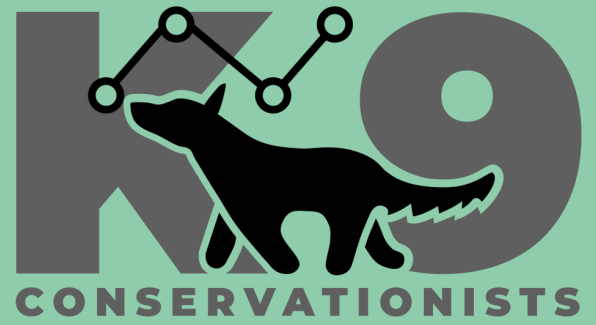


# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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WIND ENERGY, ALASKAN  
WOLVES, GROWTH, AND  
IN-PERSON LEARNING



Pictured: Heather  
and Ellie

# DEAR FRIENDS

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2024 was an incredible year of growth and achievement for K9 Conservationists. Our teams ventured into breathtaking and challenging environments to further our mission. In Alaska and Canada, we tracked elusive wolf scat across rugged terrain. In Wyoming, we braved snowstorms and snakes to monitor the impact of wind energy on wildlife. In Oregon, we focused on surveying vole populations to support sustainable farming practices, while in Texas, our teams sniffed out the last remaining ocelots in the United States.

Beyond the field, we continued to release our podcast, hosted an in-person retreat, attended several conferences, and ran another successful online handler course. Our success this year was made possible through collaboration and the incredible support of our friends and colleagues. Lauren Wendt, alongside Finn and Benny of Momentum K9, lent their expertise to the ocelot surveys in Texas. Susie Dunham and her dog Reacher took over the Oregon vole population surveys. Blair Pfeifer, with Boone and Buzzard, spent nine intense months on Wyoming's wind farm project. Toni Proescholdt was an invaluable asset to the Alaska wolf scat team, while Vanessa Lopez and Bernice Morfe joined K9 Conservationists as science communication interns, helping to amplify our mission and reach.

Amid all this activity, Rachel continued her master's studies at the University of Montana, while I worked on my PhD at Oregon State University. Balancing graduate school and K9 Conservationists has been both rewarding and demanding, and we're deeply grateful for Heather's willingness to shoulder extra responsibilities to keep us moving forward.

At K9 Conservationists, passion and perseverance are at the core of everything we do. This year, we walked thousands of kilometers, greeted hundreds of sunrises, and poured our energy into proposals, student feedback, and projects that drive our mission forward. None of this would have been possible without your unwavering support.

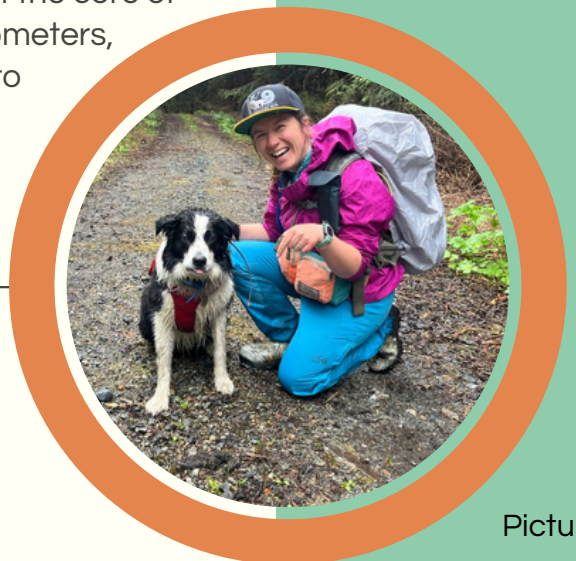
From the bottom of our hearts—and with wagging tails—thank you.



