NIU’s law dean to chair ‘green’ group for year

Three-nation organization looks for cooperation on environmental issues among different entities

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After three years of serving on the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation’s Joint Public Advisory Committee, Northern Illinois University College of Law Dean Eric Dannenmaier has been selected to serve as the three-nation’s group’s chairman.

Last month, the 15-member group consisting of five people each from Canada, the United States and Mexico elected Dannenmaier the organization’s chair. Each year, the committee appoints a new leader, rotating among the three countries.

The group is responsible for taking public commentary on environmental issues, making recommendations to environmental leaders on projects and policies affecting the continent and seeing that the Commission on Environmental Cooperation’s strategic plan is being implemented, among other duties.

Dannenmaier, who joined NIU as law school dean last June, has an extensive background in environmental law, including a long list of published works and serving in public advisory roles for environmental groups in addition to serving on Joint Public Advisory Committee.

His work has included representing the National Audubon Society and other groups in 1995 regarding the death of migratory waterfowl in central Mexico and in 2009-2010 co-chairing a workshop funded by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization regarding regional water security in the Middle East and North Africa, among many other roles in between.

Prior to joining NIU, Dannenmaier was the founding director of the environmental, energy and natural resources law program at the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law.

Some other previous environmental law experience includes directing the Tulane Law School’s Institute for Environmental Law & Policy, serving as the director of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Environmental Law Program, working as an environmental attorney at Bryan Cave LLP and researching environmental law at Washington University School of Law in St. Louis.

His latest position comes after first being selected by President Barack Obama in 2013 to join the Commission on Environmental Cooperation’s Joint Public Advisory Committee. The committee provides recommendations to the Commission on Environmental Cooperation and environmental leaders in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. to promote cooperation on environmental issues and enforce laws across the three countries. The commission was formed under the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994.

“It will be an honor to chair this important treaty body,” Dannenmaier said. “International trade and environmental protection are two critical and interrelated issues that affect the health and well-being of the people of North America and drive our mutual economic interests.”

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Northern Illinois University College of Law Dean Eric Dannenmaier was elected last month to chair the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation’s Joint Public Advisory Committee. The committee will attempt to work on developing cooperation on various environmental policies and projects.

Marie-Claude Rouillard photo

Dannenmaier said he’s found the work to be rewarding, which has included focusing on issues relating to climate change, mitigation and adaptation; green growth, or economic growth that is economically sustainable; water ecosystems; and more.

The Commission on Environmental Cooperation currently has dozens of ongoing projects aimed at reducing the environmental impact of North American trade, ranging from its ongoing work to try to revive the monarch butterfly population to researching how to best protect forests.

Although the committee is involved in advising the commission and environmental leaders on a variety of in-depth policies and projects, Dannenmaier said one of the highlights of his work thus far has been serving as a liaison to the public by hosting meetings in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. and translating that input into recommendations for the commission.

“The most rewarding work for me has been the opportunity to hold meetings with members of the public in all three countries and to hear stakeholder concerns about environmental challenges and political barriers and to work with counterparts in all three countries to overcome those barriers,” he said.