Edition	xxxvii
Preface to the First Edition	xxxix
Acknowledgments	xli
Chapter 1 • Introduction	3
Putting the Public Trust Doctrine to Work	10
Waters and Water Rights	18
The Public Trust Doctrine in Natural Resource Law: Effective Judicial Intervention	23
The Headwaters of the Public Trust: Some Thoughts on the Source and Scope of the Traditional Doctrine	41
A Comparative Guide to the Western States' Public Trust Doctrines: Public Values, Private Rights, and the Evolution Toward an Ecological Public Trust	54
Chapter 2 • The Foundation Cases	57
<i>Arnold v. Mundy</i>	57
<i>Martin v. Waddell's Lessee</i>	63
<i>Pollard v. Hagan</i>	66
<i>Illinois Central Railroad Co. v. Illinois</i>	68
<i>Shively v. Bowlby</i>	77
<i>Robinson Township v. Pennsylvania</i>	82
Note on the Source of the Public Trust Doctrine, According to Justice Kennedy	93
Chapter 3 • Navigability and Its Evolution	95
A. The Evolving Geographic Scope of Navigability	97
<i>Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Mississippi</i>	97

The Public Trust Doctrine: A Twenty-First Century Concept	102
<i>People ex rel. Baker v. Mack</i>	103
<i>Parks v. Cooper</i>	106
<i>Wilbour v. Gallagher</i>	112
<i>Arkansas River Rights Committee v. Echubby Lake Hunting Club</i>	116
<i>Glass v. Goeckel</i>	119
<i>Montana Coalition for Stream Access, Inc. v. Curran</i>	124
B. Purposes of Navigability	130
<i>Munninghoff v. Wisconsin Conservation Commission</i>	130
<i>Marks v. Whitney</i>	132
Chapter 4 • Wetlands	139
<i>Just v. Marinette County</i>	141
<i>Rock-Koshkonong Lake Dist. v. State Dept. of Natural Resources</i>	147
<i>Palazzolo v. Rhode Island</i>	156
<i>Palazzolo v. State</i>	157
<i>McQueen v. South Carolina Coastal Council</i>	159
<i>Esplanade Properties, LLC v. City of Seattle</i>	164
Chapter 5 • Water Rights	171
Restoring the Public Trust: Water Resources and the Public Trust Doctrine, A Manual for Advocates	172
<i>National Audubon Society v. Superior Court of Alpine County</i> (“Mono Lake” Decision)	173
<i>Environmental Law Foundation v. State Water Resources Control Board</i>	184
<i>In re Water Use Permit Applications, Petitions for Interim Instream Flow Standard Amendments, and Petitions for Water Reservations for The Waiahole Ditch</i> (“Waiahole Ditch” Decision)	189
Hawai’i Water Commission Splits Over Waiahole Water Case	203
Water Privatization Trends in the United States: Human Rights, National Security, and Public Stewardship	208
Chapter 6 • The Wildlife Trust	217
The Pioneer Spirit and the Public Trust: The American Rule of Capture and State Ownership of Wildlife	218
<i>Geer v. Connecticut</i>	221
<i>Cawsey v. Brickey</i>	230
<i>Barrett v. State</i>	232
<i>State Department of Fisheries v. Gillette</i>	236
<i>Owsichek v. State, Guide Licensing and Control Bd.</i>	239
<i>Center for Biological Diversity, Inc. v. FPL Group, Inc.</i>	244
Advancing the Sovereign Trust of Government to Safeguard the Environment for Present and Future Generations (Part I): Ecological Realism and the Need for a Paradigm Shift	252
Chapter 7 • Beaches	257
<i>Borough of Neptune City v. Borough of Avon-by-the-Sea</i>	257

