IU McKinney Offers First-of-its-Kind
River Law Course

(ABOVE) *Jordan Bolden, Alex Hanaauer (foreground), and others on the Blue River, Indiana.*

Students from IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law took part in a unique new Environmental Law course in the summer of 2014, designed to move teaching out of the classroom and into the landscapes where law meets practice. The course in River Law surveyed policies, laws, and institutions that conserve and protect American rivers, tributaries, and watersheds. But instead of meeting on campus in a classroom, Professor Eric Dannenmaier designed the course so that students spent most of their "class time" in canoes and kayaks, or camping alongside the rivers that they were studying.

Offered as an intensive three-week field course, River Law introduced students to some of the key jurisdictional and substantive debates concerning the Clean Water Act, and focused on the institutional challenges of managing rivers under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and comparable state legislation. Common law water access rights and navigational rights were also addressed.

(ABOVE) *Devon Sharpe and Jonathan Rygg on the Jacks Fork River, Missouri.*

(LEFT) *The 2014 River Law course (L-R) Professor Dannenmaier, and students Ivi Kim, Jonathan Rigg, Anna Travis, Ariel Morelock, Jenna Sibert, Andrew Bean, Jordan Bolden, Josh Forcum, Alex Hanauer, Rich Slater, RJ Proie, Dan Jones, Rebecca Berfanger, and Devon Sharpe.*

Students began with preparatory class sessions, and then worked in "boat teams" to research four different issues that are closely connected to river management and conservation:

1. Securing Water Rights—including the interplay of public and private rights to access to the river systems and to use the water as a resource

2. Conserving Ecosystems, Species & Habitat—including a consideration for endangered species, wildlife vitality and biological diversity

3. Protecting Water Quality—from effects of agricultural activity, forestry, and nearby municipal and industrial activities

4. Managing Multiple Uses—emphasizing the interplay among socio-cultural values in the implementation of river management plans

Following initial classroom sessions and independent research into their assigned issue areas, students spent a day canoeing on the Blue River in Southern Indiana—the state's first designated "Natural, Scenic, and Recreational River." The Blue River flows about 57 miles through Harrison, Washington, and Crawford Counties. The class then traveled to the Missouri Ozarks for a four-day trip to canoe and camp alongside the Jacks Fork River, part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR). The ONSR is the United States' first designated "Wild and Scenic River," encompassing about 134 miles of the Jacks Fork and Current Rivers in the Ozark Mountains in Southern Missouri.

The course used a method called "peer-to-peer teaching," where students research the material and engage each other, rather than relying solely on lectures and instructor-led discussion. Professor Dannenmaier framed the legal issues and guided the conversations, but explained that "the peer-led teaching method requires students to do a lot of independent work and to teach each other about what they have discovered." He also noted that the field component provided an experience that strengthened the students' work. "Learning about river law while on a river, next to a river, and sometimes in a river—you can't beat that," explained Professor Dannenmaier. "By taking natural resources law to the field, it is easier to understand the values and competing demands that inform policy choices and drive legal institutions. Plus, learning about the environment while in the environment is reinforcing because the issues are more salient and the memories are more vivid—so the learning is more persistent."

On both rivers, students had an opportunity to meet with experts who provided background regarding the environmental and political challenges faced by conservation agencies, and to talk with local residents and constituencies who use the rivers and depend on them for their livelihood. While on the Jacks Fork River in Missouri, the students also participated in a river clean-up organized by the Missouri Stream Team. ❖