

TrailBlazer Grant

2024 Report



A COLLABORATION:





Dear Donor,

On behalf of the Student Development working Group and Early Career Professional Working Group we would like to extend our deepest gratitude for your contribution to the TrailBlazer Grant program. As our grant continues to grow, your contribution will ensure we can continue to support the first steps of more members of our professional wildlife family. The 2024 TrailBlazer grant saw 94 applications and awarded a combination of 58 monetary and gear awards. Our second year of applicants has included members from across the globe including Japan, Bangladesh, Scotland, Australia and beyond. Applicants also ranged in degree type with 53.3% holding or pursuing a Bachelor's degree, 28.3% a Masters degree, 18.5% a Doctoral degree, and 2.2% an Associates degree. Applicants provided ample feedback on the grant with the overwhelming majority being positive feedback and welcome constructive criticism that will help us grow moving forward.

As an extension of The Wildlife Society's goal to break down barriers that prevent professional growth for all members, the 2024 TrailBlazer grant refined its ability to address historically underrepresented or marginalized groups in wildlife conservation. This includes visible/invisible disabilities, socio-economic background, first generation college students/degree holders, veterans, non-traditional students, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ethnic heritage, and race. As biologists', diversity is at the core of what makes the ecosystems we value function similarly, the efforts of this grant will diversify our community, strengthening the profession in the process.

We invite you to explore some of the stories shared by the 2024 TrailBlazer Grant award winners on the following pages to see the members of our wildlife family who you have empowered through your generous donations. Please understand these are their unedited words and photos intended to introduce you to these members at the dawn of their careers. As the 2025 TrailBlazer grant is now underway we invite you to share your experience as a donor with others to encourage the continued growth of this grant so we can ensure every wildlife biologist at the beginning of their professional journey is given the strength to make their career exactly what they envision.

Sincerely,

The Wildlife Society's
Student Development Working Group Board



Thanks to your support, in 2024 we provided 58 students & early career professionals with monetary grants and field gear!



90+

We received 94 applications in 2024



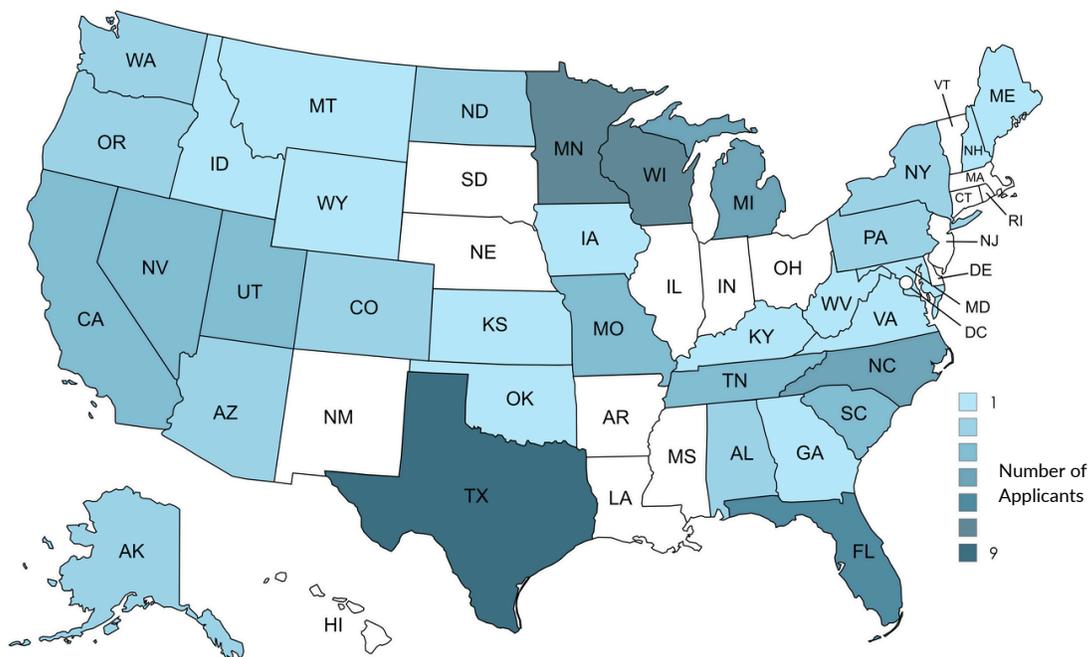
>46%

Nearly half of the applicants were pursuing advanced degrees



5+

Applicants were from 5 countries outside the U.S.



