

## MVP: King & Spalding's Carol Wood

By Juan Carlos Rodriguez

*Law360 (December 6, 2019, 1:23 PM EST)* -- Carol Wood of King & Spalding LLP helped convince an international tribunal that a \$9.5 billion judgment against Chevron for environmental damage in Ecuador was based on fraud, and she's defending ConocoPhillips against a series of groundbreaking climate change lawsuits, earning her a spot among Law360's 2019 Environmental MVPs.

### **HER BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:**

Wood headed up the team representing Chevron Corp. and its indirect subsidiary Texaco Petroleum Co. at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which concluded in August 2018 that a \$9.5 billion judgment issued against the company by an Ecuadorian court over pollution in the Amazon was tainted by fraud and that Ecuador wrongfully enforced the ruling.

The tribunal said Chevron doesn't have to comply with the Ecuadorian judgment and that other nations should not recognize it. Chevron is now seeking damages it says Ecuador owes it for injuries caused by the judgment.

"It was a high water mark in my practice, and a fascinating case in many ways," Wood said. "We had a client who was not willing to back down because they knew they were in the right, and we were able to pull the facts together and really present to the tribunal what the true story was."

Part of the case included a trip to the Ecuadorian jungle, where Wood faced off with the country's lawyers and experts in a battle to determine whether the alleged environmental damage really could be pinned on Chevron.

She said the case depended on her ability to take the various technical issues addressed by expert witnesses and break them down into understandable concepts for the tribunal.

"I was really proud that we could show the tribunal that the claims that were being made against

MVP



Carol Wood  
King & Spalding

Chevron and TexPet ... were all false," she said.

#### **WHY SHE'S AN ENVIRONMENTAL ATTORNEY:**

Wood worked for a Congressional representative from her home state of Georgia right out of college, and she got the opportunity to work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and local communities on a large Superfund site in her district.

"What really was fascinating to me were the rights and obligations under the law with respect to permitting, remediation of contamination, and who is responsible and why," she said. "That's why I pushed myself into environmental law."

#### **WHAT MOTIVATES HER:**

"I always like to learn new things, and practicing law provides you with an opportunity to learn something new every day, whether it's a new legal principle or a scientific concept. It's new every day because you're constantly learning," Wood said.

She said that under the umbrella of environmental law, each case is slightly different. So attorneys may one day need to drill down on ecotoxicology, and another day study mining issues and learn how a mine or a smelter operates.

#### **HER ADVICE FOR YOUNGER ATTORNEYS:**

Wood said it's very important to develop an expertise, particularly at big law firms that represent clients in large disputes where it's easy to be lost in the crowd. If attorneys just starting out can develop depth in some specific areas, she said, others at the firm will look to them as experts. It will increase their demand and give them more confidence in their own practice.

"It's good to try everything when you get started, but really develop an expertise so that you can say, 'I know this area of the law,' and then publish or market yourself in that area of the law so people know it," Wood said. "I think that you then start distinguishing yourself from others."

— As told to Juan Carlos Rodriguez

*Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.*