



Animal Law &
Policy Institute

VERMONT LAW & GRADUATE SCHOOL



2025-2026 Update

Program Highlights

| Key Accomplishments

- Expanded course offerings including Animal Law in Practice, Aquaculture Law and Policy, Wildlife Law and Policy, and International Animal Law
- Prioritized continued engagement in policy advocacy, research, and public education to ensure farmed animal advocacy remains a visible, durable pillar of the Animal Law and Policy Institute
- Conducted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and public records projects for national organizations to uncover how agencies regulate industrial animal agriculture and where enforcement and oversight are falling short
- Assisted national organizations with projects designed to prevent the expansion of animal-based aquaculture, including legal and policy strategies to challenge harmful facilities and rulemaking pathways
- Launched the Graduate Certificate in Animal Protection Policy



| Historic Gift to VLGS

In 2025, VLGS received a \$10 million gift—the largest in the school’s history—to support its leading environmental work. This meaningful support will expand VLGS’s expertise in animal protection policy and agriculture and food systems, in addition to advancing a new research-based initiative to combat harmful aquaculture. Funding supports the **Farmed Animal Advocacy Clinic**, the ALPI program staff, scholarships, and student networking and speaking opportunities. The gift allows the ALPI to build upon the momentum of its growing animal law and policy degree programs, including a JD concentration in animal law, Animal Law LLM, Master of Public Policy: Animal Protection, and Master of Legal Studies: Animal Law.

Students from around the world take part in our extensive course offerings taught by leading scholars and practitioners to advance their careers in animal advocacy. The gift reflects the important role of legal advocacy for animal justice.



VLGS students at VINE Sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont

| Awards and Accolades



Delcianna Winders, tenured professor and director of the Animal Law and Policy Institute, was named the 2025 Richard Brooks Distinguished Faculty Scholar in recognition of her significant contributions to the scholarly mission of the school.

Professor Winders was also the recipient of the 2025 American Bar Association Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section’s (TIPS) Excellence in the Advancement of Animal Law Award. Presented by the TIPS Animal Law Committee, this award recognizes exceptional work by an Animal Law Committee member who, through commitment and leadership, has advanced the humane treatment of animals through the law.

The ALPI faculty and staff are sought-after experts in the field due to their extensive experience, scholarship, and dedication to animal justice. From **Vox** to **Inside Climate News** to **CNN**, and even a **feature length documentary**, the ALPI team regularly appears in the media through articles, news stories, podcasts, and more.

| Welcome Amanda Hitt

The Animal Law and Policy Institute at VLGS is growing! **Amanda Hitt** was recently welcomed to the team as director of strategic initiatives.

A talented, multi-threat animal law and policy champion, Amanda is tasked with developing and executing the ALPI’s programmatic vision for its next, and critical, second five-year chapter. Amanda’s knowledge of public health, public interest litigation, whistleblower protection, and advocacy makes her an ideal contributor to the ALPI and a role model and educator for our aspiring animal law and policy advocates.

As Amanda helps launch groundbreaking new initiatives, we look forward to sharing more about her work and contributions.



Farmed Animal Advocacy Highlights



We maintained an active farmed animal docket during a leadership transition through the Farmed Animal Advocacy Practicum while the search for a dedicated Farmed Animal Advocacy Clinic (FAAC) director was underway.

We are excited that **Conley Wouters** is the new director of the Farmed Animal Advocacy Clinic.

Professor Wouters brings litigation and teaching experience in both Los Angeles and Chicago, along with a deep commitment to advancing the field of

animal law. His current research focuses on legal storytelling and animal law, areas in which he has already made meaningful scholarly contributions.

He developed a strong foundation in complex legal advocacy while continuing an active pro bono practice centered on animal law. In recognition of this work, he received the 2023 Compassionate Counsel Award from the Animal Legal Defense Fund. We are thrilled to welcome Professor Wouters and look forward to the leadership, expertise, and passion he brings to the clinic.

| Leading the Response to Proposed Increases in Slaughter Speeds

This year, the ALPI helped lead a nationwide effort to oppose the USDA's proposed rules that would increase chicken slaughter line speeds and eliminate limits on pig slaughter line speeds. Drawing on the expertise of current and former federal inspectors, veterinarians, and advocates, we contributed to comprehensive comments documenting the risks these changes pose to animal welfare, worker safety, public health, and the environment.

