



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

**President & Executive Director
Southern Environmental Law Center**

Charlottesville, VA

"Solutions start in the South."

The Opportunity

Over nearly four decades, the Southern Environmental Law Center has built an extraordinary reputation for impact and effectiveness as one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment.

Known for tackling complex environmental issues and well-resourced opponents in its six-state region,¹ SELC delivers nationally significant results through its place-based focus, its deep local presence, its strong network of partner organizations, and its effective mix of legal, strategic, and communications expertise. Relationships to people and place are at the heart of who SELC is, and the commitment to honoring and strengthening those relationships is pervasive.

SELC's mission is straightforward: Protect the basic right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate; preserve the region's natural treasures and rich biodiversity; and provide a healthy environment for all. In its most recent strategic update, ratified by the Board of Directors in November 2020, SELC made an explicit, overarching commitment to environmental justice, a commitment that had been integral to much of its work but rarely expressed as such:

Build a more diverse organization and enhance SELC's advocacy for environmental justice in the South through our work to ensure environmental protections are adopted, applied, and enforced fairly and equitably for all communities across the region.

SELC is rooted in the South, but its influence extends far beyond the region, as the challenges it undertakes and the victories it has won provide inspiration and momentum for initiatives, policy

¹ Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.



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Through both actions and impact, the Southern Environmental Law Center has shown that “Solutions start in the South.”



changes and legal advocacy, nationally and beyond. Through both actions and impact, the Southern Environmental Law Center has shown that **“Solutions start in the South.”** Within its six states, SELC will continue to use its leadership role to ensure strong measures to alter the trajectory of climate change—the defining environmental challenge of our era—and thereby help raise the bar for the nation as a whole.²

SELC is about to undergo what will be only its second leadership transition in the organization’s 36 years. The first took place just over three years ago upon the retirement of SELC’s iconic founder, [Rick Middleton](#), now President Emeritus. Rick was succeeded in early 2019 by [Jeff Gleason](#), already a 25-year veteran of SELC and a greatly respected environmental lawyer in his own right, having served as SELC’s Deputy Director until his own retirement in 2016.

Jeff came out of retirement to lead SELC through the transition from its founder, a major challenge for any organization. Having solidified extraordinary gains for SELC in the very demanding three years since, Jeff informed the Board last summer of his intention to retire fully by the end of 2022,³ and thus the current search for his successor.

The Organization

SELC is place-based. SELC’s commitment to place is purposeful, pervasive and distinctive. SELC’s staff of 200, including 100 attorneys, are not just experts and advocates, they are residents too. In defending the region’s air, water, climate, wildlife,

² SELC Strategic Plan, 2021-2030.

³ Mr. Gleason intends to step down as Executive Director not later than December 2022, but he will be available as an advisor to his successor through March 2023, if desired.

lands and people, SELC deploys a full array of resources but the impetus is personal as well as professional.

SELC is relationship-focused. Partnership is core to SELC’s effectiveness. Relationships within the [staff](#) and [Board](#) are unusually close, but the same is true of the 300+ [partners](#) SELC has represented and worked alongside, not to mention its exceedingly loyal donors. SELC is the antithesis of a one-and-done, transactional approach, and its treasured relationships reflect decades of intentionality.

SELC is respectful—respectful of its people, its communities and its partners. “We do the right things the right way,” noted one senior team member. Conversations with staff and stakeholders reveal a common theme of respect for the work and for each other, coupled with 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 important, and its importance is growing. SELC has for years been the largest and most impactful environmental organization in the South, but it has never pursued growth for growth’s sake. Even so, its growth in recent years has been remarkable, a byproduct of many factors, among them the success of its litigation and advocacy, heightened public awareness and sense of urgency around environmental issues, a fluid political environment, and expanding support for SELC’s ability to deliver results.

As one indication, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, SELC expects to report revenues from all sources of \$46 million,⁴ over 3½ times those of a decade earlier. The exceptionally robust balance sheet reflects and enhances SELC’s enviable

⁴ Unaudited estimate.



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SELC has a total staff of 200 operating out of nine offices across six states and Washington, DC.



