



*“Since the [case], over 80 restaurants have gone foie-gras-free.... Almost all the campaigns cropped up in direct response to our lawsuit, and I’ve had several activists reach out saying that our lawsuit made them less afraid of repression.”*

- AALDP client, Lauren Melchionda

The quote above is a fitting distillation of what we're achieving with the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project. It comes from a client whom we defended in a frivolous lawsuit filed by a restaurant owner against foie gras protesters. Our goal is to provide activists with legal support that keeps them out of court and fighting for animals.

For too long, the animal rights movement has been hindered by an unmet but critical need: a lack of legal support for activists who participate in mass protests, engage in civil disobedience, and rescue animals. Not only has this left those activists exposed to repression that squelches their activity, it has also limited the kinds of tactics and strategies used by the movement. Though bold, attention-grabbing action that evokes moral outrage is necessary to bring about moral revolutions, and though the animal agriculture industry itself says that this is the activism it is most concerned will impact its financial bottom line, these tactics have been the exception rather than the rule for the animal rights movement.

Now, in just two short years, the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project has begun to shift this, and 2024 was our busiest year yet. By representing and advising protesters, investigators, and whistleblowers, challenging unconstitutional laws and rulings, and advancing important legal arguments, AALDP is reassuring activists that, if they stick out their necks for animals and get in trouble, there are lawyers who will have their backs.

This year, we have had important victories, significantly increased our case- and workload, partnered with activists and organizations across the animal rights movement, and been discovered by people who are not part of the movement, but who have faced legal consequences for daring to help animals. We do all of this with only four employees, only three of whom are paid by our budget (I am paid as a full-time faculty member of the university). We try to never turn down a case, and our commitment has always been to do more with fewer resources.

We hope you will read this report to see how much can be accomplished when a small group of advocates is fiercely dedicated to maximizing our impact. If you are able, we hope you will contribute and help us continue our movement-defining work. Together, we will make animal rights a force to reckon with.

**Justin Marceau**

Director, Animal Activist Legal Defense Project





# 2024 Animal Rescues





## Animal Rescue Fights and Wins

2024 included dramatic victories for the Right to Rescue. AALDP was on the defense team for three Direct Action Everywhere activists who faced multiple felonies and 16 years in prison for rescuing three beagles from one of the last U.S. suppliers of dogs for vivisection, Ridgland Farms. Stunningly, after we filed a motion that would have forced prosecutors to argue that dogs are legally "things," they suddenly dismissed the case just days before trial was to begin. AALDP and local animal advocacy organizations Dane4Dogs and Alliance for Animals wasted no time turning the tables on Ridgland, filing a petition for a special prosecutor to bring criminal cruelty charges against Ridgland. In January 2025, the judge granted our petition.



*"AALDP has been a game changer for animal activism in Wisconsin, both legally and for morale. For over seven years, local Wisconsin activists fought to shut down Ridgland Farms. We led ballot initiatives and passed ground-breaking ordinances banning dog and cat experimentation, but it all seemed to have no tangible impact for the dogs suffering at Ridgland until AALDP joined us. For the first time, there is a good chance that Ridgland Farms will finally be held accountable for its cruelty—a milestone that was out of reach prior to the involvement, expertise, and dedication of AALDP attorneys. And AALDP's impact extends far beyond the outcome of this particular lawsuit. Because of its involvement, we have learned so much about the legal process and built connections and friendships that will benefit the animal rights movement in Wisconsin, and hopefully nationwide, for decades to come. Thank you so much for what you do!"*

**- Rebekah Robinson, President, Dane4Dogs**

In another dramatic victory, AALDP secured the dismissal of charges against a sanctuary owner, Tracy Murphy, who faced jail for providing care to two loose cows who had wandered onto her property—again, on the eve of trial. For two years, law enforcement and prosecutors had aggressively prosecuted Tracy on larceny charges—holding her in jail, shackling her in court, and subjecting her to a gag order. Last summer, we secured a front-page, Sunday Edition story about the case in the *New York Times*.

At the eleventh hour, AALDP discovered that the supervising investigator in Tracy's case was the brother-in-law of the purported owner of the cows, who was also a New York State Trooper. We also pressed for dismissal because the cows had been sold and slaughtered, preventing defense attorneys from examining the prime evidence in the case. In advance of dismissing the case, the judge blasted law enforcement for its shoddy work.