<i>Matthews v. Bay Head Improvement Ass'n.</i>	261
<i>Raleigh Avenue Beach Ass'n v. Atlantis Beach Club, Inc.</i>	265
<i>State ex rel. Thornton v. Hay</i>	268
<i>Stevens v. City of Cannon Beach</i>	280
<i>Stevens v. City of Cannon Beach</i>	281
The Comedy of the Commons: Custom, Commerce, and Inherently Public Property	285
Chapter 8 • Parks and Public Lands	289
A. State Parklands	290
<i>Gould v. Greylock Reservation Comm'n</i>	291
<i>Big Sur Properties v. Mott</i>	294
<i>County of Solano v. Handlery</i>	296
<i>Raritan Baykeeper v. City of New York</i>	298
B. Federal Parks and Public Lands	303
<i>Sierra Club v. Department of Interior</i>	305
<i>Sierra Club v. Department of Interior II</i>	308
Chapter 9 • Private Property and the Public Trust Doctrine	313
A. The Public Trust Doctrine's Accommodation of Private Property	313
The Public Trust Doctrine and Private Property:	
The Accommodation Principle	313
<i>Boone v. Kingsbury</i>	314
<i>Vermont v. Central Vermont Railway</i>	319
B. The Public Trust Doctrine as a Background Principle of Property Law	325
<i>National Association of Home Builders v. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection</i>	326
<i>Coastal Petroleum v. Chiles</i>	327
<i>R.W. Docks & Slips v. State</i>	329
Chapter 10 • The Public Trust Doctrine Abroad	333
<i>M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath</i>	333
<i>Juan Antonio Oposa et al. v. The Honorable Fulgencio S. Factoran, Jr., G.R.</i>	341
<i>Metropolitan Manila Development Authority v. Concerned Residents of Manila Bay</i>	344
<i>Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) v. Attorney General</i>	346
<i>Waweru v. Republic</i>	348
The Public Trust Doctrine, Environmental Human Rights, and the Future of Private Property	353
<i>British Columbia v. Canadian Forest Products Ltd.</i>	361
Chapter 11 • The Global Public Trust and Co-Trustee Management	365
A. Co-Tenant Trustees	365

Advancing the Sovereign Trust of Government to Safeguard the Environment for Present and Future Generations (Part I): Ecological Realism and the Need for a Paradigm Shift	365
<i>United States v. 1.58 Acres of Land</i>	367
<i>In re Steuart Transportation Company</i>	372
B. The PTD on a Global Level	375
The Public Trust Doctrine: A Viable Approach to International Environmental Protection	377
Sovereignty Bounded: Public Trusteeship for Common Pool Resources?	379
The Planetary Trust: Conservation and Intergenerational Equity	380
C. The Atmospheric Trust and the Climate Crisis	382
Atmospheric Trust Litigation Across the World	383
<i>Alec L. et al. v. Jackson</i>	389
<i>Bonser-Lain ex rel. TVH, et al. v. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality</i>	395
D. The Ocean Trust	399
The Public Trust Doctrine in the Exclusive Economic Zone	399
The Public Trust Doctrine: What a Tall Tale They Tell	401
The Silver Anniversary of the United States' Exclusive Economic Zone: Twenty-Five Years of Ocean Use and Abuse and the Possibility of a Blue Water Public Trust Doctrine	402
New Discourses on Ocean Governance: Understanding Property Rights and the Public Trust	403
Chapter 12 · Frontiers of the Public Trust	407
“You Can’t Negotiate with a Beetle”: Environmental Law for a New Ecological Age	407
A. An Expanding <i>Res</i>	410
<i>Lake Beulah Management District v. State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources</i>	412
Application of the Public-Trust Doctrine and Principles of Natural Resource Management to Electromagnetic Spectrum	419
A Property Rights Approach to Sacred Sites Cases: Asserting a Place for Indians as Nonowners	424
Identity and Cultural Property: The Protection of Cultural Property in the United States	428
Congress’s Copyright Giveaway	430
B. New Enforcement Approaches	433
Democracy, Distrust, and the Public Trust: Process-Based Constitutional Theory, the Public Trust Doctrine, and the Search for a Substantive Environmental Value	434
Office of Legal Guardian for Future Generations	440
The Public Trust Doctrine in Motion	445
Index	447

Table of Cases

The principal cases are in bold type. Cases cited or discussed in the text are in roman type. References are to pages. Cases cited in principal cases and within other quoted materials are not included.

