

[Trial by Fire](#)

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Wesley Rosenfeld received a crash course in environmental law during his summer internship with the Gulf Restoration Network, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and restore the natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico.



Second-year law student Wesley Rosenfeld spent the summer learning about environmental law at the height of the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster. (Photo by Tricia Travis)

As oil spewed from BP's Deepwater Horizon well during the majority of his three-month stint, Rosenfeld saw first-hand the kinds of legal, policy and community-outreach responses that are involved in countering such a large-scale environmental disaster. Rosenfeld, who will enter his second year at [Tulane Law School](#) this fall, says that he's always had an interest in [environmental law](#), but the experience he's gained this summer was unexpected.

"I had no idea I would be working during such a major event with people who are serious about oil drilling reform," says Rosenfeld. "I grew up in the Florida Keys so I know the impact that environmental decisions regarding the coast can make."

As a legal intern, Rosenfeld helped the organization's staff conduct legal research that aids in drafting proposals for new legislation. In the process, he says he's learned a lot about the flaws present in existing laws.

"I'm becoming very familiar with several acts that simply aren't doing the job," he says. "Right now the goal of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 is to make sure that spilling oil was not a part of the drilling process. Unfortunately it became evident in my research that several oil companies consider spills a normal part of the business."

He's also developed a few of his own ideas for reform. One of those ideas, he explains, would require oil companies with multiple safety infractions to be penalized by paying higher fees to bid on land for drilling purposes.

"I think other companies would try to clean up their acts because they would be interested in being in a position where they can pay less for land and save money over time," says Rosenfeld.