Tracy Murphy at Asha Farm Sanctuary

*"I think the investigation done by the New York State Police was horrible."*

- Judge Gary Strenkoski, before dismissing charges against AALDP client Tracy Murphy

We also won a not guilty verdict in the case of three volunteers from an Arkansas animal rescue organization who had been charged with criminal trespass for rescuing a paralyzed mother dog and two puppies from under an abandoned, dilapidated house slated for demolition.

*"I can't express enough how deeply grateful I am to the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project for their unwavering support during one of the most difficult and emotional times of my life. When I was wrongfully arrested and detained for rescuing puppies, it felt like everything was against me. But the team didn't just offer legal help—they stood by me as allies, fighting for justice and my right to act on behalf of innocent animals. Their assistance gave me the strength to keep fighting, knowing I wasn't alone. They didn't just defend my case, they believed in my cause. I will forever be thankful for their compassion, dedication, and the incredible impact they've had on my life and my activism."*

**- Mary Scott-McKinney, defendant in the Arkansas dog rescue case**

## More animal rescue cases coming in 2025

We have major animal rescue cases coming up in 2025, too. Our client Zoe Rosenberg faces up to five years in prison for openly rescuing chickens and ducks from a California factory farm. In 2024, we obtained the dismissal of multiple charges against Zoe, including felonies. Her trial begins in May 2025.

Meanwhile, we are appealing the conviction of Direct Action Everywhere co-founder Wayne Hsiung for his participation in protests at two Bay Area factory farms, during which activists rescued animals. We are arguing that California already provides legal protection for rescuing animals from certain situations, such as rescuing dogs from hot cars, and that denying that defense to those who rescued farmed animals is arbitrary and unlawful. In 2025, several organizations and experts will file amicus briefs in support of the case and this important legal argument.

We are also currently representing the owners of the Michigan Duck Rescue and Sanctuary, a large animal sanctuary in Lyon, Michigan, that provides safety and care to hundreds of ducks and geese. The owners face nearly a dozen misdemeanor charges for providing care to ducks at their sanctuary.

In addition to arguing that animals are legally entitled to rescue, we also supported the Nonhuman Rights Project in its latest case pressing for the fundamental rights of certain nonhuman animals to challenge their captivity. In a case seeking the release to a sanctuary of five elephants from a Colorado zoo, AALDP filed an amicus brief on behalf of two dozen law professors in support of animal personhood.



# *Defending Whistleblowers*



**SEAQUEST ACCUSED OF TRYING TO SILENCE EMPLOYEES**

## Defending Whistleblowers and Protecting Free Speech

In 2024, we took on several projects to protect whistleblowers who exposed animal industries. Just a few weeks before the November election, the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project and Direct Action Everywhere (DxE) released an investigation conducted by anonymous DxE activists who placed hidden cameras in Denver's only remaining slaughterhouse, Superior Farms, the largest lamb slaughterhouse in the country. A feature story in *The Intercept* broke the news of the investigation, boosting a local ballot initiative campaign to close Superior Farms and ban slaughterhouses in Denver. Though the initiative did not pass in 2024, this first-time effort received significant voter support and was an inspiring example of how to use investigations to support efforts to press for material change for animals.



# SECRET RECORDINGS SHOW UGLY CONDITIONS AHEAD OF DENVER'S SLAUGHTERHOUSE BAN REFERENDUM

Advocates hope the graphic videos, which were shared with The Intercept, will help rally support for the ballot initiative.



Natasha Lennard

October 9 2024, 3:47 p.m.

< Share



*The Intercept* headline on Denver's slaughterhouse ban referendum





We also defended whistleblowers who spoke up for aquatic animals. We represented Lana Westbrook, the former Marketing Coordinator for the notorious, mall-based interactive aquarium SeaQuest, in a civil suit filed by the company after Lana spoke up about severe animal neglect and mistreatment. Dozens of current and former SeaQuest employees have come forward to blow the whistle, and SeaQuest threatened similar lawsuits against other employees—to no avail. In December, SeaQuest filed for bankruptcy, dismissed its lawsuit against Lana, and unconditionally released her from a non-disclosure agreement that had limited what she could say about her experience working at SeaQuest.

