LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Southern Environmental Law Center

Deputy Director
Southern Environmental Law Center
Charlottesville, Virginia

“Protecting the South's environment through the power of the law”

THE OPPORTUNITY

For nearly three decades, the Southern Environmental Law Center has occupied a special place in environmental advocacy and stewardship. Using the power of law and policy to protect the environment and health of the southeastern United States, SELC has built an unparalleled reputation for effective advocacy, education and, where necessary, litigation to enforce environmental safeguards or set far-reaching precedents.

SELC works across all three branches of government—executive, judicial and legislative—at the federal, regional, state and local levels—and is widely recognized as the region’s primary environmental advocate and collaborative resource. Its focus is regional, but its reputation and impact extend far beyond its southeastern footprint.

Since inception, SELC has been committed to promoting clean air, energy and water; protecting the South’s mountains and forests; preventing destructive
development of coasts and wetlands; and developing cleaner, more efficient transportation choices. SELC’s attorneys have handled over 500 cases and projects addressing virtually every major environmental threat facing the Southeast. The organization’s successes have been the subject of extensive press\(^1\) citing its impact as strategic expert, environmental leader and collaborative advocate delivering results for the region’s people and environment.

SELC may be the perfect embodiment of the maxim “Money follows impact.” Funded exclusively by donations from individuals, families and foundations, the nonprofit launched what was only the second capital campaign in its history just a few months before the 2008 recession beset the US economy. Rather than force a modification of its ambitious financial goals, however, SELC’s supporters proved both loyal and generous, and the campaign goal of $45 million was achieved on schedule—and exceeded by a comfortable margin.

In fact, SELC’s average annual revenues—all derived essentially from donations—increased 87% for the five years of 2009-2013 compared to 2004-2008. This is not a blip; this is real momentum.

SELC is the largest environmental organization in the Southeast and a genuine force for good, now operating out of nine offices across the region and on Capitol Hill. Founded and still headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia, SELC has built a staff that includes 60 highly credentialed lawyers; experienced heads of development, communications and finance; and an exceptionally capable administrative team.

While SELC’s team has grown considerably in the past half-dozen years, growth has never been a goal in and of itself. Rather, the staff has expanded only because the organization’s successes have appealed to funders willing to support the increasingly complex advocacy and litigation which SELC’s mission supports. Donors are hands-off, but their presence is appreciated. Said one young attorney, “I feel so blessed that someone else’s generosity makes it possible for me to pursue my passion for environmental advocacy.”

The organization is led by two environmental veterans, Rick Middleton, SELC’s founder and Executive Director and a highly regarded force for the

\(^{1}\) Recent examples available [here](#)
environment, and Jeff Gleason, Deputy Director and Director of Regional Programs. A greatly respected environmental lawyer in his own right, Jeff has been central to essentially every success the organization has had in his 25 years there. His influence on SELC’s people and programs is extensive and pervasive. Jeff’s recent decision to retire in 2015 prompts the present search for his successor. Typical of his style, he gave enough advance notice of his plans to minimize any disruption such an important leadership transition might otherwise present.

The organization is healthy. In FY 2013, SELC reported income of $18mm, a robust balance sheet and a seven-year string of 4-star ratings from Charity Navigator. It is well-positioned to honor its supporters in tackling the most challenging environmental issues of the day across one of the country’s fastest-growing regions. Best of all, the successes of the past three decades now become the foundation for an even more compelling future.

THE ORGANIZATION

SELC is a relationship-focused organization, and the sense of community is made tangible by self-reinforcing commitments to cooperation, collaboration, respect and friendship. These traits contribute to the exceptionally low turnover in staff at all levels, the deep commitment of board members and stakeholders, and extensive working partnerships SELC enjoys with scores of nonprofit partners.

SELC is a learning organization that devotes considerable resources to professional development. Its cadre of committed environmentalists shares a heightened sense of curiosity, and the mechanisms for staff cohesion and growth are numerous. Mentoring programs, subject-matter seminars, regular off-site retreats that people actually look forward to—all are part of SELC’s working ethos. SELC is as thoughtful and deliberate about itself as it is about the mission it serves.

