

Academic

Attorney

Advocate

ACTIVIST

**An Environmental Lawyer's Legacy of
REDEFINING POSSIBLE**

Profile of an Activist: Professor Linda Krop



Photo courtesy of Brett Millar

As I log on to a Zoom office hours meeting at 5:45 pm on Wednesday evening, I am instantly greeted by a radiant smile that is inevitably contagious. Professor Krop stands out against a Zoom background featuring a stunning shot of the lagoon on campus, instantly highlighting her love for UCSB and her appreciation for the natural beauty surrounding it. We dive into a discussion of the Environmental Law cases that were assigned this week, and she patiently and enthusiastically answers all of my questions, no matter how redundant or simplistic they may be. Many of the answers she thoroughly explains by providing examples from her own work as Chief Counsel at the Environmental Defense Center (EDC), a nonprofit, public interest environmental law firm based in Santa Barbara. Her genuine passion for her work is palpable (even through the computer screen), as is her commitment to her students and, more broadly, to improving the world we live in. She generously humors my effusive fascination for much longer than was originally scheduled, and apologizes when she has to leave right when office hours end at 6:15. I later understand the reason, which I think fittingly illustrates the commitment, dedication, and passion that seemingly drive all of her endeavors. Every Wednesday, Professor Krop works a full day at the EDC until 5, holds office hours with her students until 6:15, gives herself 15 minutes to eat and catch her breath, and then teaches an Environmental Law course from 6:30 to 9:30 pm.

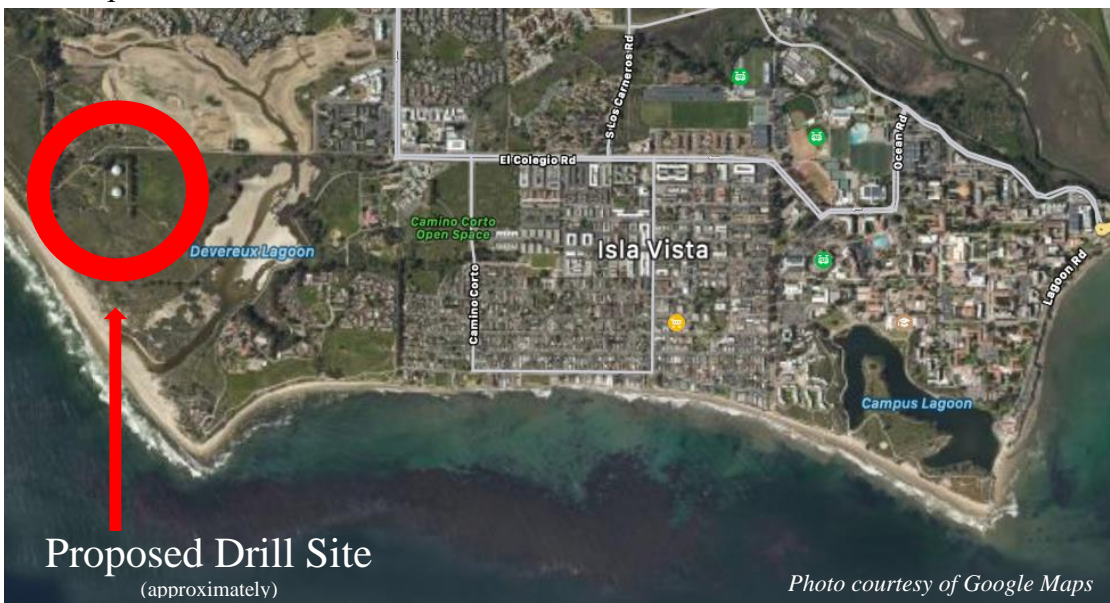
CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS

This commitment, dedication and passion is not only reflected by her demanding schedule; Professor Krop’s career has been nothing short of groundbreaking. Her career at the EDC began in 1989, and she has served as Chief Counsel since 1999.ⁱⁱ Her awe-inspiring career achievements include, “termination of 40 federal oil and gas leases offshore California, defeat of several specific oil drilling projects, and preservation of important areas for public access and ecological protection, including Hearst Ranch, Ellwood, Carpinteria Bluffs and Sedgwick Ranch”.ⁱⁱⁱ But this list of impressive feats fails to fully embody all of the incredible impacts she has made throughout her career, which has been defined by a fierce commitment to environmental justice, and an emphatic pursuit of making our world a better place. Professor Krop is the true definition of an activist.