Similarly, we are defending former marine animal trainer Phil Demers in a lawsuit filed by the beleaguered Miami Seaquarium, after Demers published drone footage of the dire living conditions of the orca Lolita, who died soon after. The case arose amidst mounting animal welfare violations, and Phil's advocacy led to increased scrutiny of and protest against the Seaquarium, and widespread calls for it to close. Phil's case is ongoing as Miami Seaquarium's finances continue to suffer significantly.

In both cases, the combination of whistleblowers, investigative journalism, and public outcry pushed these animal exploiting companies toward financial ruin. They underscore the importance of providing robust defense for whistleblowers and others poised to expose the inevitable abuses of animal industries.





In 2024, we also represented former employee whistleblowers from Triple D Wildlife, a captive wildlife facility in Montana, whom Triple D sued after they reported to the USDA "[i]llegal, unethical, and just absolutely morally wrong and dishonest" conduct they observed while working for Triple D, and spoke with a journalist from *Rolling Stone*. As in the SeaQuest case, and many whistleblower cases, Triple D alleged the former employees violated a non-disclosure agreement. But, as labor attorney Matt Bruenig notes, many of these NDAs contain illegal and unenforceable contract terms. In 2024, we beat an attempt to gag the defendants, then collaborated with Bruenig, who filed an unfair labor practices charge against Triple D, to dismiss the case. Combined, these efforts led to a favorable settlement for our clients, vindicating their brave whistleblowing.

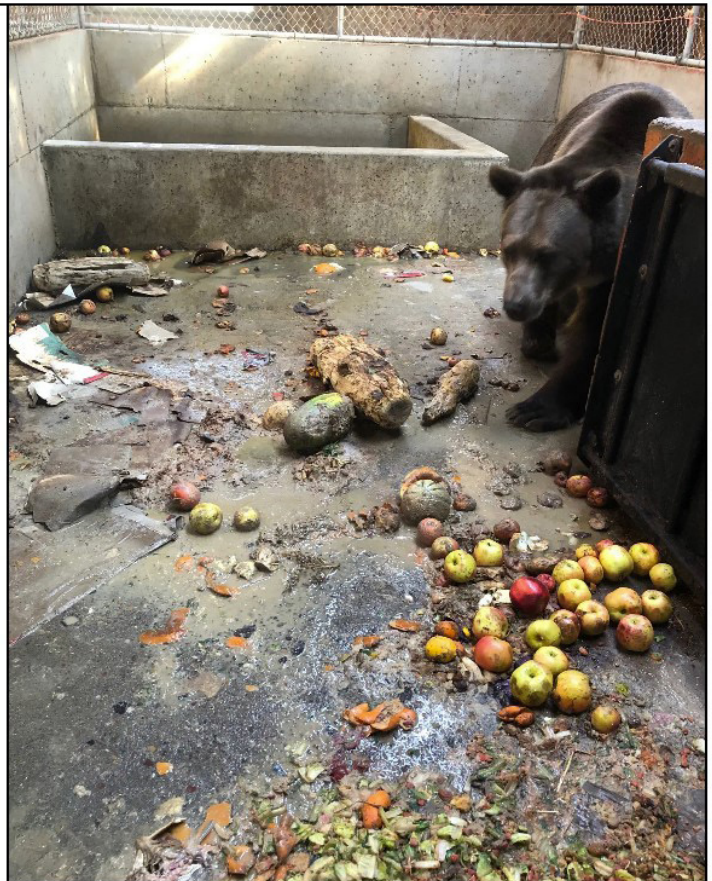
**SPECIAL REPORT**

# THE UGLY TRUTH ABOUT THE WILD ANIMALS OF INSTAGRAM

Many of the thrilling photographs of bears, wolves, and tigers on your social media feeds are taken at game farms — places critics say are the exotic-animal equivalent of puppy mills

By **RENE EBERSOLE**

APRIL 21, 2024



*Rolling Stone* story about whistleblowers from Triple D Wildlife

In 2024, we also went on the offensive to protect the ability of whistleblowers to expose wrongdoing. In 2024, AALDP teamed up with organizations across the ideological spectrum—including Project Veritas, PETA, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), Animal Outlook, and the law firm First & Fourteenth—to file in support of a challenge to an Oregon law that prohibits surreptitious audio recordings. Oregon's law is one of the most restrictive consent-to-record laws in the country, stifling undercover investigations and other exposés. While the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed with our position, the case is pending cert in the US Supreme Court. The constitutionality of restrictions like this is destined to be resolved by the Supreme Court, and AALDP is on the ground floor advocating for the rights of undercover investigators.