2024 TrailBlazer Awardees



Samantha Hamilton

Throughout August 2024, I scoped out potential study sites in Santa Cruz for a developing project on sea otter foraging strategies. Most days' survey began with a light mist from the morning fog and ended in sunshine with brisk winds. Central California's variable weather called for gear that could keep out the rain, wind, and sun, and Vortex's jacket did just that. Thanks to my Cloud Shaker, I was able to stay dry and comfortable no matter the conditions. The durable, breathable material made it a perfect choice for my fieldwork, giving me reliable protection from the elements without restricting my movement. I am grateful to The Wildlife Society's SDWG and Vortex for helping me dress for success in the field. Thank you for generously supporting my study and supplying me with a high-quality jacket that I can wear in rain or shine!



Blake Gordon

Being chosen as one of the recipients for the TrailBlazers Program and receiving the Vortex Diamond HD 10x42 binoculars has been truly wonderful. It has opened me up to being able take my birdwatching to the next level by not having to rely on watching and identifying only the birds that come my feeders in my back yard. I hike the public lands close by me as often as I can and while I hear and see many birds off in the distance., they often take flight before I am close enough to make any identification. Now that I am able to observe from a distance, I have been able to increase my number of identification as well as observe bird and other wildlife in natural settings. Just this past week another great opportunity has arisen in that I have been asked a by a private conservation organization here in Missouri to assist with put together managed deer hunts for veterans on some private prairie lands. Being a veteran myself I am honored to be asked and of course gladly accepted. Having the opportunity to take other veterans out not only with the hopes of being able to have a successful harvest but also sharing moments to observe the flora and fauna of prairie remnants and restorations is truly an amazing opportunity as well. Being bestowed the trailblazers grant now not only means that I am able to use the binoculars to enhance by ability to observe wildlife and continue progressing my knowledge with hopes of beginning a conservation career after my military time. I now also have the potential means of sparking a conservation interest in other veterans, who like me have not had an opportunity observe the natural environment with an enhanced viewpoint and perhaps initiate a spark in them to also become trailblazers into the realm of conservations and stewards of the land.



Kira Gangbin

As a first-generation college student, I overcame many hurdles to get where I am today. One challenge that I did not anticipate was the expectation of having sufficient field gear prior to being hired for many wildlife positions. My first wildlife position was working in desert ecosystems conducting a variety of wildlife surveys. I did not have the prior knowledge or financial ability to initially invest in sun-protective clothing. It wasn't until I received my first paycheck – and many sunburns – that I realized the necessity of these field clothes. I quickly spent my first paycheck to buy the necessary gear for the job I was performing. As I have progressed in my academic journey, this financial hurdle for field gear remains. I am now a PhD student where I research the factors that could be limiting Texas horned lizard reintroduction efforts. It can be challenging to find a balance between the financial demands of obtaining new field gear, purchasing gas to travel between field sites, and buying daily necessities. I am extremely grateful for the Wildlife Society and KUIU for selecting me as a recipient of the KUIU Divide 1500 Daypack. While facing the 100+ degree days of central Texas, this backpack serves as a breathable and durable pack that allows me to carry my water-bladder and all necessary field gear in one place. Since obtaining this pack, I have been able to travel farther distances while radiotracking lizards and I have been able to accomplish many more tasks during each survey. I believe that limited access to field gear for students and early-career professionals is a substantial problem in wildlife sciences. I am grateful that the Wildlife Society and KUIU are taking the initiative to solve this problem. My hope is that one day, after I have completed my academic journey, I can pay it forward and help other budding wildlife biologists in obtaining the proper gear. You never know how much one backpack could change someone's life.



Liz Patterson

With the help of the TWS' TrailBlazer Grant, I was able to buy hiking boots to assist in my field work. I work for the Invasive Species Centre, an environmental non-profit that works diligently to detect, map, and remove invasive species in Ontario. I spend much of my summers in the field conducting environmental DNA sampling. Our field sites are sometimes off the beaten track, and the new boots help with stabilization in uneven terrain, while boosting my confidence in my field sampling abilities. With the TrailBlazer Grant, I was able to afford a key piece of field gear that will be used for years to come.



