



Meghan S. Largent

Rails to Trails Practice Group Leader

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Meghan Largent is a nationally recognized advocate for property owners, leveraging deep experience in federal takings law to secure compensation for clients whose private property is taken for public use. Her practice focuses both on how to establish when property rights are taken by the government and how to value those property rights.

As a leader of Lewis Rice's [Federal Takings & Rails to Trails Practice Group](#), Meghan has represented thousands of landowners nationwide in pursuing payment from the federal government for the taking of their property as a result of the National Trails System Act. That Act allows a railroad to sell or donate its abandoned rail line to be repurposed as a public park, rather than allowing the century-old rail easement to extinguish and the land underneath to return to the property owner.

Meghan has devoted much of her career to advancing this area of law and has been directly involved in many of the precedent-setting cases in this field. Additionally, Meghan has been called upon to author and co-author amicus briefs to the Supreme Court of the United States and United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in cases involving federal takings of property. She currently serves on the United States Court of Federal Claims' Advisory Council for Tribal & Takings Claims; as well as serving on the United States Court of Federal Claims Board of Governors.

In addition to her takings work, Meghan handles direct condemnation matters involving local governmental agencies with condemnation authority, property valuation matters before the United States Tax Court, and commercial disputes.

Education

- Washington University in St. Louis School of Law (J.D., 2005)
- University of Missouri at Columbia (B.J., *cum laude*, 2001)

Special Honors

- *Missouri Lawyers Media* "The POWER List: Commercial & Consumer Litigation 2025"
- *Missouri Lawyers Media* "The POWER List: Commercial & Consumer Litigation 2024"
- *Missouri Lawyers Media* "The POWER List: Commercial & Consumer Litigation 2023"

Services

- Federal Takings & Rails to Trails
- Eminent Domain & Land Use
- Complex Litigation
- Appellate Litigation
- Products Liability
- Environmental, Chemical & Toxic Tort

- *Missouri Lawyers Media* "The POWER List: Commercial & Consumer Litigation 2022"
- *Missouri Lawyers Media* "Up & Coming" Lawyer (2015)
- Albert E. Arent Pro Bono Award (2014)
- *Super Lawyers*® Rising Star (Washington D.C., (2014-2016))

Legal Background

- Counsel, Arent Fox (2015-2019)
- Adjunct professor, Washington University School of Law (fall 2018, fall 2019)
- Associate, Arent Fox (2010-2015)
- Associate, Lathrop & Gage (2008-2010)
- Law clerk, Illinois Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit, Hon. Sue E. Myerscough (2006-2008)
- Appellate Prosecutor's Office, State of Illinois (2005-2006)

Professional Affiliations

- Board of Governors, United States Court of Federal Claims (2025-present)
- Advisory Council, Takings & Tribal Claims, United States Court of Federal Claims (2025-present)

Admissions

- Missouri Bar
- Illinois Bar
- District of Columbia Bar
- U.S. Court of Federal Claims
- U.S. Tax Court
- Eighth Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals
- Eleventh Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals
- Federal Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals
- Eastern District of Missouri, U.S. District Court
- Western District of Missouri, U.S. District Court
- Northern District of Illinois, U.S. District Court
- Central District of Illinois, U.S. District Court

Rails to Trails

Meghan represents landowners throughout the United States pursuing takings claims against the federal government. One of her primary focuses is representing land owners in what is commonly referred to as rails to trails takings. Meghan litigates cases in the United States Court of Federal Claims on behalf of those whose property was taken by the federal government pursuant to the National Trails System Act, which authorizes abandoned railroad lines to be converted to public parks. Her goal is to obtain

compensation from the government for the taking of their land for the public recreational trail. Meghan focuses on both proving the taking has occurred as well as establishing the value of the property that was taken. Her national work for landowners includes representing land owners coast-to-coast, including 23 states.

In securing judgments for clients after trial and pre-trial settlements, Meghan has secured multi-million dollar awards for these landowners. She also has significant experience representing landowners in The United States Court of Appeals.

Meghan represents clients in this area of law through contingency fee arrangements, which allow our clients to prosecute their claims without paying attorney fees upfront. Attorney fees are paid only if a favorable outcome is achieved.

Guiding Principles

When I was first introduced to Trails Act takings cases more than a decade ago, my first question was, wouldn't you rather have a trail in your backyard than a train? But after doing these cases for more than 10 years, I now know that's not what these cases are about.

I have shaken hands with hundreds of landowners across the country and walked miles of right-of-way in dozens of states. These cases are about the fact that no one asked these landowners this question. The government simply takes property to build these trails without the landowners having any input whatsoever.

Whether the government has taken from an owner property worth millions or only a few hundred dollars, I believe the constitution guarantees compensation for all takings, big and small, and that everyone should be able to realize that constitutional guarantee.

