

Amy Steinfeld

Professional Services

Brownstein attorney finds passion in water

By Chris Officer
Staff Writer

Amy Steinfeld knew at a young age that she had water in her blood.

“It really started in fourth grade,” Steinfeld said. “I was born and raised in Southern California, so I was very familiar with drought issues.”

Steinfeld, now a water and land use attorney at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck’s Santa Barbara office, saw her interest in water rights accelerated in college, where she said it was a forefront issue on her campus.

“Water was a big theme at UCLA,” she said. “I went to law school specifically for water law.”

Ever since, Steinfeld has inundated herself with water and land use law and consulting.

Before attending law school, Steinfeld was a consultant and analyst for the California Safety Compliance Corporation. There, she would work with corporations like Nordstrom and Abercrombie & Fitch to ensure they complied with labor laws while operating overseas.

During her two years consulting, Steinfeld spent time in 37 different countries, a pace even she said was hard to maintain.

“I couldn’t keep that schedule forever,” Steinfeld said. “Plus, it could be dangerous because we’d be working in countries like Pakistan. But I always managed to have some fun, too.”

After her time consulting, Steinfeld attended the University of Colorado Law School in Boulder, she said, specifically for water law.

Steinfeld returned back to Southern California and worked for the then Santa Barbara-based law firm Hatch & Parent. When Brownstein merged with Hatch & Parent in 2007, Steinfeld made the transition to the Brownstein team.

Steinfeld’s practice focuses on the intersection of land use and water law. Her practice ranges from helping agencies with water supply, to defending farmers against litigation.

She also helps clients comply with the California Environmental Quality Act. For instance, she said, if a city wants to increase its recycled water use, there’s a lot that goes into that like permits and assessing any unintended collateral damage.

“Recycled water is a good thing,” Steinfeld said. “But you have to be aware of the environmental impact.”

Steinfeld is also raising awareness about California’s water issue. In January, she helped launch the inaugural California H2O Women conference held in Santa Barbara. The women-only event showcased 100 of the top female leaders in the water industry.

“It was really an historic event,” Steinfeld said. “Typi-



NIK BLASKOVICH PHOTO

After spending a lot of time overseas early in her career, Amy Steinfeld found her home in Santa Barbara.

cally, the water industry has been a male-dominated field.”

The purpose of the conference, she said, was both to acknowledge women in the water industry and to collaborate on ideas. Steinfeld said in some ways California’s drought presented a good opportunity.

“The drought has been a wake-up call,” she said. “[It forced us] to come up with new ideas, for the private sector and the government to get together and brainstorm a way to save and conserve this resource.”

The U.S. is starting to make strides when it comes to water conservation. In December, the state passed The California Clean Drinking Water and Natural Resource Protection Act of 2016. The measure will allocate \$500 million for flood protection infrastructure repair statewide. Something Steinfeld says has her excited for the future of water.

“Water is definitely not dry,” she said. “It’s really a good time to be a water lawyer.”

At A Glance

- Amy Steinfeld
- Partner, Water and Land Use Attorney, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck
- University of Colorado Law School

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