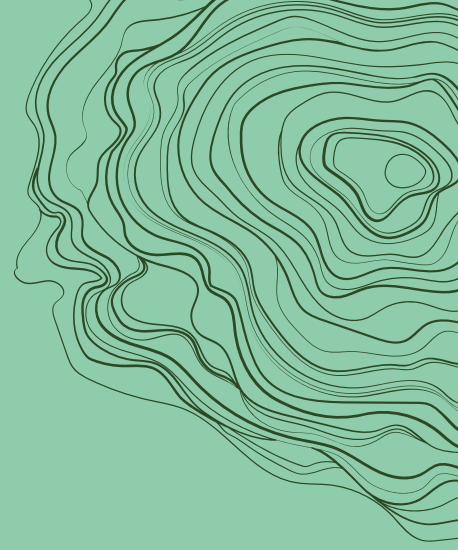
*Kayla Fratt*

KAYLA FRATT

Co-Founder



Pictured: Kayla  
and Barley





# K9 Conservationists

## at a Glance

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Our mission is to unite highly trained conservation detection dog teams with researchers to collect scientific data. We aim to provide mentorship, education, and foster collaboration among scientists, novice handlers, and local communities.

Our core values are collaboration, Humane Hierarchy-based training, and enthusiasm for sharing knowledge about conservation detection dogs.

We pride ourselves on creative solutions for challenging projects, top-notch dog welfare, and safety in the field.

### 2024 by the numbers

**+5**  
human  
team  
members

**~1395**  
samples  
detected

**12**  
project  
proposals  
submitted

**24**  
interviews,  
demos, and  
presentations

**90**  
new  
handler  
course  
students

**36,288**  
podcast  
plays





# Education & Collaboration



## University Outreach

Through our university outreach program, Kayla presented "The Past, Present, and Future of Conservation Dogs," sharing her journey in the field and showcasing how advanced training methods enhance detection dog work. Each talk concluded with a live demonstration by K9s Barley and Niffler.



## In-person Conferences

A highlight of our year was participating in The Wildlife Society Conference, which proved to be an exceptional forum for knowledge exchange. Our team learned from both seasoned experts and emerging voices in the field. Alongside our project partners, we also attended the Wind Wildlife Research Meeting, advancing our understanding of renewable energy and wildlife.



## Conservation Dog Alliance

We're thrilled to announce that 2024 marked the launch of the Conservation Dog Alliance (CDA), and we're proud to be founding members. This welcoming and inclusive community is set to transform the conservation dog field. Members enjoy a growing research library, along with lunch-and-learns, skillshares, continuing education, and networking opportunities.

# WIND ENERGY IN WYOMING

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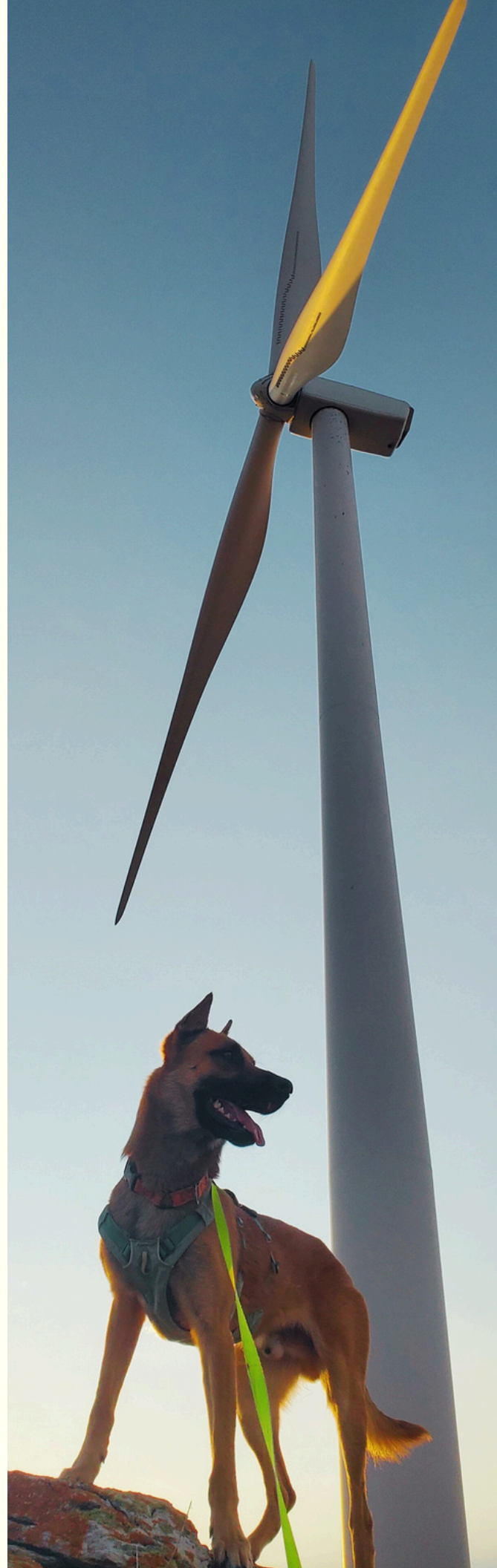
We were honored to support and participate in an innovative project this year that blends renewable energy development with wildlife conservation. Researchers are testing a simple yet clever solution to reduce bird collisions with wind turbines: painting one of the turbine blades black. The idea comes from a Norwegian study that showed a 72% reduction in bird fatalities by breaking up the visual uniformity of turbine blades, making them more visible to birds like golden eagles.