- Ackerman v. Steisel, 104 A.D.2d 940 (N.Y. App Div. 1984), 294
- Adjudication of the Existing Rights to Use of all Water in the Missouri Drainage, 55 P.3d 396 (Mont. 2002), 130, 202
- Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODA) v. Attorney General**, Misc. Cause No. 0100 (Uganda 2004), 346
- Alabama v. Texas, 347 U.S. 272 (1954), 305, 368, 399
- Alec L., et. al. v. Jackson**, § 863 F. Supp. 2d 11 (D. C.C. 2012), *aff'd.*, 561 Fed. Appx. 7 (D.C. Cir. 2014) (mem.), 40, 303, 343, **389**, 393–395
- Alford v. Finch, 155 So.2d 790 (Fla. 1963), 232
- Almader v. Town of Kennebunkport, 106 A.3d 1099 (Me. 2014), 276
- Allen v. McClellan, 405 P.2d 405 (N.M. 1965), 232
- American Electric Power Company v. Connecticut, 131 S.Ct. 2527 (2011), 391, 394
- American Pelagic Fishing Co. v. United States, 379 F.3d 1363 (Fed. Cir. 2004), 332
- Anglers of the Ausable v. Dept. of Envtl. Quality, 796 N.W.2d 460 (Mich. 2011), 123, 124
- Appleby v. New York, 271 U.S. 364 (1926), 50, 73, 94, 98, 101
- Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest v. Hassell, 837 P.2d 158 (Ct. App. Az. 1991), 9, 12, 75, 77, 181, 197, 394
- Arizona v. California, 373 U.S. 546 (1963), 68, 253
- Arkansas River Rights Committee v. Echubby Lake Hunting Club**, 126 S.W.3d 738 (Ark. App. 2003), 116, 314
- Arnold v. Mundy**, 6 N.J.L. 1 (N.J. 1821), 11, 57, 94, 122, 258, 419
- Attorney Gen. v. Hermes, 339 N.W.2d 545 (Mich. App. 1983), 228
- Barhaugh v. State, 264 P.3d 518 (Mont. 2011), 398, 438
- Barney v. Keokuk, 94 U.S. 324 (1877), 99, 102
- Barrett v. State**, 116 N.E. 99 (N.Y. App. 1917), 232
- Berkeley v. Superior Court of Alameda County, 26 Cal.3d 515 (Cal. 1980), 137, 175–77, 245, 322
- Bernstein v. City of Pittsburgh, 77 A.2d 452, (Pa. 1951), 301
- Big Sur Properties v. Mott**, 62 Cal. App.3d 99 (Cal. Dist. Ct. App. 1976), **294**, 296–98
- Board of Trustees of Philadelphia Museum v. Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 96 A. 123 (Pa. 1915), 298
- Bohn v. Albertson, 238 P.2d 128 (Cal. Dist. Ct. App. 1961), 116, 117