# *Defending Demonstrators*



## Defending Demonstrators and Protecting the Right to Protest

In addition to hefty cases that press important legal standards, challenge unconstitutional laws, and contribute to the ongoing development of Animal Law, AALDP consistently takes on the most traditional kinds of activist cases: protesters get ticketed or arrested, and they call us to defend them. In 2024, we:

***Secured a plea to reduced charges, requiring no jail or probation, for four protesters initially charged with felonies for protesting the Iditarod dog race***

***Successfully pressed for dismissal of an anti-speech, harassing noise ticket issued to the driver of PETA's "Hell on Wheels" truck, which played the sounds of chickens on factory farms at the Denver Food & Wine Festival***

***Resolved felony and misdemeanor cases for fur protesters in Portland, OR, through a plea to reduced charges with no additional punishment***

***Secured the dismissal of charges against 15 activists cited under an unconstitutional "offensive gesture" statute while protesting a fast food company for falling short on its animal welfare promises***



Photo: Animal Rights Collective Portland (ARCPDX)

Our cases take us all over the country, not only providing our expertise to activists far and wide, but also spreading the word about a group of attorneys focused on animal activist defense. We have also advised numerous activists in advance of protests and other events, so that they don't end up with legal cases in the first place!





Finally, AALDP is also on the defense team of the racketeering prosecution of Defend the Atlanta Forest protesters, who are working to stop construction of a police training facility in a forest in Atlanta, GA. This is the one of the most dangerous government attacks on protest and free speech we have seen in years, and, if the government's efforts are successful, we are bound to see similar attacks against animal rights activists. Indeed, the Atlanta prosecution is strikingly similar to the mid-2000s prosecution of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty organizers, recasting a political campaign as an unlawful conspiracy. AALDP's participation in the defense of these defendants helps forge ties with broader social justice movements, and our expertise about the SHAC prosecution is a significant contribution to the defense against a prosecutorial strategy that threatens all activists.



Activists with the Stop Copy City campaign have faced dramatic repression of their protest movement



# 2024 Advocacy and Outreach





Beyond directly defending activists, we have also worked hard to spread the word about activist defense as a form of Animal Law. In 2024, we spoke at conferences and to Bar Associations around the country, and held events for students and the public about activism, legal defense, and skills that lawyers and activists both need to advance our work.

## Public talks:

New York Bar Association Animal Law Committee  
Connecticut Bar Association Animal Law Section  
Texas Bar Association Animal Law Committee  
Kentucky Bar Association Animal Law Section  
Michigan Bar Association Animal Law Section  
Association of American Law Schools  
Yale Animal Law Society  
NYU Law School  
Canadian Animal Law Conference  
US Animal and Vegan Advocacy Summit

## Events:

In the Spring, we brought activists and lawyers from around the country to Denver for Behind the Headlines: Effective Media Engagement for Lawyers and Activists. Participants heard from lawyers, journalists, and communications professionals how to sharpen their media skills and get their stories out. This inspiring and collaborative event focused on the unique ways we speak to the press and the special ethical obligations that lawyers have when speaking publicly about their clients and cases.

## Students:

In the Fall, we kicked off our second year as a clinical program at the University of Denver with the largest number of applicants so far. Ten students joined the project assisting us with substantive work on all our cases, as well as conducting additional research that will be of critical assistance to activists in the years to come. Client Tracy Murphy, former SHAC 7 prisoner Jake Conroy, and Jake Davis from the Nonhuman Rights Project visited the class as guest speakers. Students will be continuing their work into the Spring 2025 semester.

*"I came to law school with no intention of focusing on animal advocacy, but my time with the AALDP opened my eyes to the critical intersection between law and animal welfare, and empowered me with the tools to effect lasting change. The knowledge, mentorship, and hands-on experience I gained through AALDP have been transformative both professionally and personally. Through AALDP I've been granted opportunities I never thought possible as it helped develop the skills I'll use for the rest of my career. Most importantly, I was granted the opportunity to push for a change within the legislature. As a law student, a bill I wrote to ban cosmetic testing on animals is likely to be passed this legislative session. The encouragement I received from AALDP was vital to instilling this confidence and ability within me. I am now committed to using my legal skills to push for stronger protections and, ultimately, to run for office with the goal of advancing animal welfare legislation. The program has shaped my professional identity and set me up for success."*

- Michael Barlow-Roach, JD Candidate, 2025

# Press Highlights

2024 saw a significant increase in press coverage of AALDP's work, due to our hiring a communications consultant, who has now become AALDP's Communications Director. With someone specifically focused on promoting our work, we are better able to defend animal advocates not only in court, but also in the court of public opinion.