I pride myself on being accessible, and I love talking about the Trails Act and takings cases. So whether an owner thinks their property has been subjected to a taking, might be subjected to a taking in the future, or just has a question about the condition of the railroad right-of-way on their property, I love to hear from them so that I can see if there's a way to help.

FAQs

What does a typical day look like for you in your practice?

My day can involve traveling across the country to meet with landowners and listening to their concerns about how the conversion of an old, abandoned railway into a public trail through their land may affect their homes, businesses or farms. On other days I may be in court either in Washington D.C. or virtually to argue motions and attend status conferences. However, many days are spent at my office in St. Louis researching and reviewing property records and law from the late 1800s or early 1900s.

What got you interested in your practice area?

I started helping on a small assignment related to a case in Kansas. From there my interest grew, and I found myself taking on more and more projects until one day, more than a decade ago, I realized it was almost exclusively what I did. I enjoy the work, and so it came about naturally.

Part of making our cases is researching old railroad deeds. Oftentimes it involves looking at 100-year-old railroad maps, 150-year-old railroad deeds, and subdivision plans from the mid-century. I love doing the necessary research to prove these cases and make the case for these landowners to get paid what the constitution allows.

What are some of the biggest challenges your clients face?

They may not realize that opening a portion of their land to the public can significantly impact their use and enjoyment of the property—even if the public project becomes an amenity the community likes.

How do you approach understanding your clients and their needs to provide the best legal advice?

The National Trails System Act doesn't require the government to notify the landowners affected by these rail-trail conversions. So, they are often left wondering what their rights are and who is responsible for the damage. Many times, explaining what rights these landowners have—namely, compensation—and what rights they don't have—getting the land back—goes a long way to help them plan for the future when it comes to the use and enjoyment of their land.

How do you stay up to date on the latest developments and trends that could impact your clients?

It is extremely important that I keep up with developments in the law regarding all types of government takings. Every day I review the latest decisions from the Court of Federal Claims and Surface Transportation Board as well as media specific to takings and condemnation.

What do you like to do outside of work?

I have two kids, and most of my time outside of work is spent with them pursuing their interests in sports and creative arts. My family loves to travel, and we've been fortunate enough to take our children to Europe and New Zealand, and we continue to explore all corners of the United States.

How are you involved in your community?

I stay involved with my children's school and our religious congregation, helping with events throughout the year. I also contribute to some of my favorite charities in the area such as Marygrove and Life House Youth Center in Sullivan, Missouri.

Publications & Presentations

August 4, 2025

Filing Fee Applications: Best Practices

United States Court of Federal Claims Bar Association

February 3, 2025

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

June 3, 2024

Missouri Easements and Rights-of-Way

Half-Moon Continuing Legal Education Seminar

March 4, 2024

Testimony before the sub-committee on Conservation and Natural Resources re:

House Bill 1554

Missouri House of Representatives

February 1, 2024

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

January 1, 2024

An Overview of Landowners' Rights in Federal Rail-Trail Conversions

National Agricultural Law Center Webinar

August 1, 2023

Rails to Trails in Mississippi

Mississippi Farm Bureau

February 1, 2023

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

June 1, 2022

Missouri Easements and Rights-of-Way

Half-Moon Continuing Legal Education Seminar

April 4, 2022

Guest Speaker, Eminent Domain Seminar

Wake Forest University School of Law

February 1, 2022

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

July 15, 2021

Supreme Court Limits Ability to Compel Access to Private Property Without Compensation

February 2, 2021

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

February 1, 2020

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar

Washington University School of Law

January 2020

Responding to Project Changes: Valuing a Taking When Government Action is Ongoing

ALI-CLE Eminent Domain & Land Valuation Litigation Conference

December 2020

Rails-to-Trails in Kansas – Understanding the interplay of state and federal law when converting abandoned railroad rights-of-way to public recreational trails

July 2019

Supreme Court Overturns *Williamson County*: Allows a Property Owner Challenging a Local Government Regulation to Bring a Fifth Amendment Taking Case in Federal Court without Having to First Litigate in State Court

February 2019

Guest Lecturer, Rails-to-Trails Seminar
Washington University School of Law

January 2019

Issues in Eminent Domain that Invite Ethical Mistakes: Staying on the Straight and Narrow

ALI-CLE 2019 Eminent Domain and Land Valuation Litigation Conference

October 2018

How the Federal Government Took the High Line
22nd Annual National Conference on Private Property Rights

Summer 2016

"Easement/Right of Way"
47th Annual Appraisal for Ad Valorem Taxation of Communications, Energy, and Transportation Properties

April 2, 2012

The Fifth Amendment Requires the Government to Pay an Owner Interest Equal to What the Owner Could Have Earned Had the Government Paid the Owner the Fair-Market Value of Their Property on the Date the Government took the Owner's Property.

The Brigham-Kanner Property Rights Conference Journal

2010

The Trails Act: Railroad Property Owners and Taxpayers for More Than a Quarter Century

45 Real Property Probate and Trust Journal 115