- Bonser-Lain, et al. v. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality**, No. D-1-GN-11-002194, 2012 WL 3164561 (Tex. Dist. Ct. Aug. 2 2012), 395, 411
- Bonser-Lain ex rel. TVH v. Tex. Comm’n on Env’tl. Quality*, 438 S.W.3d 887 (Tex. App. 2014), 396
- Boone v. Kingsbury**, 273 P. 797 (Cal. 1928), 314, 318
- Borough of Neptune City v. Borough of Avon-by-the-Sea**, 294 A.2d 47 (N.J. 1972), 37, 193, 257, 260, 261, 320
- Boston Waterfront Development Corp. v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, 393 N.E.2d 356 (Mass. 1979), 319
- Bott v. Natural Resources Comm.*, 327 N.W.2d 838 (Mich. 1982), 123, 412
- British Columbia v. Canadian Forest Products Ltd.**, 2 S.C.R. 74 (Can. 2004), 361
- Brooklyn Park Commissioners v. Armstrong*, 45 N.Y. 234 (1871), 293
- Butler ex rel Peshlakai v. Brewer*, 2013 WL 1091209 (Ariz. Ct. App., Mar. 14, 2013), 411
- California Trout v. Superior Court* 266 Cal. Rptr. 788 (Cal. App. 1989), 183
- Carnahan v. Moriah Property Owners Association*, 716 N.E.2d 437 (Ind. 1999), 119
- Carson v. Blazer*, 2 Binn. 475 (Pa. 1810), 57
- Carter v. Harper*, 196 N.W. 414 (Wisc. 1923), 422, 424
- Carter v. S.C. Coastal Council*, 314 S.E.2d 327 (S.C. 1984), 162
- Casitas Municipal Water District v. United States*, 76 Fed. Cl. 100 (2007), 184, 332
- Cawsey v. Brickey**, 144 P. 938 (Wash. 1914), 230
- Center for Biological Diversity, Inc. v. FPL Group**, 83 Cal. Rptr. 3d 588 (Cal. Ct. App. 2008), 6, 229, 244
- Champlin’s Realty Associates L.P., v. Tillson*, 823 A.2d 1162 (R.I. 2003), 158, 159
- Chernaik v. Kitzhaber*, 263 Or. App. 463 (2014), 397
- Chiesa v. D. Lobi Enters.*, No. A-6070-09T3, 2012 N.J. Super. LEXIS 2218 (N.J. Super. Ct. Ap. Div. Sept. 28, 2012), 267
- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 515 U.S. 50 (2010), 423
- City of Clifton v. Passaic Valley Water Comm’n*, 539 A.2d 760 (N.J. Super. 1987), 214
- City of Daytona Beach v. Tona-Rama, Inc.*, 294 So.2d 73 (Fla. 1974), 276
- City of Madison v. Wisconsin*, 83 N.W.2d 674 (Wisc. 1957), 302
- City of Montpelier v. Barnett*, 49 A.3d 120 (Vt. 2012), 129
- Coastal Petroleum v. Chiles**, 701 So.2d 619 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1997), 327
- Coeur d’Alene Tribe v. Asarco, Inc.*, 280 F.Supp.2d 1094 (D. Idaho 2003), 374
- Coleman v. Schwarzenegger*, No. CIV S-90-0520 LKK JFM P, 2009 WL 2430820 (E.D. Cal. & N.D. Cal. Aug 4, 2009), 205
- Collopy v. Wildlife Commission*, 625 P.2d 994 (Colo. 1981), 232
- Columbia River Fishermen’s Protective Union v. St. Helens*, 87 P.2d 195 (Or. 1939), 238
- Commonwealth v. Alger*, 61 Mass. 53 (Mass. 1851), 38, 419
- Commonwealth v. Massachusetts Turnpike Authority*, 191 N.E.2d 481 (Mass. 1963), 31
- Conatser v. Johnson*, 194 P.3d 897 (Utah 2008), 132
- County of Solano v. Handlery**, 66 Cal. Rptr. 3d 201 (Cal. Ct. App. 2007), 296
- Coyle v. Smith*, 221 U.S. 559 (1911), 73
- Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Nat’l Highway Traffic Safety Admin.*, 508 F.3d 508, 523 (9th Cir. 2008), 397
- Day v. Armstrong*, 362 P.2d 137 (Wyo. 1961), 109, 129
- Defenders of Wildlife v. Hull*, 18 P.3d 722 (Ariz. App. Div. 1 2001), 77
- Democko v. Iowa Dep’t of Natural Res.*, 840 N.W.2d 281 (Iowa 2013), 232
- Dep’t of Interior v. Klamath Water Users Protective Ass’n*, 532 U.S. 1 (2001), 203
- Desert Protective Council v. U.S. Department of Interior*, 927 F.Supp.2d 949 (S.D. Cal. 2013), 251
- District of Columbia v. Air Florida, Inc.*, 750 F.2d 1077 (D.C. Cir. 1984), 370