Alabama



Georgia



North Carolina



South Carolina



Tennessee



Virginia

capability to tackle tough issues that may require years-long efforts before tangible results are evident.⁵

SELC is people. Today, SELC has a total staff of 200 operating out of [nine offices](#) across six states and Washington, DC.⁶

- **Lawyers**, half the total staff, comprise national experts in their respective areas, capable of handling complex, precedent-setting litigation
- **Policy professionals** work hand-in-glove with SELC’s lawyers to secure and defend environmental protections within the Legislative and Executive branches of government
- **Communications professionals** expand SELC’s reach and impact through an evolving array of media and tools
- **Development professionals** ensure the funding relationships required for organizational stability and longevity
- **Administrative, finance and IT professionals** constitute SELC’s operational backbone.

Lawyers have always been at the center of SELC’s work. Their effectiveness is supported and enhanced in critical ways by exceptionally competent professionals in communications, finance and advancement. As SELC has grown, some of these roles have become more centralized, but they have also become more fully integrated into SELC’s programmatic work, supporting the autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit of individual offices and program teams.⁷

⁵ SELC’s IRS Form 990 and audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 are available [here](#).

⁶ SELC’s website lists ten offices, but the two Charlottesville offices are in the process of relocating to a new, combined facility, which will be fully operational in April 2022.

⁷ For example, analyses and graphics prepared by SELC’s Geospatial Science team have been instrumental in conveying complex issues and arguments (as with [this interactive map](#)), and SELC’s communications team has added welcomed consistency and power to its messaging.

During Covid, SELC added nearly 50 people, reflecting ongoing investments in capacity. Assimilating highly qualified talent in an environment with a treasured culture continues to require a fresh look at long-standing organizational practices.

SELC is strategic. The Southern Environmental Law Center has long prided itself on a culture that emphasizes the long view. Solutions to major environmental issues are rarely found in quick fixes. Many nonprofits succumb to a funding-based strategy, pursuing one-off projects for which dollars might be available. By contrast, SELC pursues strategy-based funding, ensuring that the organization's expertise is focused on the region's most important environmental issues, which often require years of litigation and policy advocacy.

This is a self-reinforcing cycle: Because SELC and its donors and partners share a commitment to genuine strategic impact, the pressure for quick wins or short-term gains is minimal. This orientation has been a vital component of some of SELC's most important successes against opponents with exceptionally deep pockets in cases that a less secure advocate might have avoided altogether.⁸

SELC employs a classic matrix approach to management:

- **Geographically**, each office has a senior attorney in charge, three of whom are members of SELC's nine-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 department heads responsible for the traditional functions of advancement,

⁸ Two examples among many: SELC's victories against the [Atlantic Coast Pipeline](#) and on behalf of [coal ash cleanup](#).



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We're an overnight success
thirty years in the making.



communications and marketing, and finance and administration.

- **Culturally**, SELC is one firm, not a collection of accomplished individuals. Each office and program team has its own personality and its own sources of pride, but the competition one often finds in professional services firms is decidedly friendly, and the ambitions are collective more than individual. Advancement is based on accomplishment, not on revenue generated from clients or partner groups.

Overseeing this matrix is a nine-person Management Committee comprising the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, three state directors, and directors of programs, advancement, finance and administration, and communications.

SELC is governed by a highly engaged [Board of Trustees](#) of committed community leaders and regional advocates from a variety of professional settings across all six of its states. The Board's regard for the line between governance and management is well established.

SELC is maturing. In recent years, SELC has restructured management and reallocated resources to reflect its strategic ambitions. Increased attention has been paid to the management of the enterprise, distinct from but entwined with the management of its programmatic work.

SELC is not a top-down organization with a management structure removed from the essence of the work. Rather, the approach is more organic, always attentive to the "why" of the work, and not just the "what" or "how."

Some trends already underway were accelerated under the remote working conditions imposed by Covid. Staff members, never a shy lot, became more vigorous advocates for themselves, and their ability (and affinity) for working independently shone. Instead of the expected slowdown in

effectiveness, the team actually grew in value and importance. The new patterns developed during Covid may have generated new expectations, and new tolerance, for the ways the work is conducted going forward, one example of the generational shift ahead.