The project brings together the expertise and resources of many partners, including PacifiCorp, the Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute (REWI), the United States Geological Survey (USGS), and other research teams. It's part of a larger public-private partnership that also involves the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Oregon State University, Invenergy, and NextEra Energy.

Currently being tested at a Wyoming wind farm, the study uses advanced tracking technology, detailed monitoring of bird activity, and carcass surveys to assess the impact of the painted blades. Our teams have been assisting with the latter methodology, and it's been no small feat—our hardworking teams have also been on the ground for nine months this year. They've endured intense winds, snow, summer heat, cactus, rattlesnakes, and encounters with other wildlife to help make this project a success. The work has involved three dedicated handlers—Blair, Heather, and Rachel—and six amazing dogs: Buzzard, Boone, Scottie, Ellie, Niffler, and Suki.

If successful, this could provide a cost-effective and scalable solution for reducing bird fatalities at wind farms around the world. It's an inspiring example of how collaboration and innovation can strike a balance between renewable energy growth and wildlife conservation!

Pictured: Buzzard



# ALEXANDER ARCHIPELAGO WOLVES

As part of her PhD at Oregon State University and funded by Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Kayla is studying the diet and movement of the Alexander Archipelago wolf. She and Barley spent 4 months braving wind, waves, cold, and never-ending rain in the islands around Prince of Wales, Alaska. Alongside their fantastic field technician Toni Proescholdt and intrepid boat captains Michael Kapnich and Ben Hodek, Kayla and Barley surveyed 22 islands!

They'll repeat this project for two more summers. Now that the samples have been collected, Kayla is learning to extract DNA and analyze the scats for species identification, diet contents, and individual identification. She'll then perform spatial analysis regarding the factors influencing wolf diet and movement across these islands.

Pictured: Kayla and Barley (below)    Toni and Barley (right)



# TEXAS OCELOTS

The United States is home to fewer than 80 wild ocelots, most living on private ranches in southeast Texas. Alongside Texas A&M Kingsville's SPEC lab and with funding from the East Foundation, K9 Conservationists is working to monitor these elusive cats. Our dear friend and colleague Lauren Wendt spent a month surveying for ocelots with her dogs Finn and Benny.

This was an incredibly challenging project with heat, cacti, thorned trees, and low target density. Lauren's tenacity and expertise prevailed even when her dog Finn was injured by a javelina.

James Helferich, the PhD student leading this project, said, "Our experience with K9 Conservationists was a great asset to our ocelot research program. We knew getting scat data would be a challenging endeavor, but working with K9 Conservationists allowed us to execute an effective project."

Despite the challenges, we are thrilled to return for a second field season with Dr. Petracca and PhD student James in 2025. Heather, Scottie, and Barley will be heading to south Texas for round two in January!

Pictured: Finn (below) and Benny (right)