- Diversion Lake Club v. Heath, 86 S.W.2d 441 (Tex. 1935), 116
 Economy Light & Power Co. v. United States, 256 U.S. 113 (1921), 371
 Eldred v. Ashcroft, 239 F.3d 372 (D.C. Cir. 2001), 432
 Eldred v. Ashcroft, 537 U.S. 186 (2003), 432
 Eldred v. Reno, 74 F.Supp.2d 1 (D.D.C. 1999), 432
 Ellington Construction Co. v. Zoning Board Of Appeals, 152 A.D.2d 365 (N.Y. App. Div. 1989), 294
 Environmental Protection Information Center v. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 187 P.3d 888 (Cal. 2008), 183, 332
Environmental Law Foundation v. State Water Resources Control Board, 44 ELR 20158 (Cal. Sup. Ct. 2014), 184
Esplanade Properties, LLC v. City of Seattle, 307 F.3d 978 (9th Cir. 2002), 5, 164
 Ex parte Maier, 37 P. 402 (Cal. 1894), 224, 230, 250
 Fomento Resorts & Hotels v. Minguel Martins, (2009) 1 N.S.C. 100 (India), 340
 Fort Mojave Indian Tribe v. United States, 23 Cl. Ct. 417 (1991), 203
 Friends of the Parks v. Chicago Park District, 786 N.E.2d 161 (Ill. 2003), 302, 318
 Friends of Thayer Lake v. Brown, 1 N.Y.S.3d 504 (N.Y. App. Div. 2015), 129
 Fur Seal Arbitration (U.S. v. Great Britain, 1893), 371, 379
 Galt v. State Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, 731 P.2d 912 (Mont. 1987), 127, 132
Geer v. Connecticut, 161 U.S. 519 (1896), 4, 81, 221, 230, 241, 246, 304
 Georgia v. Tenn. Copper Co., 206 U.S. 230, 237 (1907), 265
 Ghen v. Rich, 8 F. 159 (D. Mass. 1881), 217
 Gibbons v. Ogden, 22 U.S. 1 (1824), 49, 53
Glass v. Goeckel, 703 N.W.2d 58 (Mich. 2005), 119, 314
 Glick v. Harvey, 121 A.D.3d 498 (N.Y. App. Div. 2014), 302
 Glori dei Filippone v. Iowa Department of Natural Resources, No. 2-1005 / 12-0444 (Court of Appeals of Iowa, March 13, 2013), 397
 Golden Feather Community Association v. Thermalito Irrigation District, 257 Cal. Rptr. 836 (Cal Ct. App. 1989), 116, 200, 412
Gould v. Greylock Reservation Commission, 215 N.E.2d 114 (Mass. 1966), 29, 31, 32, 38, 291
 Graham v. Estuary Properties, Inc. 399 So.2d 1374 (Fla. 1981), 145
 Grayson v. Town of Huntington, 160 A.D.2d 835 (N.Y. App. Div. 1990), 294, 423
 Green Mountain Chrysler v. Crombie, 508 F. Supp. 2d 295 (D. Vt. 2007), 397–98
 Guilliams v. Beaver Lake Club, 175 P. 437 (Or. 1918), 105, 129, 274
 Hay v. Bruno, 344 F.Supp. 286 (D. Or. 1972), 276
 Hoffman v. City of Pittsburgh, 75 A.2d 649 (Pa. 1950), 298
 Hughes v. Oklahoma, 441 U.S. 322 (1979), 227, 242, 246
 Hyland v. Borough of Allenhurst, 393 A.2d 579 (N.J. 1978), 260
 Idaho v. Coeur d’Alene Tribe, 521 U.S. 261 (1997), 93
 Idaho v. United States, 533 U.S. 262 (2001), 81
Illinois Central Railroad Co. v. Illinois, 146 U.S. 387 (1892), 62, 68, 171, 243, 362
In re Conveyance of 1.2 Acres of Bangor Memorial Park to Bangor Area School Dist., 567 A.2d 86 (Pa. Commw. 1989), 301
In re Electric Power (Indonesian Const. Ct. Judicial Review of Law Number 20, Dec. 15, 2014), 352
In re Hall, 164 N.Y. 196 (1900), 202
In re Hood River, 227 P. 1065 (Or. 1924), 411
In re Kukui, 174 P.3d 320 (Haw. 2007), 202
In re Oil & Natural Gas (Indonesian Const. Ct., Judicial Review of Law Number 22 Year 2001, Case No. 002/PUU-I/2003, Dec. 21, 2004), 353
In re Oil & Natural Gas (Indonesian Const. Ct., Judicial Review of Law Number 22