The ALPI also helped build and coordinate a broad coalition of more than seventy organizations that signed the comments urging the USDA to reject the proposed increases. Beyond the formal

rulemaking process, our work helped bring national attention to these issues through coverage in *The New Republic*, *Inside Climate News*, and *The Cool Down*, and most recently, **Bloomberg Law**, amplifying concerns about the impacts of accelerated production on animals, workers, communities, and public health.

Through strategic advocacy, coalition building, and public engagement, the ALPI is ensuring that the voices of inspectors, experts, and affected communities are heard in critical regulatory decisions shaping the future of our food system.



Chickens who are safe from slaughter living at VINE Sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont



| Addressing Animal Hoarding

We supported local advocates in addressing a heartbreaking animal hoarding case involving a facility presenting itself as a sanctuary. These situations are complex and can fall into legal gaps. We assisted local advocates to understand the judicial system, connected the right stakeholders, and supported their efforts to safeguard the animals from continued harm.



IMPACT

Highlights the need for stronger oversight of unregulated facilities, and allows us to engage in community and advocacy skill building to connect our program to the advocates on the ground in our state

| Combatting Harmful Aquaculture

We drafted model legislation to protect aquatic farmed animals, bringing science and law together to defend billions of fish and other aquatic beings who are often excluded from legal protections.



IMPACT

Gives advocates and policymakers a ready-to-use legal framework for safeguarding aquatic life



Gladys and Olivia are now safe at Merrymac Farm Sanctuary

| Investigating Insect Farming

We explored the rapidly expanding insect farming industry, uncovering legal gaps and exposing misleading “green” marketing claims.



IMPACT

Equips advocates to challenge false environmental narratives and push for ethical and transparent regulation

| Researching Drone Law

We clarified the legal use of drones in farmed animal investigations, balancing privacy concerns with the urgent need to document cruelty.



IMPACT

Empowers investigators with clear, lawful pathways to gather evidence that can expose abuse and drive reform

Student and Alumni Highlights



NYU Animal Law Student Summit

Student Training and Leadership Development

The ALPI supports students through travel grants to conferences and competitions, career mentorship, and facilitating networking opportunities.

The Animal Law and Policy Institute faculty, staff, and students participated in the Brooks Institute Animal Law Student Summit at New York University. The summit brought together members from animal law programs at VLGS, NYU, George Washington University, Lewis & Clark, Harvard, Yale, Toronto, and the University of Chicago to discuss cutting-edge issues, build collaborative projects, and network to support students and recent graduates on their career paths.



Animal Law and Policy Practicum students visit the State House in Montpelier, Vermont

Students tracked and analyzed pending Vermont animal-related legislation, including standards for the care of egg-laying hens, and proposed stricter penalties and mandatory animal forfeiture in animal cruelty cases.

Professor Laura Ireland, associate director of the Animal Law and Policy

Institute, brought students to the State House in Montpelier to meet animal protection lobbyists and legislators, and to listen to hearings and floor debates.

Amanda Reyes JD'24 Featured in ABA Journal



VLGS graduate **Amanda Reyes** was featured in an *ABA Journal* cover story, "**Changing Course.**" The article highlights her nontraditional path from sanctuary chimpanzee caregiver to animal lawyer. While at VLGS, Reyes was a student attorney in the Environmental Advocacy

and Farmed Animal Advocacy Clinics and an active member of the Animal Law Society.

Update on Inaugural Brooks Institute for Animal Rights and Policy Animal Law LLM Fellows

Lana Nadj LLM'25 is now the executive director of the Harvard Animal Law and Policy Program; **Anette Sikka LLM'25** is completing her thesis; **Pius Ubenyi LLM'25** is preparing to earn a JD in the United States; and **Carlos Contreras Lopez LLM'25** is a judicial law clerk to the Honorable James P. Wilson in New Jersey.

