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FAMU College of Law's First Environmental Law and Justice Symposium Tackles Major Developments in Protecting the Environment

Orlando, Fla. – Nearly 200 participants convened in Orlando for “New Directions in Environmental Justice,” the inaugural Environmental Law and Justice Symposium hosted jointly by the Florida A&M University (FAMU) College of Law and the FAMU Center for Environmental Equity and Justice, a division of the Environmental Sciences Institute.

The event offered an overview of the latest international, national, regional, state and local developments in environmental justice, and attracted attendees throughout the state of Florida.

The conference began with remarks by Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming, Esq., Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 administrator. Fleming stressed a holistic approach to environmental justice, a process that brings the EPA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other governmental agencies to the table at one time to jointly address and effect change in communities.

“You can protect the environment and still build the economy,” she said.

The symposium included sessions with keynote addresses from Beverly Wright, founder and director of Deep South Center for Environmental Justice in New Orleans; Quentin Pair, Esq., U.S. Department of Justice; and Prof. Maxine Burkett, University of Hawaii School of Law. The event also included panel discussions on National and International Developments in Environmental Justice, Toxic Dumping and Brownfields, and Impacts to Indigenous Peoples and Wildlife. Each discussion panel featured renowned experts on environmental justice issues representing government, academia, public and private sectors.

“Environmental Justice is a topic of particular interest to the FAMU College of Law as we seek to continually provide assistance to diverse populations, many of whom who are impacted by environmental issues discussed during the symposium,” said College of Law Dean LeRoy Pernell.

PAGE TWO
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In addition to sessions with speakers and panelists, the EPA Office of Water and the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance collaborated to present students from Harvard University and the University of Mary Washington for a debate session. The students debated both sides of the issue of environmental justice concerns should be incorporated into the EPA permitting process. At the conclusion of the debate, attendees were invited to ask questions and provide feedback as to which team's stance was more compelling. The symposium concluded with an Environmental Justice Listening Session where EPA officials heard from local environmental justice stakeholders.

"I was very impressed with the quality of the speakers' presentations and pleased with the high turn-out for the event," said FAMU associate law professor Randall Abate. Professor Abate, who teaches environmental law at the FAMU College of Law, coordinated the symposium. "The success of the event was the product of a rewarding and productive collaboration between administrators, faculty, staff and the students at the College of Law and FAMU's main campus."

One highlight of the symposium included a display of the Lake Apopka Farmworker Memorial Quilts, constructed as a tribute to the lives of now deceased farmworkers who worked the muck farms on Lake Apopka in Central Florida. The symposium was sponsored by the law firm of Akerman Senterfitt LLP, the Environmental and Land Use Law Section of the Florida Bar, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, and the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, articles were solicited for the first environmental symposium issue of the FAMU Law Review.

"Law professors and attorneys throughout the nation have committed to submit articles for this special issue, which will ensure a timely and resounding impact on the scholarly literature on environmental law and justice issues in 2011," Abate said.

Additional information and links to presentations submitted by the symposium speakers can be found at the FAMU College of Law's webpage at the following link:

<http://law.famu.edu/go.cfm/do/Page.View/pid/198>.

Photo caption: A FAMU student observes one of two Lake Apopka Farmworker Memorial Quilts on display during the FAMU Environmental Law and Justice Symposium.

The FAMU College of Law was founded in 1949 on the main campus in Tallahassee. After graduating 57 lawyers, the law school was closed by the state of Florida in 1968. The Florida Legislature voted to reopen the law school in 2000 and Orlando was selected as the location. The re-established FAMU College of Law opened its doors in 2002 and is now housed in a state-of-the-art facility in downtown Orlando's Parramore neighborhood. The FAMU College of Law received full accreditation from the American Bar Association in July 2009, and is ranked number one in the nation for Diversity by *U.S. News & World Report*.