SELC is a place-based organization, committed since inception to the environmental health of six states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Despite outside entreaties to expand its

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footprint, there is no enthusiasm for loosening the tight geographic focus that has been fundamental to its impact. Mission creep is not a problem for SELC.

**SELC is a respectful organization**—respectful of its people, its communities and its partners. Conversations with staff and stakeholders in all six states yield a common theme of respect for the work and for each other, devotion to the mission and appreciation for the importance of living balanced, multifaceted lives. Everyone at SELC has made economic trade-offs to work there, but no one has compromised their values, their families or their sense of humor to do so.

**SELC is a stable, maturing organization**, with unusually deep relationships across the board. Because of its thoughtful, deliberative hiring process, SELC experiences very low staff turnover. Because of its impact on environmental policy and behavior, SELC is blessed with donors and board members who are generous and loyal. Technology is current, marketing and communications are in full sync with programmatic strategy, and the development team can point with pride to record-setting donations even in the depths of the recession.

SELC employs a classic matrix approach to management:

- **Geographically**, each office has a senior attorney in charge, two of whom are members of SELC’s six-person Management Committee.
- **Programmatically**, each primary issue area has a senior attorney serving as catalyst for case priorities and program expertise.
- **Administratively**, the organization is supported by Charlottesville-based department heads responsible for the traditional functions of development & marketing and finance & administration.
- **Culturally**, SELC is one firm, not just a collection of accomplished individuals. Each office and program team has its own personality and its own sources of pride, to be sure, but the competition one often finds in professional services firms is decidedly friendly, and the ambitions are collective more than individual.
Overseeing this matrix is a Management Committee comprising the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the heads of development and finance and the heads of two major offices. Each program area (Coasts and Wetlands, for example) has a designated leader charged with coordinating policy positions and regional strategies and effective distribution of knowledge and workloads. Recently, the role of Director of Litigation was added, a reflection of increased complexity in the 150 initiatives and cases in-house.

SELC is governed by a highly engaged Board of Trustees of committed community leaders and advocates respected in a variety of professional settings. The board’s regard for the line between governance and management is well established.

Additional information on SELC and its programs, people and priorities can be found on its extensive website.

THE MANDATE

The position of Deputy Director is central to SELC’s success, impact and organizational cohesiveness. Intellectual capital and commitment to environmental advocacy are SELC’s stock in trade and assets that require a deft management hand. The Deputy Director is a critical strategic influence that allows an organization of SELC’s reach and complexity to function as an integrated whole while leveraging the strengths of individuals, teams and departments.

SELC’s current structure has evolved in response to the talents and interests of its key players. The effectiveness of the current management team results in part from trust relationships developed over many years. The retirement of such a trusted leader as the incumbent Deputy Director marks a real pivot point in the organization’s development. While there is understandable nervousness about the impact of the impending transition, most colleagues see it as an opportunity to embrace an even more exciting future for SELC.

In its current iteration, the Deputy Director is a primary nexus for SELC’s programs, operations and culture. In turns strategist, conductor, advisor,

4 https://www.southernenvironment.org/about-selc/board-of-trustees
5 https://www.southernenvironment.org/
counselor and traffic cop, the Deputy Director touches essentially every important strategy, initiative and decision the organization undertakes.

The mandate for the next Deputy Director is straightforward, even if further clarity is needed as the transition progresses. Among the core responsibilities:

- **Principal partner to the Executive Director** on essentially all issues of consequence. The current Deputy Director enjoys exceptional influence and responsibility, the result of expertise and trust built over many years. The goal insofar as possible is for the new Deputy to be positioned to have similar sway.

- **Regional program oversight**,  
  - Ensuring a strategic perspective in the deployment of resources and expertise, especially across programs, offices and initiatives,  
  - Anticipating or reconciling conflicts in program staffing, work priorities or case management

- **Technology effectiveness and security**, ensuring a strategically current, customer-focused IT strategy that also reflects proper concern for data security. While the goal is not to hire a technologist per se, SELC recognizes it has much to learn in this area, and leveraging technology more fully is an important objective.

- **Fundraising**, as appropriate. As a senior member of the management team, the Deputy Director should be comfortable supporting SELC’s fundraising strategy, even if funds development is not a core competence. Depending on the new Deputy’s experience and aspirations, fundraising could become a key area of focus.