Due to the nature of her work, her impacts are not so much seen as they are unseen. It is the absence of oil drilling monstrosities, dangerous pollution and hazardous energy facilities that reflect the significance of Professor Krop’s dedicated efforts, and those of the EDC. Stories that should be known to every member of our community arguably don’t have the recognition they deserve; I will venture to speak for many UCSB students and residents of the Santa Barbara area when I say that many of us have no idea how lucky we are that activists like Professor Krop and her colleagues at the EDC have been protecting our community, our safety, and our livelihoods. It can be hard to imagine what our community might look like if these activists hadn’t been defending it from invasion and injustice for the past four decades, but if we attempt to visualize ‘what could have been’, we can begin to understand the magnitude of the impact Professor Krop and the EDC have had on our communities. In doing so, we can appreciate the everyday privileges we enjoy thanks to their tireless work, and finally give them the credit they deserve.

CONSERVING OUR CAMPUS

Without the efforts of Professor Krop and the EDC, our campus and our Isla Vista community would be nothing like the slice of paradise it is today. In 1993, Mobil, one of the largest and most powerful oil companies in the world at the time, proposed a \$1.8 billion project that would have built a slant drilling site onshore, right next to campus.^{iv} And when I say right next to campus...



The Mobil Clearview Project would have brought the university millions (maybe billions) of dollars in revenue, which for a university – especially a *public* university – would be like winning the lottery ten times over. It’s hard to imagine what our community would be like with a massive drilling site less than a mile away, but not only would the project have been an inconceivable nuisance, it also would have been incredibly dangerous. According to Professor Krop, this site would have produced oil that is very high in hydrogen sulfide gas, which is dangerous and highly toxic to human beings. Mild exposure can cause numerous troublesome health consequences; severe exposure can cause paralysis, cancer, coma, and death.^v. In addition to the environmental consequences and local disruption this project would have caused, it could have put our entire community at risk; if an S₂H release had occurred, the entire community would have been in grave danger

Even still, convincing people to give up that much money is no small feat. A small non-profit law firm going up against one of the largest and richest oil companies in the world, trying to convince a public institution to forfeit millions of dollars; the odds were seemingly impossible. But they won.

Smiling, Professor Krop recounts, “to this day, whenever I see the Chancellor, he always puts his arm around me and tells people, we defeated Mobil together”. So, every time you jog to Sands, surf at Devs or take a deep breath without fear, remember that you have Professor Krop and the EDC to thank.

It’s hard to believe, but this was just one of many cases within our Santa Barbara community with such high stakes and challenging odds. But the amazement doesn’t stop there; the EDC’s reach extends beyond the borders of Santa Barbara County, and often beyond the bounds of what has previously been considered possible in the realm of Environmental Law.

CHAMPIONING CENTRAL COAST COMMUNITIES

When asked about her proudest moment in her career so far, it was understandably difficult for Professor Krop to pick just one. I would imagine that all of the cases she has been involved in have unquestionably been incredible in some way or another. But many of them haven’t just been awe-inspiring, they’ve been groundbreaking, precedent setting, trailblazing efforts that have forever changed what our state, our country, and our world thought was possible. Among such extraordinary experiences, Professor Krop chose one in particular to share.

Around 2004, BHP Billiton, the largest mining company in the world, proposed a liquefied natural gas terminal project just offshore of Ventura County. The science behind the liquefied natural gas scheme can be somewhat daunting, but the key issue is this: liquefied natural gas is very volatile and explosive in its compressed form. So, the proposed project was inherently, extremely dangerous.

Professor Krop explained that BHP Billiton selected Oxnard as the sight for their ticking time bomb because it is characteristically a somewhat disadvantaged community; put clearly, they picked a community that they expected would be unable to fight back.

So, on one side we have BHP Billiton, the largest and wealthiest mining company in the world, and on the other we have the small, disadvantaged, and relatively poor community of Oxnard represented by a small nonprofit environmental law firm. The challenges didn't stop there. At the time the EDC got involved, the project already had the support of President Bush, Governor Schwarzenegger, and agency staff, all of whom were recommending approval of the project. So, on one side there was unimaginable amounts of money and the epitome of power (federal *and* state government approval), and on the other side there was, "little us", as Professor Krop put it. The odds of success were slim-to-none. And, most importantly, Professor Krop explained,

“No one had successfully fought a project like this in the whole country”

Long (and awe-inspiring) story short, they ended up bringing a case to the agency that was so compelling that the California State Lands Commission decided to deny the project without even having to go to court.

But the most touching point of this groundbreaking story was the emphasis put on community engagement and mobilization. On the day of the hearing, Professor Krop recounts, over 2,500 members of the community showed up, exceeding expectations and overflowing the chamber, which only had room for 800. Professor Krop shares a jubilant, genuine smile as she recounts the impact this case had on the community, explaining, "it wasn't just for the environment, it was for the community as well". This pioneering case was groundbreaking in so many ways, but Professor Krop seems most proud and delighted when describing how this effort was able to truly inspire and empower the community.

