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Clinic's success could hurt funding

By John Higgins Emerald Contributor

Students and professors in the University law school's environmental law clinic have won several cases dealing with pollution, land use and other environmental issues since the clinic opened shop 17 years ago. However, every case has a loser as well.

For example, in 1984 the clinic succeeded in getting the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service to stop spraying aerial herbicides on the Oregon lands because they submitted an illegal environmental impact statement.

Last March, the clinic battled Oregon Pulp mills to limit the amount of certain chemicals the mills released into rivers. The mills lost and the State Environmental Quality Commission became the first state agency in the country to set such limits.

This spring, the clinic asked a district judge in an ongoing case to ban logging on BLM lands until the BLM complies with the National Environmental Policy Act.

In these and similar cases, the clinic has conspicuously opposed industry and has made enemies among conservatives in the Oregon State Legislature. As Measure 5 squeezes out another round of cuts, the clinic's reputation makes it and the law school vulnerable to political attacks.

The clinic may also be vulnerable to cuts from within the school. Law school Dean Dave Frohnmayer singled out the clinic as the most expensive clinic by far within the school, drawing criticism from students about his calculations.

Opponents of the law school usually cite economic reasons to close it. They argue that the state already has two law schools (Willamette University and Lewis and Clark College, both private schools) and doesn't need to bankroll anoth-

However, another agenda emerges in the details.

Though the ostensible reason state Senator Mae Yih, R-Albany, and Rep. Rod Johnson, R-Roseburg, co-sponsored a bill last year to close the law school was to save money, the political hostility toward the clinic was obvious.

Yih said a budget note attached to the bill asked that the clinic adopt a more balanced viewpoint regarding the cases it accepted. The note was removed for procedural reasons and the bill died in committee without a hearing.

When the House considered Senate appropriations bill for higher education last June, Johnson attached a budget note to the bill and made a floor speech criticizing the clinic. Four members of the House joined Johnson in his futile attempt to kill the bill.

Those who voted against the appropriations bill represented timber communities like Medford, Riddle, Lebanon and Roseburg. Their constituents complained the clinic only represents environmentalists and doesn't act in the state's best in-

Merrilee Peay, coordinator for the Yellow Ribbon Coalition, said her group is opposed to "about 90 percent" of what the clinic does

The Yellow Ribbon Coalition represents about 5,000 people in Lane County. It belongs to the Oregon Lands Coalition, which represents 81,000 members ranging from miners, loggers and ranchers to sheep herders and off-road vehicle en-

"I believe that environmental law can be balanced," Peay said. "Their idea now is to totally shut down the industry.'

These complaints are old hat to the law school. In 1988, Maurice Holland, then dean of the law school, put together an independent committee to examine the criticisms of the clinic. The committee's report concluded that the criticisms had no basis, assuring University officials the clinic operated well within acceptable bounda-

The clinic's two attorneys, professors John Bonine and Michael Axline, admit 10 students each semester to work with 10 advanced students on actual cases. It operates as a law firm with two senior partners and many associates. Bonine and Axline accept cases based on potential educational value.

Every March, a student group loosely associated with the environmental law program, Land Air and Water, organizes the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, which draws an international field of lawyers and scholars to Eugene to discuss environmental laws and issues.

These activities make the program and the school highly visible — both to its supporters and detractors.

Axline argues the school is only representing citizens and groups who want environmental laws enforced. Conservatives want laws enforced, right?

The environmental law clinic

is the only one of four clinics the law school offers that is run on campus with professors. The other three are "downtown

For example, in the criminal prosecution class, students assist felony trial lawyers with circuit court cases. The school also offers a criminal defense clinic and a civil practice clinic. These classes are considered less expensive than "in house" clinics like the environmental law clinic because students aren't working under direct faculty supervision.

'I will not deny I am opposed to the way the clinic has operated. I think it's a misuse of public funds, and that flavors my desire to see it stopped.'

 Rep. Rod Johnson, R-Roseburg

"Clinical education is an important component to many legal and academic programs," Axline said. "The quality of the (environmental law) program has attracted students and supporters nationally and internationally.

He said people on the losing side of the clinic's successful cases are bitter that students are learning by practicing law.

This unhappiness in industry and state government makes the clinic vulnerable to cuts in at least two ways: The Legislature could cut the law school, or administrators could cut the clinic to save political energy for other fights

Though legislative efforts to close the school have failed in the past, Johnson speculated that the clinic's record of taking on anti-business cases will jeopardize the school's funding when the 1992-93 Legislature

spends its money.

Johnson argues that the state doesn't need another law school pumping out lawyers, but the issue of the clinic's reputation also figures in his thinking.
"I will not deny I am op-

posed to the way the clinic has operated," he said. "I think it's misuse of public funds, and that flavors my desire to see it stopped."

He thinks he can get the

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SUMMER

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announced he would leave the University to bebraska.

Byrne said he feels he can be more successful at his job in Nebraska because there is traditionally more support for higher education and athletics

Byrne said, for example, that Nebraskans recently voted for a one cent sports tax, similar to one that recently failed in Oregon.

However, he said he does regret not having seen Oregon teams play in the NCAA basketball tournament or play in the Rose Bowl.

 University head football Coach Rich Brooks donned a new hat by becoming the University's new athletic director. He will continue with his coaching duties.

The appointment upset some who believe Brooks should not serve in both capacities. Others believe the University should have used the athletic director vacancy to appoint a woman or minority to the post.

Still others question Brooks' qualifications.

But Dan Williams, vice president for adminis-University dian to find the best person to succeed Bill Byrne.

"We asked ourselves if there was a person right here at the University who had the abilities, the necessary experience and the understanding of athletics, our university and the state of Oregon, to provide the leadership required," Williams said. "The answer to that question was 'yes."

Brooks will receive \$20,000 annually for his new duties, added on to the \$97,850 base salary he makes as football coach. Brooks' total compensation package will be nearly \$200,000 per year.

The University, it turns out, gets a new athletic director at a bargain if one considers Byrne made about \$88,000 when he was athletic director.

Williams insisted the hiring of Brooks was not an economic move.