The balance of these roles will no doubt shift under a new incumbent, depending on the strengths of the appointed candidate. Some responsibilities could be added or expanded and others delegated to another member of the
team. What will not change, however, is the importance of the role to SELC’s continued success.

In essence, the Deputy Director must have sufficient managerial competence to free the Executive Director to focus on his strengths—external priorities and relationships chief among them—combined with the personal style, subject-matter credibility and decision quality to earn the respect of highly accomplished colleagues.

THE RELATIONSHIPS

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<tr>
<th>The Deputy Director reports to</th>
<th>Executive Director</th>
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<tr>
<td>and is a member of</td>
<td>The six-person Management Committee</td>
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<td>With direct supervisory responsibility for</td>
<td>• Director of Litigation</td>
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<td>• Director of Program Communications</td>
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<td>• Director of Information Technology</td>
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<td>and interacts regularly with</td>
<td>• Individual office directors (i.e., lead attorneys for the geography)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Program Leaders (Air, Water, Energy, etc.)</td>
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<td>• Director of Development &amp; Marketing</td>
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<td>• Director of Finance &amp; Administration</td>
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<td>• Members of the Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>• Selected donors</td>
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<td>• Environmental leaders and advocates</td>
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THE LOCATION

The Deputy Director is based in SELC’s headquarters office in downtown Charlottesville, Virginia.

Home to three US Presidents, the University of Virginia and Monticello, the greater Charlottesville area has developed a national reputation for livability, frequently cited on lists of the nation’s ten most inviting and livable communities. The area is exceedingly welcoming to those who treasure an intellectually stimulating, culturally rich and environmentally varied place to live and work. The Shenandoah National Park is in the immediate vicinity, and Richmond, Washington and Virginia’s shore are less than two hours away.
Start [here](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlottesville,_Virginia) for an overview of Charlottesville’s attractions as a personal and professional base.

**THE CANDIDATE**

The ideal candidate to become Deputy Director of SELC will be a smart, accomplished and passionate lawyer who has led a compelling group of peers to significant success in a collaborative, high-achieving context. Both internal and external prospects will be considered, as will prospects from the public and private sectors, law firms and nonprofits.

Competence: *The ideal candidate will offer...*

- A record of accomplishment in environmental advocacy or stewardship that would be additive to SELC in some material way
- Sufficient experience in the management of people and programs to warrant the support and follow-ship of respected colleagues
- The self-confidence and self-awareness to excel in a matrixed organization where lines of authority are rarely linear and organizational clarity can be elusive
- A decisive management style, informed by wisdom and excellent judgment and applied in an organization accustomed to extensive deliberations on every organizational issue of consequence; the ability to promote a sense of urgency without sacrificing care or respect for differing views
- The experience and wisdom to help guide SELC through the inevitable departure over the coming years of some of its most senior and impactful people; someone who can advance SELC’s own organizational maturity as it addresses the transition from a founder-led model.
**Culture: SELC seeks a Deputy Director who models...**

- A pervasive commitment to excellence matched with organizational and intellectual agility
- A strategic perspective wrapped in practical garb; a planful executive who can also implement
- A disciplined management style and a nurturing personal style
- An authentic professional who leads by example, someone who knows when to nudge and when to pause
- Active listening skills; a person with whom colleagues and partners enjoy interacting.

**Character: SELC expects to appoint...**

- An empowering lawyer/manager for whom integrity, collegiality, fairness and work/life balance are core tenets; a leader who can capture colleagues’ confidence
- A decisive but compassionate executive with superb judgment; someone with the patience and humility to help lead a highly successful organization through a major transition
- A problem-solver who can also look well beyond the immediate concerns
- A colleague accustomed to excellence who elicits it from others with grace and good humor
- Someone who wants to work with high quality people, not just high quality lawyers
- A professional who respects the South and southern culture, ideally someone with experience in or ties to SELC’s geography and culture
- An entrepreneurial executive who derives joy from bold initiatives pursued thoughtfully, creatively and tenaciously.

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For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email SELC@BoardWalkConsulting.com or call Sam Pettway or Joan Schlachter at 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).