CATALYZING A COMPASSIONATE ACTIVIST

After hearing these two stories I obviously had endless questions, but the one, burning question that stood out was: how were you able to persevere? In both cases the odds she and her team faced were monumental – seemingly insurmountable. I was dying to know how she summoned the courage to challenge some of the wealthiest, most powerful figures in the world, and how she was able to persist despite these seemingly impenetrable obstacles.

Professor Krop smiled and replied that perseverance is the key, compassionately advising, "don't be daunted, don't give up". She explained that these weren't the only cases where the odds were stacked against her and her team, and that, in fact, "most of the time we're told we're not going to win". But regardless of the circumstance, she explains, they buckle down and take each monumental challenge "piece by piece, issue by issue". She speaks so highly of

her team, and never takes sole credit for any of these accomplishments, speaking always in we's instead of I's. Her humility and modesty are inspiring, especially for someone as accomplished and prolific as she is. She commends her team's focus and grit, and contentedly acknowledges that, while they collectively take on some seemingly impossible cases, they do prevail most of the time.

When I asked about the source of her drive and resolute perseverance, Professor Krop recounted the defining experiences she had as a child, and the influence that her mother had on her determination to make the world a better place.

Professor Krop recounts that she grew up in an activist oriented family, so was accustomed to, "attending meetings and rallies and hearings, and speaking up for what you believe in" from a young age. She describes her mother as an influential figure, and remembers helping her with community organizing, educating others, political campaigning throughout her childhood. One year, she remembers, her mother was one of the biggest organizers in her area for a candidate running for president, and she was so involved that, "the whole house turned into a headquarters". Unfortunately, that candidate ended up losing, and Professor Krop recounts the experience as devastating at such a young age.

But, she explains, the devastating loss became a defining moment for her and helped instill the perseverance that still seems to define her to this day, thanks to her mother's guidance. Rather than giving up or letting the loss turn into resentment and disenfranchisement, her mother took it in stride, and encouraged Professor Krop to do the same. She recalls that her mother encouraged a 'you win some, you lose some' attitude, and emphasized that they did the right thing and that was all that was important.

The most defining moment, she recalls, was her mother saying, "We can't give up... how are we going to make this world a better place if we give up? We just have to try again next time". She thoughtfully reiterates that her mom really gave her the encouragement to persevere.

CONTINUING THE LEGACY OF COMPASSION

Acknowledging that she has been inspired by other activists throughout her life, Professor Krop expressed that she now wishes to return the favor. When I asked what she thought she might want her legacy to be she replied, "I would like my legacy to be to inspire others to act...to work on something they're passionate about, to collaborate, to find others with like-minded goals and work together". As a beloved professor and mentor to numerous students at UCSB, it's safe to say that she is doing just that. She selflessly dedicates her time to helping students understand the intricacies of environmental law and inspiring countless students (including myself) to pursue it as a career. Empathetic, kind, and understanding, she relates easily to students and engages them on a level that not many professors can do.

First and foremost, she wants students to know that they can make a difference. She humorously remembers being a young professional and disbelieving her own mentor when she proclaimed the same advice she gives currently, but now she effusively delivers that message to her students in such a way that truly makes us believe it. Her advice?

“You can make a difference...Every single individual makes a difference”

Ever empathetic to her students’ mindsets, she acknowledges that things can get overwhelming, but advises us to just start with one thing, get involved, and learn. Just starting with one thing can make a huge difference. Finally, she compassionately advises; “Pick something you’re passionate about...If you’re passionate about something you’ll be into it more, you’ll be a happier person, you’ll take something away from that experience that will help you”.

Needless to say, Professor Krop goes above and beyond to inspire her students by empowering them to make a difference and, more importantly, by leading by example. A lifelong activist, Professor Krop has made an incomparable impact on our community, our environment, and our world. She has broken boundaries, stood up to some of the most powerful institutions in the world, empowered countless community members across the Central Coast, and inspired generations of students to make a difference in this world. In sum, through dedication, passion, and activism, Professor Krop has redefined possible.

ⁱ “Past Victories.” *Environmental Defense Center*, Environmental Defense Center, 2020, www.environmentaldefensecenter.org/edc-staff/.

ⁱⁱ “Staff.” *Environmental Defense Center*, Environmental Defense Center, 2020, www.environmentaldefensecenter.org/edc-staff/.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Staff.” *Environmental Defense Center*, Environmental Defense Center, 2020, www.environmentaldefensecenter.org/edc-staff/.

^{iv} “Mobil Rebuffed in Extended Reach Drilling Project.” *Oil and Gas Journal on UCSB Clearview Decision*, PennWell Publishing Company 1995, 3 July 1995, charm.physics.ucsb.edu/clearview/ogj_ucsb.html.

^v Carpenter, Bethany. “The Dangers Of Hydrogen Sulfide.” *Vivid Learning Systems*, Vivid Learning Systems, 14 Jan. 2021, vividlearningsystems.com/blog/how-to-protect-against-the-dangers-of-hydrogen-sulfide.