Seana Finn

I am truly grateful to have been nominated for the TrailBlazer grant for the Vortex rain jacket. Given the weather we've been experiencing in North Carolina, this jacket has already become one of my favorite pieces of gear! With the unpredictable rain showers, it is essential to have reliable garments for fieldwork. However, it can be challenging trying to find quality equipment that is reliable and affordable. Thanks to the TrailBlazer Grant, I now have a high-quality rain jacket that will allow me to conduct my fieldwork, no matter the weather.

Blair McLean

I am so grateful that I received the TrailBlazer grant this year. They graciously awarded me a Vortex Cloud Shaker rain jacket that has saved me from being drenched in the field on more than one occasion! While out monitoring birds, learning to identify them and recognize their behavior, this rain jacket has kept me warm and dry. Sometimes, especially here in Florida, you are in the middle of a project when it starts to rain down, leaving you with two options: run for cover or get soaked. The Vortex jacket I was awarded made it to where I did not have to abandon my project in the middle of data collection, I was able to remain comfortable and continue with my project. The jacket has also helped me in my day to day activities when outside during a rainstorm. Now, I am also able to participate in the Turtle Survival Alliance NAFTRG surveys without becoming freezing cold from the regular showers that happen throughout the day. This grant was a blessing that I am more than appreciative about. I applied to the grant thinking, "I never get awarded anything but hey, why not give it a shot. I could really use some gear". When I was notified that I was accepted and being granted an amazing rain jacket, I was shocked and excited. I could not wait to use it in the field! The quality and durability of this jacket surpassed my expectations and I am forever grateful to the TrailBlazer grant for providing it for me. As a first generation college student who funded my own tuition and related costs, field equipment was often gone without or gifted to me as second hand. To be given something of this quality and functionality, I am very thankful and appreciative. Thank you to all involved!





Amanda Barron

Since I've received this rain jacket, I pack it with me on all of my field hitches and it has not let me down! Often times in this desert/mountainous environment, flash storms will come out of the blue. This makes it really beneficial to have a jacket that is as easy to roll up and pack like this one. It's lightweight and takes up very little space in my bag. I'm thankful to have been chosen to receive such a useful tool to help me stay dry and comfortable when I'm gathering vegetation data in the backcountry of Colorado. Thank you Wildlife Society!

Ashlyn Rogers

My name is Ashlyn Rogers and I work as a seasonal field technician, mostly with birds. With this grant, I was able to purchase a new backpack from REI that I can use to carry field gear. My previous backpack had been patched, sewn, and was just generally in disrepair and it has been so great to have a backpack that I know will stand up against the test of time. Not only that, but this backpack is also better able to support the weight of sometimes heavy field gear without unnecessary strain on my back and shoulders. I am so grateful to the working group for this assistance.



Crystal Anderson

Living with autism and associated learning disabilities has presented numerous challenges throughout my academic journey. Tasks that others found routine often required immense effort and perseverance from me. Navigating social interactions and managing sensory sensitivities added layers of complexity to my daily life. Despite these hurdles, my passion for wildlife and the environment became a driving force that fueled my determination to succeed. I am proud to be the first person in my family to earn a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree, and I am currently working towards being the first to receive a Ph.D. My success is a testament to the unwavering support of my family, mentors, and educators who believed in my potential. Additionally, organizations like The Wildlife Society and donors like KUIU have played a crucial role in my journey, providing essential equipment and supplies, enabling me to focus on my fieldwork and research. In sharing my story, I hope to inspire others facing their own struggles and to underscore the importance of inclusive and supportive educational environments. Support from organizations like The Wildlife Society and KUIU is vital in ensuring students like me have the resources needed to succeed. These partnerships and donations create opportunities for everyone to realize their potential, regardless of the challenges they may face. I am deeply appreciative of the positive impact you have made. Thank you KUIU and The Wildlife Society for your continued dedication to fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic community. I hope to pay it forward by using my own experiences create a more inclusive world for others.



Tucker Lutter

Thank you so much for choosing me for the TrailBlazer Grant. The Vortex rain jacket I received is very helpful at my job as an assistant preserve manager in Iowa. We have a bison herd and when I check on the bison and repair their 12 mile long perimeter fence it is essential to have good rain gear as I can be remote from the office on an ATV for several hours at a time. My old rain jacket has been leaking and we have had an unusually wet spring and summer so far so the new jacket is just what I needed to succeed.



