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Meet Charlie Howland: A Super Fun(d) Guy

Some, like Charlie Howland, might call it kismet. But Charlie's impact in the environmental law and policy field more likely stems from his passion for science and his youthful curiosity about how the world works—and how it might work better. As a young boy growing up in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, Charlie would grow mosquito larvae in his room to study their life cycle. At the first Earth Day, Charlie, then in 6th grade, oversaw first aid during the cleanup of a local creek. During high school, Charlie spent hours operating his ham radio. Even today, Charlie enjoys perfecting his craft as a home coffee roaster.

Today, Charlie is a partner at Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP in New York City, where he advises U.S. and foreign clients on all aspects of environmental and energy law. And while Charlie spent the bulk of his career at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), his legal career started well before law school.

Upon graduating from Cornell University, where he majored in history, Charlie landed a job with the City of Philadelphia Law Department, where he worked as its environmental legal assistant. One of the first cases he worked on was the City's cleanup of a landfill, which turned into the first private (i.e., nonfederal or state plaintiff) Superfund cost recovery action ever filed. Not surprisingly, he found the technical and legal aspects of the case fascinating, and so the self-proclaimed "science nerd" decided to follow his curiosity and go to law school.

At Villanova Law School, Charlie took every environmental law course he could find, and he relished administrative law—a rarity indeed. Soon after graduating, he found a job with a boutique law firm in Philadelphia, where he became the "Superfund guy." And in a few short years, Charlie joined EPA's Regional office in Philadelphia, where he would continue to work on Superfund—and other complex matters—for the next 28 years.



Charlie and his wife, Beth, in the
Lofoten Islands, Norway.

At EPA, Charlie's innate curiosity led him to work on a myriad of projects and cases. One of his early specialties was working on enforcement cases involving federal facilities owned by the U.S. Department of Energy or the U.S. Department of Defense. The complex nature of laws surrounding federal facilities led him to work under laws other than Superfund, including the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. It also allowed him to become expert in a niche area; namely, determining which federal agency had authority over a particular site's cleanup. True to his curious nature, Charlie also spent a little over a year on detail at EPA's Office of Reimbursement, working on the Project XL program.

Always hungry to learn more, through EPA Charlie attended an in-depth executive training program on environmental economics at Harvard's JFK School of Government, focusing on cost-benefit analysis and the crafting of regulations. But it was the session on how wholesale electricity markets are regulated that

most piqued Charlie's curiosity. In 2008-09 he took a leave of absence to serve as general counsel for a utility-scale renewable energy developer with projects in the United States and Canada. Upon his return to EPA, he helped spearhead the Agency's efforts to encourage the development of renewable energy projects on contaminated land. Charlie also served as lead EPA attorney in all aspects of the complex cleanup of the Bethlehem Steel Sparrows Point Steel Mill, the largest privately owned industrial complex on the East Coast, for which he was awarded a Silver Medal by EPA and a Gold Medal by the Philadelphia Federal Executive Board.

Charlie continued at EPA until 2018 when he was contacted by a headhunter about the possibility of joining Curtis, where he now heads their Environmental Group. After spending nearly three decades in public service, Charlie admits to feeling terrified about the idea of returning to private practice. "How could I possibly do this? How could a staff EPA attorney, albeit at a pretty senior level, step into the role as a partner at a New York City law firm?" But given the uncertain climate at EPA at that time, and the fact that he was eligible for retirement and could always lean on his pension, he thought to himself, "EPA's been great, but you know what, if I crash and burn, I crash and burn." He's been at Curtis ever since, with work including supervising environmental due diligence, litigation and international arbitration, and serving as outside general counsel for a global energy management and consulting firm.

Charlie also loves to teach and has taught administrative and energy law at several law schools as an adjunct. While still at EPA, he was accepted into the U.S. State Department's Fulbright Specialist program. His first project was to help the University of the Arctic in Tromsø, Norway, develop an environmental and energy Master of Law program. This fall he spent six weeks at the Tashkent State University of Law in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where he taught environmental and energy law. "ELI was very helpful to me in getting ready for Uzbekistan," commented Charlie, who had several conversations with ELI senior staff before his trip. Among the readings Charlie assigned to his students was *Environmental Rule of Law: First Global*

Report, which ELI wrote under contract for the UN Environment Programme. "I just think that report is so useful and important," Charlie added.

Charlie is also extremely appreciative of those who have taught and supported him throughout his career, and isn't shy to name them. "I learned more from (fellow Leadership Council member) Mike Goodstein about environmental litigation as a young EPA attorney while he was at the Department of Justice than from anyone else in my career, and I'm lucky enough to have him as a friend to this day."

Looking back, Charlie reflects, "I feel so lucky to have the career that I've had and to still be doing what I love, and working on issues that are really important and are intellectually very challenging." When asked what guidance he'd give to attorneys new to the field, Charlie offers two pieces of advice: (1) engage with, and enjoy learning about, physics, technology, and economics, not just the law; and (2) follow your passions, even if you're unsure of where they might lead.

Charlie's lives by that credo in his personal life as well. When he's not working, Charlie enjoys traveling and spending time with his wife, Beth, and his adult children, Carolina and Baird. Charlie's an expert home coffee roaster, and takes his coffee very, very seriously. Charlie is also a member of the Sons of Copper Beeches, a scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars, devoted to the veneration of Sherlock Holmes (about whom Charlie once wrote a "trifling monograph" proving how the Great Detective played a role in the impeachment of President Clinton). His connection to Holmes stems from his father, who would read the stories to him at night until he died when Charlie was only 11.

So, while kismet may have played a part this past October when a Sherlock Holmes film festival happened to be playing at the very Uzbekistan law school at which Charlie was teaching, it is apparent that throughout his career—whether he was working on complex Superfund cases, learning about energy law, or teaching others—it was Charlie's drive to engage in the world around him, rather than luck, that carried the day.