- Year 2001, Case No. 36/PUU-X/2012, Nov. 13, 2012), 353
- In re Omya Solid Waste Facility Final Certificate*, No. 96-6-10 Vtec (May 16, 2011), 200, 412, 418
- In re Stuart Transportation Co.*, 495 F.Supp. 38 (E. D. Va. 1980), 229, 238, 372**
- In re Wai'ola O Moloka'i*, 83 P.3d 994 (Haw. 2004), 202
- In re Water Resources* (Indonesian Const. Ct., Judicial Review of Law Number 7, July 19, 2005), 352–53
- In re Water Use Permit Applications*, 147 P.3d 836 (Haw. 2006), 199
- In re Water Use Permit Applications*, 93 P.3d 643 (2004), 199
- In re Water Use Permit Applications, petitions for Interim Instream Flow Standard Amend., and Petition for Water Reservations for the Waiahole Ditch*, 9 P.3d 409 (Haw. 2000), 4, 8, 91, 185, 188, 189, 418, 427, 430**
- Jamie Lynn Butler v. Governor Janice K. Brewer*, I CA-CV 12-0347, n. 5 (Ariz. Ct. App. Mar. 14, 2013) 188, 411–412
- Johnson v. M'Intosh* 21 U.S. 543 (1823), 67
- Just v. Marinette Co.*, 201 N.W.2d 761 (Wis. 1972), 141, 149–51, 153, 162, 326**
- Kaiser Aetna v. United States*, 444 U.S. 164 (1979), 14, 50, 257, 283, 329
- Kansas ex rel. Meek v. Hays*, 785 P.2d 1356 (Kan. 1990), 129
- Kauai Springs, Inc. v. County of Kaua'i*, 324 P.3d 951 (Haw. 2014), 206
- Kleppe v. New Mexico*, 426 U.S. 529 (1976), 228, 229
- Knudson v. Kearney*, 152 P. 541 (Cal. 1915), 137
- Komari v. Mayor of Samarinda* (Samarinda Trial Ct., July 24, 2014), 353
- Kootenai Environmental Alliance v. Panhandle Yacht Club*, 671 P.2d 1085 (Idaho 1983), 180
- Labrador Inuit Association v. Newfoundland* 155 Nfld & P.E.I.R. 93 (Can. 1997), 363
- Lake Beulah Mgmt. Dist. v. State of Wisconsin Dep't of Natural Res.*, 799 N.W.2d 73 (Wisc. 2011), 148, 187, 412, 418**
- Lake Michigan Federation v. United States Army Corps of Engineers*, 742 F. Supp. 441 (N.D. Ill. 1990), 75, 169
- Lamprey v. Metcalf*, 53 N.W. 1139 (Minn. 1893), 103, 107, 126
- Lawrence v. Clark Co.*, 254 P.3d 606 (Nev. 2011), 75
- Leovy v. United States*, 177 U.S. 621 (1900), 139
- Loorz ex rel Alec L. v. McCarthy*, 561 F.Appx. 7 (D.C. Cir. 2014), 343
- Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council*, 505 U.S. 1003 (1992), 141, 145, 146, 155, 159, 168, 235, 257, 283, 325
- Luscher v. Reynolds*, 56 P.2d 1158 (Or. 1936), 105
- M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*, (1999) 1 S.C.C. 388 (India), 333, 359**
- M.I. Builders Private Limited v. Radhey Shayam Sahu* (1999) 6 S.C.C. 464 (India), 340
- Marks v. Whitney*, 491 P.2d 374 (Cal. 1971), 10, 37, 132, 174, 193**
- Martin v. Waddell's Lessee*, 41 U.S. 367 (1842), 63, 223, 320, 368**
- Matcha v. Mattox*, 711 S.W.2d 95 (Tx. App. 1986), 276
- Matthews v. Bay Head Improvement Association*, 471 A.2d 355 (N.J. 1984), 10, 14, 192, 261, 265, 320, 325–27, 427**
- McCleary v. State*, 269 P.3d 227 (Wash. 2012), 205
- McDonald v. Halvorson*, 780 P.2d 714 (Or. 1989), 279, 282, 285
- McGarvey v. Whittredge*, 28 A.2d 620 (Me. 2011), 124, 268
- McQueen v. South Carolina Coastal Council*, 580 S.E.2d 116 (S.C. 2003), 119, 159**
- Merrill v. Ohio Department of Natural Resources*, 955 N.E.2d 935 (Ohio 2011), 123
- Mescalero Apache Tribe v. New Mexico*, 630 F.2d 724 (10th Cir. 1980), 254
- Metropolitan Manila Development Authority v. Concerned Residents of Manila Bay*, (2008) 574 S.C.R.A. 661 (Philip.), 344, 348**