Evan Baldinelli

I am beyond grateful to The Wildlife Society for being considered for the TrailBlazer Grant! The grant covered the cost of waders, wader boots, and a new pack, all of which were essential in conducting day-to-day fieldwork as a fisheries technician. This investment in my professional development has allowed me to continue the pursuit of my lifelong passion, and I am happy to know that diversity is valued in the wildlife profession

Cat Adkins

I was one of the fortunate students that received a day pack this summer through TWS. I am writing to you later than I had anticipated, but still well before the deadline. You see, I have been very busy in the field with my awesome new day pack that I now have! In addition to a full-time internship this summer I am also still part time in class (full time regularly though). This pack has proven so very useful for me. I can carry my gear, 2 water bottles (which is important!), my field clipboard, and tools like the GIS Spot, the small magnifying glass I can't think of the name for right now (ha-ha), some field books, my rite in the rain notebook, sample bags, flags, etc. Being able to carry all these things in the field is very convenient especially when out there for multiple hours at a time. It also leaves my body more maneuverable and the weight carries better than if I had to fill the pockets of my field pants in order to carry the essentials like water and using my hands/arms for the books and clipboard. Now I am quicker to move throughout the field and more efficient. I just have to stop-drop and roll. (ha-ha!) That is stop and take the pack off, drop it on the ground gently, roll out the things I need from it, such as the clip board and GIS. And leaving my hands free is much better than it sounds. Its important for walking some of the terrain to maintain balance or be able to catch myself should I stumble or fall. Being able to reach out and touch things without having to stop and put everything down that I am carrying is a bonus too. I just really wanted to tell you Thank You so much for the kind gesture of the Day Pack. In my role as an Ecological Research Assistant as a summer Intern, it has proven to be a valuable asset. I truly appreciate all that you do!





Ashlyn Herron

As a recipient of the 2024 TWS TrailBlazer Grant, I was able to use the funds to support the purchase of a spotting scope. This scope made accurately collecting grassland bird presence data throughout the prairies of North Dakota possible for the final field season of my Masters' Research. I am looking forward to continuing to use this scope to share the wonder of wildlife, particularly prairie wildlife, with others around me, both in professional and recreational settings!

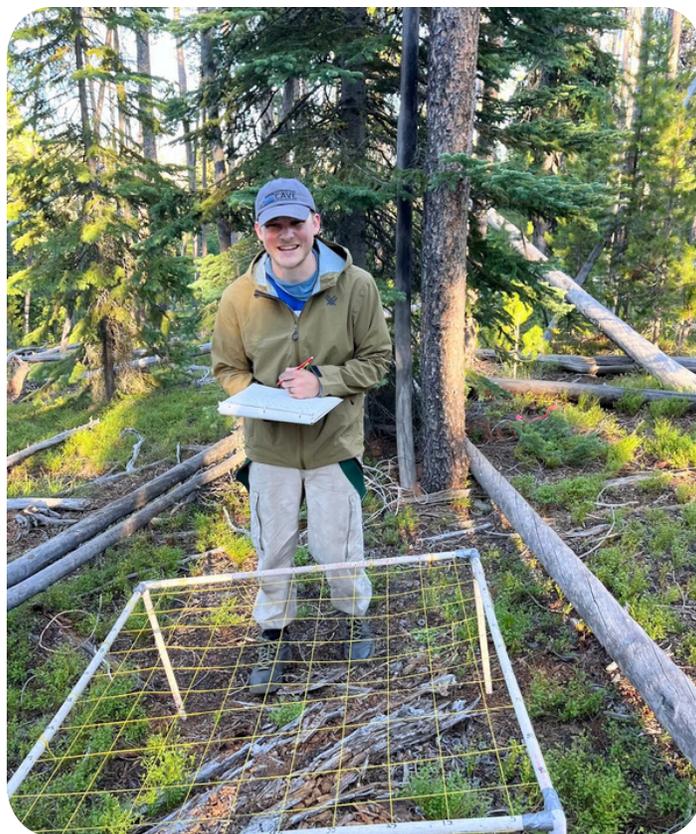
August Wise

The TrailBlazer Grant from The Wildlife Society has significantly advanced my work as a geospatial data manager and research scientist at the Forest Park Living Lab. The Vortex binoculars awarded have proven invaluable for my field work, enhancing my ability to observe and record urban species with quicker precision. This improved capability has not only refined my data collection but has also provided additional opportunities in my development as a researcher, allowing me to perform my duties with increased accuracy and confidence. I cannot thank TWS and Vortex enough for their generosity, and their commitment to budding new professionals in the world of wildlife and conservation such as myself.