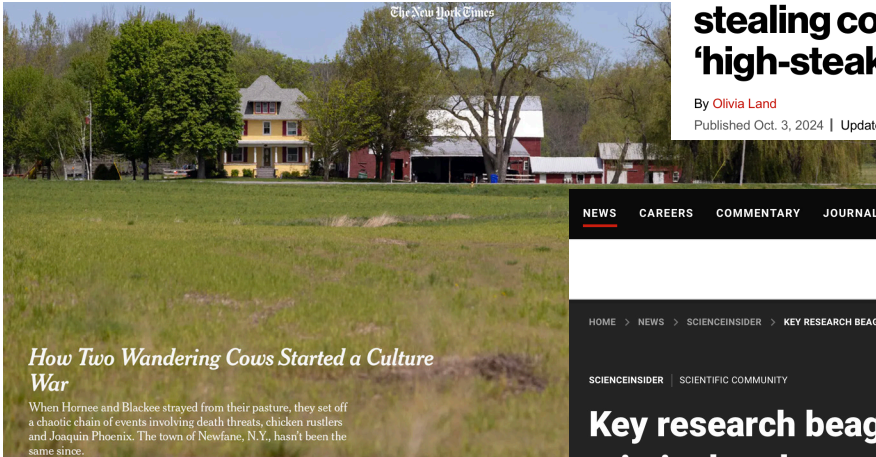


US NEWS

## NY animal sanctuary owner accused of stealing cows walks free after twist in 'high-steaks' case

By Olivia Land  
Published Oct. 3, 2024 | Updated Oct. 8, 2024, 1:01 p.m. ET

10 Comments



### How Two Wandering Cows Started a Culture War

When Hornee and Blackee strayed from their pasture, they set off a chaotic chain of events involving death threats, chicken rustlers and Joaquin Phoenix. The town of Newfane, N.Y., hasn't been the same since.

NEWS CAREERS COMMENTARY JOURNALS

Science

News Home All News ScienceInsider News Features

DONATE

HOME > NEWS > SCIENCEINSIDER > KEY RESEARCH BEAGLE BREEDER FACES POTENTIAL CRIMINAL PROBE

SCIENCEINSIDER | SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

## Key research beagle breeder faces potential criminal probe

's 3200-dog facility

All Sections

THE DENVER POST

Subscribe

Log in

68°F Saturday, March 1st 2025  
Digital Replica Edition

Politics

Latest Headlines Colorado Politics Crime Nation World Education Health Environment Transportation Housing News Obituaries

TRENDING: National Weather Service, NOAA layoffs Denver strip club wage theft Vote: Denver's best green chile

POLITICS

## Supporters of Denver slaughterhouse ban claim video shows illegal treatment of lambs in city's last facility

Superior Farms says footage from anonymous activists who back Initiated Question

KSTP.COM EYEWITNESS NEWS

News Weather Watch Live Traffic Sports

Watch Now:  
5 EYEWITNESS NEWS Evening

## SeaQuest accused of trying to silence former employee

Eric Rasmussen KSTP  
Updated: May 22, 2024 - 5:49 PM  
Published: May 22, 2024 - 4:47 PM



## In Solidarity

Below is a list of organizations the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project collaborated with in 2024. Together, we are strengthening activist defense and emboldening activists.



Alliance for Animals



animal  
EQUALITY



ANIMAL  
JUSTICE

AnimalOutlook  
*Exposing Truth. Inspiring Change.*



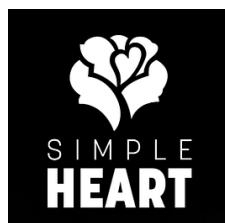
ANIMAL  
PARTISAN



THE HUMANE  
LEAGUE 



PETA 





*“The Animal Activist Legal Defense Project makes me feel supported not just as a defendant, but also as an animal rights activist. AALDP understands the importance of balancing the personal risks of a prosecution with the opportunities a case may provide to further help animals. Knowing AALDP lawyers are available to help when trouble arises allows me to feel more empowered and safe doing activism.”*

- Zoe Rosenberg, Direct Action Everywhere