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Authors' Note

We edited the case law liberally throughout for readability, eliminating redundant citations and sometimes creating paragraphs. Any footnotes are numbered consecutively throughout chapters; we did not retain the original footnote numbers.

Case citations in the text, the footnotes of judicial opinions, and the writings of commentators have been omitted without so specifying. Footnotes in judicial opinions and articles are also omitted without specifying. Asterisks and brackets are used to designate omissions from the original materials.

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Preface to the Second Edition

Our goal in publishing the first edition of this casebook a couple of years ago was to create a systematic approach to the study of the public trust doctrine (PTD), and we think our book has helped to begin the institutionalization of the doctrine in law study.

In this second edition, we have included several significant developments in what is a rapidly evolving body of law. The most notable new decision is *Robinson Township v. Commonwealth* (p. 82), a decision of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court which has quickly become a foundational decision. We have also included the Wisconsin Supreme Court's opinion in *Rock-Koshkonong Lake District v. Department of Natural Resources* (p. 147), in which the court narrowly interpreted the scope of that state's PTD, arguably misinterpreting that court's seminal decision of *Just v. Marinette County* (p. 141) in the process. A case which may expand the scope of the PTD in California to groundwater is *Environmental Law Foundation v. State Water Resources Control Board* (p. 184), although whether California will join states like Hawaii and Vermont that recognize groundwater as a trust resource awaits whether the environmental claimants can prove a link between groundwater pumping and the surface flows of the navigable Scott River.

There have been a considerable number of developments in the cluster of cases that seek to recognize the atmosphere as a trust resource, and we discuss these developments in some detail in chapter 11 (pp. 365–405). A steady stream of case law also continues to arise out of efforts of members of the public to access trust resources, mostly in the context of waterways experiencing monopoly control (chapter 3, pp. 95–138). We also have updated the text to expand our consideration of the PTD abroad to include considerable case law from Indonesia (p. 352), a constitutional amendment in Norway (p. 359), and statutory developments in Britain and the Nordic countries (p. 360).