Dalton Brantley

I am currently a PhD student at the University of Montana studying climate change and its impact on lodgepole pine ecosystem function. I received the Vortex Cloud Shaker rain jacket as part of the TWS TrailBlazer Grant and I want to say thank you! Partly for being selected for the grant and receiving this rain jacket, but mostly for the confidence and security it's provided me in the field. To preface, I'm a type one diabetic and wear an insulin pump and continuous glucose monitor 24/7, 365. This adds an additional layer of complexity to my field work, especially since I'm working in remote regions. Having this jacket has allowed me to confidently take on my research this summer by reducing my stress and worry of how the weather could damage my insulin pump. I've already gotten to stress test the jacket in snow, rain, and hail (gotta love Montana summers!) and it's kept me, and more importantly, my insulin pump dry. I am grateful for receiving this grant and jacket, as it truly has allowed me to trailblaze while also making me feel included and considered, allowing me to engage in meaningful work while more easily managing the unique challenges of fieldwork as a type 1 diabetic. I look forward to many more seasons with it!



Jordan Davis

Receiving the TrailBlazer Grant: Vortex Binoculars has already benefited me this summer. Being awarded these binoculars allows me to participate in Ornithology class activities, such as birding and bird ID lessons, easier, and assist with IDing and sexing white-tailed deer and other mammals. This award also helped relieve some of the finance burden of buying field supplies as I start my career this year and participate in various technician positions.



Paige Satterfield

The TrailBlazer Grant helped me purchase a good quality backpack for my work as a wildlife technician. This has been extremely helpful as I need a large backpack to carry lots of food and water when hiking to mountain lion kill sites. It has also allowed me to carry all the necessary gear required for capturing and collaring black bears. As this is my first job after graduating, the support from the TrailBlazer Grant in buying a new backpack has not only been beneficial in my current role, but will continue to be valuable in future jobs as well.

Joshlyn Perez

First, I would like to express my gratitude to The Wildlife Society (TWS) and KUIU for their support in this TrailBlazer Program. As with others in underrepresented groups transitioning into the Early Career Professional phase of their lives, there seems to be no shortage of obstacles in the way of our goals, whether it is financial, educational, social, etc. Aid from the wildlife community helps give us a second wind to keep pushing. It takes the support of friends, family, and leaders to create an environment for the next generation to thrive. In the field, I have used secondhand clothing, gear, and tools to make it more affordable for myself. Thus far I have used a regular backpack to hold my daily items. However, over time, holes have begun to wear at the base, the outside is sun faded, and generally falling apart. With this grant, I was able to have my first ever daypack. I was overjoyed to receive such an award. The KUIU daypack is light, comfortable, and most of all operational. My favorite feature is the various pockets that optimize storage organization. Having designated areas for gear helps you work efficiently and keep track of your materials. There's nothing worse than getting to your destination only to realize you forgot something back at the bunkhouse. My daypack is always in my truck ready to go for any adventure I may find myself in such as volunteering, herping, bird watching, hiking, working and much more. With this grant, I also hope to lead by example. Persistence pays off, even if your original plans do not go as planned. Sometimes it takes one more attempt to reach the end of the finish line. The TrailBlazer Grant was one more attempt in my journey, and it paid off tremendously. I've praised the benefits of TWS to my fellow student chapter members, in and out of the officer position, and I will be happy to share my testimony about this successful grant application. I bare many titles, first-generation student, non-traditional student, AmeriCorps alum, WTAMU Alum, but the one I hope to stand out is trailblazer.





Laura Kojima

This summer I have been living in two pairs of shoes- chacos for my aquatic field work and my Kenetrek boots, granted to me by The Wildlife Society, for almost everything else! These boots have been an absolute necessity as I am an upland bird hunter in training and am currently training myself and my dog, Dutton, in anticipation of the 2024 hunting season. During our training sessions these boots keep me comfortable on my feet which is a must given I have lower body chronic pain. I have gone on a few hikes with them as well and they provide the best support which is a must for having a high quality boot. Thank you TWS for these awesome shoes!

Deandra Jones

The TrailBlazer Grant support has been invaluable to me this summer. I was able to purchase a new pair of hiking boots, which proved important as I started my first field season estimating the black bear population in very challenging terrain. These boots have provided the comfort, stability, and durability needed for long treks through these rugged landscapes. I am grateful for the opportunity to advance our understanding of wildlife ecology and management on the Navajo Nation with your support.