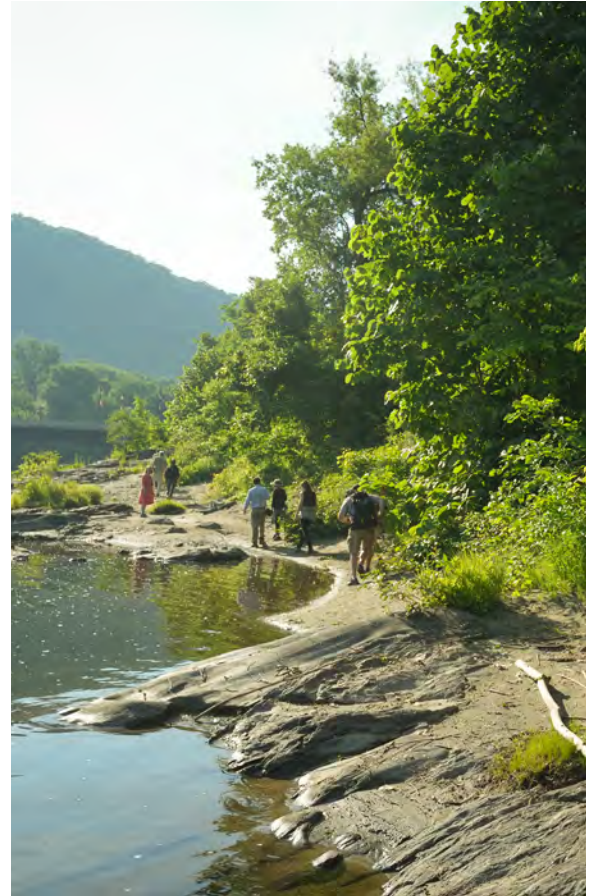


2025 Summer Media Fellows

Thanks to the generous funding of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the ALPI welcomed two animal law media fellows last summer. For the past five years, animal law media fellows participated in our summer courses; built connections with local advocates and VLGS faculty, staff, and students; and presented in the Environmental Law Center's Hot Topics lecture series.

Stephanie Hanes, journalist with the *Christian Science Monitor*, joined the Animal Welfare, Science, and Ethics course with **Dr. Heather Rally**. She presented "**Animal Storytelling**," along with photographer **Melanie Stetson Freeman**, exploring the unique challenges journalists face while reporting on non-human animals and their efforts to ensure they are accurately and effectively communicating about our natural world.

Marin Scotten, an editorial intern with the *New Republic*, joined the Animal Undercover Investigations course with **Professor Cheryl Leahy**. Her Hot Topics presentation, "**Toxic Sewage Sludge: How the Biosolid Fertilizer Industry is Poisoning Farm Animals**," discussed how the use of human biosolids, also known as sewage sludge, as farmland fertilizer has been hailed as a climate-friendly and efficient way to fertilize crops and dispose of waste. But a growing body of research now suggests sewage sludge application—which is largely unregulated and controlled by just a handful of companies—is contaminating food and water with PFAS, poisoning farm animals, and creating major public health risks.



2025 Distinguished Animal Law Academic Scholar

Last summer, **Kristen Stilt**, professor of law and faculty director of the Brooks McCormick Jr. Animal Law & Policy Program at Harvard Law School, joined the ALPI as the Distinguished Animal Law Summer Scholar. In addition to advancing her scholarship and networking with faculty and students, she presented "**Someone**" in the Hot Topics in Environmental Law summer lecture series.

An assumed division between human and nonhuman animals (and most of nature) has long been baked into most of Western culture and law. As effects of the Anthropocene bring humans and animals in closer and more frequent contact, increasingly in emergency and catastrophic situations, we are beginning to see more signs of awareness that humans and animals are not only ecologically but profoundly interdependent—and that each animal should not be categorized as something, but as someone.





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