



2021 MVP

Jonathan Kidwell

Jonathan Kidwell of Kirkland & Ellis LLP had a busy year advising clients through the environmental side of large deals, including private equity shop KKR & Co. LP's more than \$4 billion purchase of an airport services provider and the complex restructurings of Murray Energy and Chesapeake Energy, earning him a spot as one of Law360's 2021 Environmental MVPs.

His biggest achievement last year:

Helping to build out Kirkland's environmental practice both nationwide and within the firm's Texas offices into a group that is able to "anticipate and respond" to the needs of its clients is a point of pride, Kidwell said. He said navigating ever-evolving environmental regulations to advise clients through the environmental considerations of a vast array of matters, from bankruptcies to acquisitions, is a significant accomplishment for him.

"One of the areas I focused on over the past year is the changing environmental regulatory landscape and what that means in terms of the types of deals that my clients are interested in and the types of challenges faced by different

industries," Kidwell said. "And then sometimes those challenges result in financial difficulties and I have to pivot from deal work to helping clients navigate the environmental and regulatory aspects of their restructuring matters."

Kidwell pointed to his work advising oil and gas driller Chesapeake Energy through the environmental, reclamation, plugging and abandonment aspects of its Chapter 11 restructuring as an example of helping a

client handle the environmental components of large and complex bankruptcy proceedings.

What he is the proudest of:

Having successfully navigated numerous complex matters over the course of a single year is what Kidwell is proudest of, he said.

In addition to Chesapeake's restructuring, Kidwell helped guide privately owned coal giant Murray Energy through the environmental

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and reclamation considerations at the center of its Chapter 11 restructuring. Murray emerged from bankruptcy in September 2020.

On the deals side of his practice, Kidwell was lead environmental counsel for infrastructure funds controlled by KKR through the purchase of airport services provider Atlantic Aviation from Macquarie Infrastructure Corp. for \$4.475 billion. The deal saw KKR acquiring the operator of one of the largest U.S. networks of fixed-base operations providing aircraft ground support to the aviation sector, according to company announcements at the time.

His biggest challenge in the past year:

Successful years don’t happen without hard work, and the “sheer number of matters” that Kidwell and the broader Kirkland environmental practice worked on and continue to work on was one of the most challenging aspects of the past year, he said. Kidwell said last year he personally worked

on roughly 300 separate matters that spanned the spectrum of sectors, including energy and infrastructure, waste disposal and management, manufacturing, chemicals, and transportation.

“This affords great opportunities in terms of a strong supply of large interesting matters, but requires my full attention and relying on my many years of experience to make sure that every client gets my best advice,” Kidwell said.

Why he is an environmental law attorney:

The challenge is part of the appeal, though, for Kidwell, who said he is an environmental attorney because he loves the subject matter and because what it means to be an environmental attorney is “always changing, always expanding.”

“I’m an environmental attorney at Kirkland because of the incredible support system and the unparalleled opportunities and deal flow,” Kidwell said. “There’s just no other place where I could practice where I could work on this many interesting matters, this many challenging matters, and continue to increase my experience and find areas to add value to clients.”

What motivates him:

Kidwell said he is motivated by the pursuit of closing a deal after addressing and overcoming all the challenges associated with the transaction.

“I don’t think it helps my clients to gloss over important issues, but I never want environmental, health or safety considerations to be a roadblock to a deal or to exiting a restructuring,” he said. “I find that in the deal, regulatory and restructuring worlds in which I operate, there’s almost always a solution to a problem.”

His advice for junior attorneys:

“Building a legal career is a dance between the general and the specific,” Kidwell said, explaining that gaining experience on a variety of matters is an important step toward identifying your strengths and interests.

“But at the same time, you need to find a specific hook for what makes you uniquely valuable to your clients and colleagues,” Kidwell said. “For young environmental attorneys, it’s important to gain experience and breadth of knowledge but also to, early on, start to home in on what angles, what aspects, you can eventually become a leader in.”

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