For fuller information on SELC's people, programs and priorities, visit the extensive website [here](#).

The Mandate

SELC's next Executive Director, just the third in the organization's history, will step into the leadership role at a time of great promise and great challenge. The work has never been more important, nor has SELC ever been better positioned to undertake that work, but the organization's very success means the next Executive Director will face issues and opportunities that the prior EDs have not had to address, at least not at the same scale. For example,

- SELC has never been more financially secure, but its core funding is still concentrated in a relatively small set of long-time donors. To sustain the current momentum and ensure the resources required by the complex environmental issues ahead, SELC must develop an ever-broader base of funding sources, especially with individuals and entities with the capacity for material, sustained support.
- SELC is facing a generational shift. Turnover anticipated among both Board and senior staff in the coming years is a natural, healthy consequence of a stable, thriving organization, but the cost in institutional wisdom could be significant.
- The commitment to diversify SELC's own recruiting efforts has already paid welcomed dividends, but there is much more work to be done. And as the range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives of new colleagues continues to grow, some traditional practices will need to evolve. Similarly,

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We defend and protect our air, water, climate, wildlife, lands, and the people who live here. And we win.



the explicit commitment to environmental justice could affect caseloads, staffing and management in unfamiliar ways.

- SELC’s place-based approach is central to its success and its culture, and, increasingly, the issues at hand have national implications. Being a national leader rooted in the South is a welcome byproduct of years of excellent work, enhancing the organization’s appeal to new donors and new partners. The commitment to the traditional six-state region is unwavering; SELC has long resisted overtures to expand its footprint, but the possibility remains a topic of discussion.
- Partnership is core to SELC’s results. As lawyers for its partners, SELC would not exist without the hundreds of nonprofits with which it has collaborated over the years. Keeping counsel with core constituents in local communities across the region will require a continuing sense of humility, personally and institutionally, an attribute not always present in the national spotlight.

In 2020, SELC undertook its third ten-year strategic review, a comprehensive planning process in which every office, every program area and every department participated. The result was a consensus on aspirations and focus that is viewed throughout as a living document informing every aspect of SELC’s work.

In sum, SELC’s strategy for the next decade hinges on four overarching goals:

1. Maintain SELC’s leadership position and continue to enhance the ability to tackle the most pressing issues, particularly the immense challenge of climate change;
2. Solidify SELC’s reputation as a national leader delivering results through a regional, place-based approach;

3. Build a more diverse organization while enhancing advocacy for environmental justice in the South; and
4. Expand SELC’s funding base.

As SELC’s chief professional officer, the Executive Director will have overall responsibility for achieving these goals, giving life to the underlying strategy in concert with a Board of Trustees that respects the divide between governance and management and a professional staff accustomed to a leadership style that is collaborative rather than directive—one born of curiosity, not judgment, and characterized by respect for the core values that have informed SELC and its work for many years.

The Relationships

The Executive Director reports to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SELC’s Board of Trustees
And leads SELC through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nine-person Management Committee
with five direct reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Director • Director of Programs • Director of Communications • Director of Advancement • Director of Finance & Administration
and regular, substantive interactions with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual state office directors • Current and prospective financial supporters • Environmental leaders and advocates • Community and government leaders • Other relevant stakeholders

The Location

The Executive Director is based in SELC’s headquarters in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Charlottesville and the surrounding area have developed a national reputation for livability, frequently cited on lists of the nation’s 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.



SOUTHERN
ENVIRONMENTAL
LAW
CENTER



The Shenandoah National Park is in the immediate vicinity, and Richmond, Washington, DC and Virginia's shore are less than two hours away. [Wikipedia](#) and [Visit Charlottesville](#) offer different perspectives on greater Charlottesville's attractions as a personal and professional homebase.

The Candidate

The ideal candidate to become Executive Director of SELC will be a smart, accomplished and courageous lawyer with a management record of achievement and stability that inspires confidence from SELC's staff, Board and stakeholders. The best candidates will have led a compelling group of peers to significant, sustainable success in a collaborative, high-achieving context pursuing complex, high-impact work.