There are other changes as well. The above summary reflects only a snapshot of developments in this rapidly expanding area of law. We expect the pace of change to accelerate in the near future, and we pledge to try to keep current with it.

We continue to believe that this course is an ideal upper-level course in environmental law. It offers a common-law-based approach to environmental decision making, a contrast in a field dominated by statutes and administrative regulations. Although there is a role for statutory and regulatory interpretations of the PTD, there is little doubt that the vibrant center of the PTD lies in a judiciary that understands the importance of trust resources to both present and future generations. That in turn requires courts that are schooled in the doctrine's history, its evolution in other jurisdictions, and the fundamental anti-monopolistic purposes it has always served and continues to serve, including intergenerational equity.

We hope this effort contributes to the evolution of the PTD in the 21st century by educating the next generation of lawyers who must convince judges of the role the PTD can play in a world that is becoming increasingly crowded, experiencing the diminishment of trust resources, and threatened with climate change which will imperil trust resources first.

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Preface to the First Edition

The public trust doctrine (PTD) is an ancient doctrine of property law that governs sovereign stewardship of natural resources. First surfacing in Roman law through the Justinian Code, it was revived in medieval England largely through the efforts of Sir Mathew Hale and became entrenched in American law in the nineteenth century through the process of statehood. In the twentieth century, the doctrine became a favorite of the law professoriate and the environmental community for its potential to recognize public rights in private property. The doctrine both promotes public access to trust resources and justifies government protection of them. It also equips the public—the beneficiaries of the trust—with the right to challenge government on the management of their ecological assets. This doctrine, remarkable for its endurance through the ages, now brings populist overtones and human rights underpinnings to the modern fields of environmental law and property law.

We offer the first casebook on public trust law. In it, we have endeavored to capture the rich history and considerable diversity of the field. Although the PTD is often characterized as a doctrine of state law, we think the perception is erroneous because the PTD is an inherent attribute of sovereignty and, accordingly, should apply to both the federal and state governments. The origins of the American PTD lie in bilateral federal-state agreements admitting states to the Union, but the doctrine is also recognized in countries as far-flung as India, the Philippines, Kenya, and Brazil. We survey the PTD's application from the local to global level.

The wellspring of the American PTD lies in a distinctive antimonopoly sentiment that, widespread in the nineteenth century, continues to inspire a vibrant body of case law concerning public access to trust resources. That case law—as well as state constitutions and statutes—has expanded the scope of trust assets from lands submerged beneath navigable waters to wetlands, beaches, parklands, wildlife, air, and groundwater. Internationally, the doctrine has advanced concepts of sustainable development and the precautionary principle, and thus is frequently linked to the public's right to life, health, and environmental protection. There are ongoing efforts to use the PTD to combat climate change by applying it to curb carbon emissions.

While the origins of the PTD date to Roman times, the PTD carries enormous importance today, as many statutory systems fail in their basic purpose of protecting public resources from private exploitation. A course in public trust law allows students to break out of the narrow confines of statutory law and immerse themselves in fundamental principles that provide a fulcrum for sustainable environmental management. The course can, and we think should, delve into the most basic questions of constitutionalism and the role of the judiciary, legislatures, and courts in allocating natural resources.

At less than 500 pages, we think this book is ideal for an advanced course or seminar in environmental, natural resources, or property law. The casebook is accompanied by a teachers' manual as well. We have designed the text not only as a set of teaching materials, but also as a research platform for further inquiry into public trust law. We have relied heavily on the rich scholarship in public trust law and have tried to supplement it. Students in our classes have produced multiple summaries of state public trust law as well as law review notes and articles analyzing some of the most intriguing questions generated by the doctrine. We encourage you to send us cases and materials and as well as your contributions to the law of the public trust, which we will use in new editions of this text and in a treatise on the subject.

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