

MVP: Kelley Drye's William J. Jackson

By Jack McLoone

Law360 (December 3, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- William J. "Bill" Jackson, co-chair of both Kelley Drye & Warren LLP's environmental law and environmental litigation sections, led a first-of-its-kind series of bench trials between the state of New Jersey and multiple E.I. du Pont de Nemours entities, earning him a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 Environmental MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment:

Jackson told Law360 that stewarding the perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, litigation was "without question" the biggest accomplishment of the past year. The litigation was initially set up as six separate bench trials to determine whether DuPont and its subsidiaries were liable for the contamination at what is known as the Chamber Works facility and others across the state.

After Jackson and his team helped New Jersey settle with 3M for up to \$450 million to close its portions of alleged PFAS liability and eliminate one of the bench trials, the attorneys were still contending with litigating the liability of over 100 years of alleged contamination by DuPont and its predecessors. With New Jersey on the "cutting edge" of PFAS regulation as the first state in the country to do so, Jackson and his team were somewhat blazing a trail with "new law, new facts, new science," he said. They weren't able to fully pin down exactly what they were trying until April, with trial set to begin in the middle of May.

"By the time we went to trial with DuPont, it was just a massive undertaking," Jackson said, noting that the state had 26 expert witnesses and DuPont had 26 of its own. "We checked into the Hilton Garden Inn in Camden for about a month. It was like living in a dorm with all of your best friends, and we had a great team of lawyers there. ... It was really a tremendous effort and a tremendous success for the entire team."

After winning four of the five remaining bench trials — and, in Jackson's estimation, the fifth and final was in hand — a settlement was reached for a landmark deal worth over \$2 billion, the largest environmental recovery ever obtained by a single state.



"I'm really proud of what we were able to do for New Jersey," Jackson said. "And frankly, I'm proud of our clients in New Jersey for getting in front of this and doing it in a way that allowed us to achieve these results."

His proudest moment:

While coming out on top in historic litigation with a record-breaking settlement is clearly something to be proud of, another facet of the suit sprung to mind for Jackson — the ability to include Kelley Drye's young attorneys in the DuPont litigation process in order to train them on the skills necessary to handle such complex litigation.

Holed up as part of the "dorm room" in Camden, young attorneys — ranging from fifth-year attorneys to fresh first-years — helped prepare some of the expert witnesses appearing on the state's behalf, with the young group working around the clock because they were "so fired up about the case and trying to do what was right for New Jersey," Jackson said.

"That whole exercise of training the next generation, the enthusiasm and passion of it, that to me was fabulous," he said. "I'm happy and was very proud to be able to give them that opportunity. We ended up being very close, and it was a wonderful experience for everybody involved. It was a really proud moment all the way around."

Another high-profile suit in progress:

Jackson's reputation as a leading environmental litigator means no rest for the weary. He is currently serving as lead counsel for the state of Maryland in its suit against the owners of the ship that struck and collapsed the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Kelley Drye's team is responsible for determining the magnitude of the damages caused by the destruction of the bridge as part of a larger legal team comprised of several firms, he said. Jackson is no stranger to such litigation, saying the key is setting individual teams up to succeed.

"Putting people in those lanes [of focus] on these massive cases so that everybody's got their role and responsibility and an opportunity to succeed is the best way I know to manage a case like this where there are so many moving parts," he said.

What motivates him:

Jackson's motivation as an environmental attorney, whether working on behalf of state agencies or corporate ones, is being able to benefit the public, including by protecting, preserving and restoring the natural environment and improving people's quality of life.

"It's really fun, and I like to say that I get to walk around righteously indignant all day long," Jackson told Law360 with a laugh. "It's fabulous. It's a really terrific practice, and I don't know that many people have the opportunity to do things like this."

His advice for young attorneys:

For Jackson, finding this niche was somewhat accidental. While he was a young litigation attorney, an environmental case came across his desk, and he found he loved it. He's spent the past 30 years working

in environmental law, including building Kelley Drye's practice, and he hopes young lawyers can find an area they are passionate about, too. And then at that point, even though all lawyers work hard, "work isn't work," he said.

"Find your passion and follow it," he said of his best advice for young lawyers. "Easy."

--As told to Jack McLoone. Editing by Michael Watanabe.

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