



WATER WARS

Noel Edlin '82 is in the middle of a fight between two California heavyweights: oil and ag

When Board of Governors member **Noel Edlin '82** tells people he's an environmental defense lawyer, many people assume he is standing in the way of clean-up efforts. But after more than 20 years defending complex environmental cases, Edlin may have had a greater impact than many environmental lawyers.

"In most environmental cases, usually all the parties are responsible for figuring out the extent of contamination and the most effective form of remediation," Edlin said. "We're diving in and doing very important work on the environment."

Environmental clean-up involving multiple stakeholders is precisely the issue in one of Edlin's current cases, *Palla Farms v. Crimson Resource Management Corp. et al.* Last September, family-owned Palla Farms sued Edlin's client, Dole Enterprises, along with three oil companies, arguing that waste from their fracking operations polluted drinking and agricultural aquifers. In the wake of the Palla Farms case, several other lawsuits have been

filed in Kern County by environmental groups seeking clean-up costs and damages over alleged soil and groundwater contamination by oil companies. If one or more of these cases is certified as a class action, the stage could be set for a showdown between two of California's largest industries, agriculture and oil, over the state's most precious resource: water.

"It's a potentially epic struggle with huge economic impacts," Edlin said, and it's exactly the kind of tangled, science-heavy case Edlin has favored since Bassi Edlin Huie & Blum was formed 10 years ago.

Edlin found his way into environmental litigation in the late 1990s, as growing concern about pollution caused an explosion of cases. He said environmental statutes impose strict liability on the parties, and the resulting litigation involves determining who is responsible for clean-up costs and remediation. "It's often not a question of whether a site is contaminated but how much, by whom, and when," he said. "I've probably done more to clean up the environment than most lawyers."