# VOLES IN OREGON

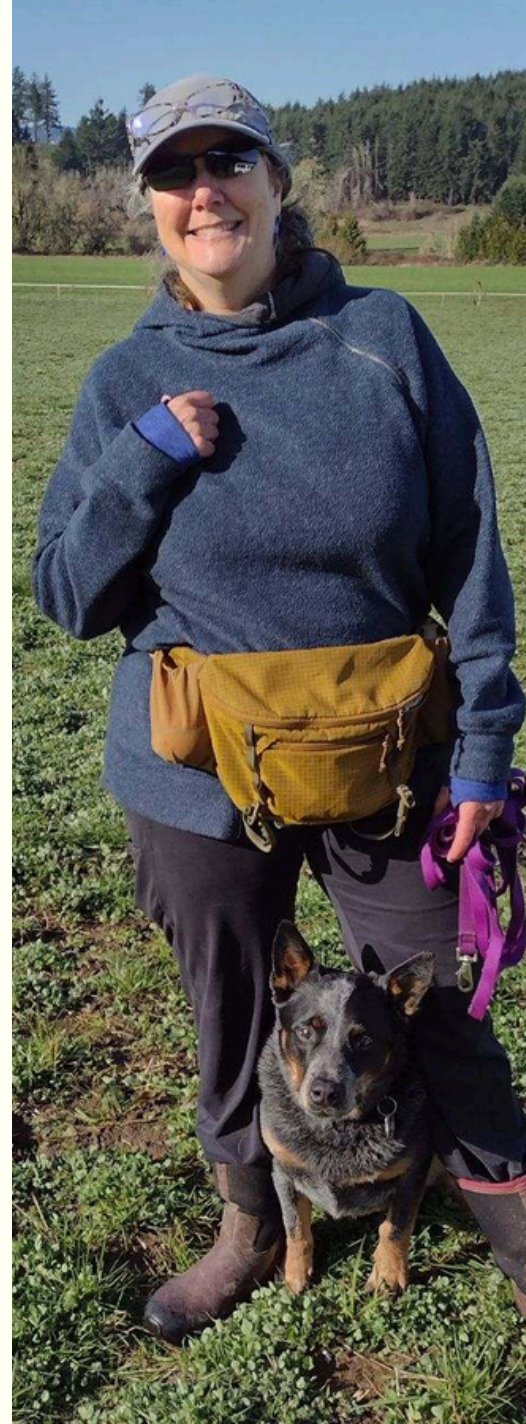
We were thrilled to have Susie Dunham and her dog Reacher join the K9 Conservationists family this year. Susie and Reacher worked on a project in partnership with Oregon State University. Voles can cause significant damage to farmlands, but organic farmers are unable to control their populations with pesticides. Reacher and Susie helped locate vole burrows during a low-population year so that farmers could target them with traps.

This interesting project highlights the diverse uses of ecological detection dogs beyond traditional conservation to include supporting organic farmers. In an article from Oregon State University Extension, Nick Andrews said, "About four or five years ago we went through a major vole irruption in the Willamette Valley. All of the vegetable farmers I was working with were struggling. Some were even thinking about not growing root vegetables again because the damage was so severe."

The multi-pronged approach to handling explosive vole populations also includes installing raptor perches to encourage natural pest control from Oregon's resident birds of prey.

Pictured: Reacher (below)

Susie and Reacher (right)





# SCI-COMM INTERNS

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With the demands of fieldwork, lab work, and her PhD, Kayla found it challenging to manage our outreach and educational programs. After discussions with the board and the team, we decided it was time to bring on interns to help. Initially, we had hoped to hire just one, but after reviewing the applications of Vanessa Lopez (right) and Bernice Morfe (below)—each offering unique and distinct styles—we couldn't resist bringing them both on board.

Working alongside Kayla, Vanessa and Bernice have been instrumental in broadening our online reach. They've contributed to the development of social media campaigns and created engaging content, most notably on TikTok. Vanessa's creative approach to storytelling and Bernice's creative editing have allowed us to engage with a wider audience, expand our network, and increase awareness of the importance of conservation detection dogs. Their diverse skill sets and fresh perspectives have been invaluable in supporting our mission, and we're excited to see the continued impact of their work.

Pictured: Bernice (below) and Vanessa (right)



# IN PERSON LEARNING & OUTREACH

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Despite the success of our online conservation dog handler course, the K9 Conservationists team has always known that in-person coaching is imperative for consistent handler growth. That's why we were so thrilled to offer our first-ever in person retreat. The National Disaster Search Dog Foundation graciously hosted us on their 100-acre campus for 3 days of in-person coaching with 9 dog teams, 3 guest instructors, and 13 auditors. We cannot wait for further in-person opportunities in 2025.

In-person events can be limited, so we were also eager to accept guest lecture opportunities at California Lutheran University, Macalester College, and Oregon State University. We gave presentations at the National Wildlife Society Conference and the Wind Wildlife Research Meeting.

Our dog teams and programs were featured on NPR's "All Things Considered", the top science podcast "Ologies", the Wolf Connection, Science Pawdcast, and more.

Pictured: Rachel and Suki