A commitment to SELC's place-based mission is fundamental. While the Board does not require that SELC's next Executive Director be from the South, the demonstrated cultural adaptability to work, lead and thrive in the South is essential.

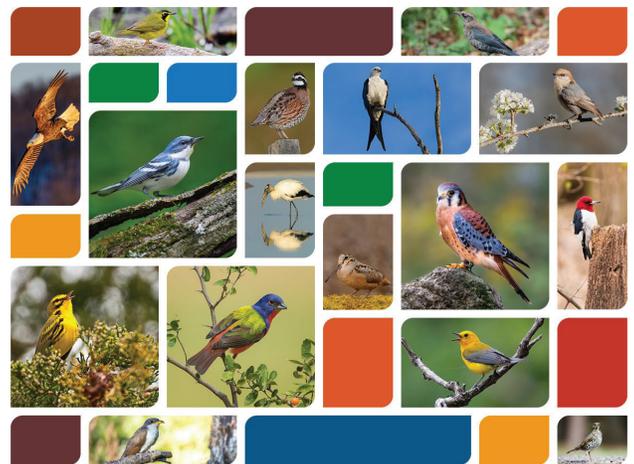
Prospects internal and external to SELC will be given full consideration, as will contenders from the public and private sectors, law firms and operating nonprofits.

Competence: The ideal candidate will offer...

- A record of significant managerial accomplishment in environmental advocacy or stewardship
- Sufficient background in SELC’s program work to be a thoughtful discussion partner and counselor but not so much as to displace the resident experts
- Experience leading a highly successful organization as it diversified its staff and stakeholders and navigated a generational change in leadership
- Demonstrated affinity for and success in the development of significant, sustained financial support; a leader who enjoys building and leveraging the full range of an organization’s assets—financial, human, social, intellectual and reputational—in furtherance of the mission
- The self-awareness to excel and the self-confidence to delegate in a highly matrixed organization characterized by a team that respects authentic leadership (but may not relish being “managed”)
- A decisive leadership style, informed by the patience required for collaboration, the discipline necessary for implementation and comfort with ambiguity; the ability to promote a sense of urgency without sacrificing care or respect for differing views and different voices
- Demonstrated respect for the power of diversity, especially as evidenced in a candidate’s own organization
- An explicit commitment to the pursuit of environmental justice

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The ideal candidate will offer an explicit commitment to the pursuit of environmental justice.

- The technological awareness to embrace available tools and processes to collective advantage
- The seasoning to lead a nationally influential organization rooted in the South.

Culture: SELC seeks an Executive Director who models...

- The humility and perspective to retain the foundations of SELC's success and the courage to adapt to a changing world
- Respect for the exceptional professionals who have devoted their careers to SELC's mission, despite far more remunerative opportunities elsewhere
- A pervasive commitment to excellence matched with organizational and intellectual agility
- The discipline to give colleagues the rein, the respect and the resources to excel
- Leadership by quiet example, with high expectations and low drama
- An adaptive communications style characterized by finely honed listening skills; a leader with whom colleagues and collaborators enjoy interacting
- A bias for action and impact.

Character: SELC expects to appoint...

- An empowering lawyer/manager for whom integrity, collaboration and partnership are core tenets; a leader who can capture colleagues' confidence and stakeholders' support
- A decisive yet compassionate executive with high EQ, superb judgment, and both the confidence and the humility to guide a mature but still-evolving organization through a major leadership transition

- A nimble leader who expects and inspires excellence in others
- A professional who respects the South and its unique traits and environmental challenges
- An entrepreneurial executive who derives joy from bold initiatives pursued thoughtfully, creatively and tenaciously.

In sum, we seek an experienced, adept leader who embraces SELC's value and history, acknowledges the aspects that should endure, adapts where necessary, and leads with courage, respect and sensitivity.

For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email

[**SELC@BoardWalkConsulting.com**](mailto:SELC@BoardWalkConsulting.com)

or call

Sam Pettway, Crystal Stephens or **Patti Kish** at
404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).

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