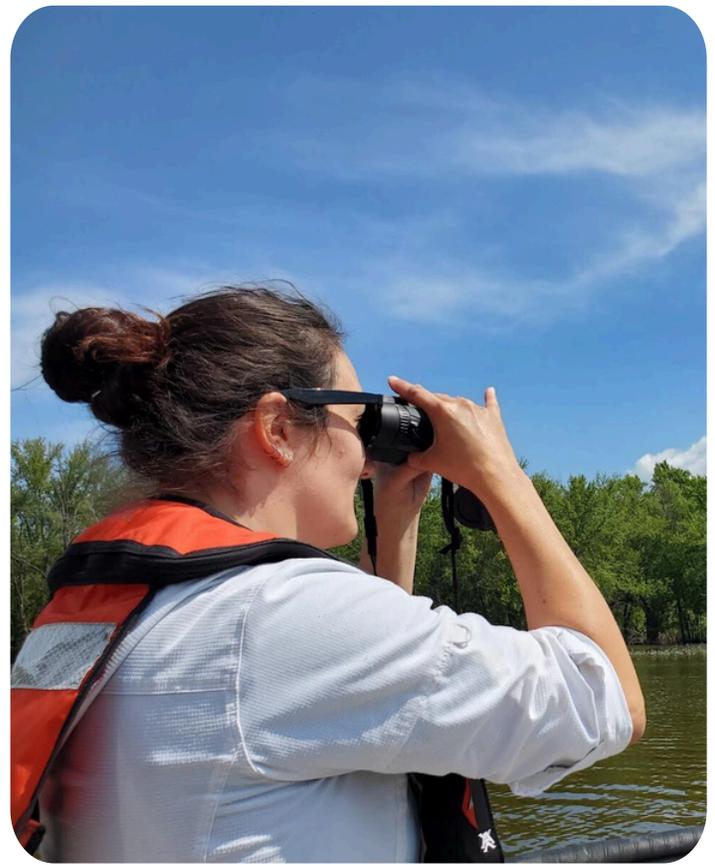
Kaitlyn Chisholm

Receiving a pair of binoculars through The Wildlife Society's TrailBlazer Grant has helped me to succeed at my job while in the field. During the spring and summer months I spend most of my days outside surveying for invasive plants. A pair of binoculars is a necessary piece of field gear at my job as we often survey units of land that are far too big to transect the entire acreage. We use binoculars in order to accurately identify plants from afar, as well as determine the size and density of an invasive population. Previously, I had to share a limited number of work binoculars with my teammates, which could not be taken home. Having my own pair of binoculars, which I could not have afforded without this grant, has allowed me to work more efficiently and effectively. Owning a pair of binoculars has also allowed me to grow my wildlife knowledge in my personal time. Just shortly after receiving the binoculars, I was able to use them in a multi organizational effort to survey for the invasive spotted lantern fly, which had just recently been confirmed for the first time in the County I work in. Being chosen as a TrailBlazer Grant recipient has helped me to do better fieldwork, as well as been a huge encouragement to me to continue trekking forward in a field where I am a minority.



Bridgette Timm

Receiving a pair of Vortex binoculars through the TrailBlazer grant has been a great asset to me this summer as we have experienced intense flooding in my study area. Having binoculars has allowed me to investigate my study sites from a distance when I wasn't able to get up close due to the high-water levels. I also have been able to enjoy bird watching more now that I have my own pair of binoculars that I can carry with me wherever I go. I am grateful for the opportunity to apply to the TrailBlazer Grant and for receiving such a great pair of Vortex binoculars.



Brilyn Brecka

The SDWG and ECP TrailBlazer Grant has been extremely helpful in my early career as a wildlife biologist in northern Minnesota. I received a boot grant and selected insulated hiking boots that will allow me to be more comfortable and better prepared for cold, winter conditions. During the winter, we spend time on snowmobiles and hiking to remote areas to assess wildlife habitat and perform a variety of surveys. Thanks to the TrailBlazer Grant and Kenetrek Boots, I'll be able to perform my job with comfort in even the coldest of weather.

Lucky Atobo

I am very appreciative of the support I have received from The Wildlife Society, which initially offered me a free 6-month membership into the prestigious society due to my underrepresented background. The Student Development Working Group took it a step further by awarding me a TrailBlazer grant for underrepresented students in wildlife biology. They supported my summer research with a KUIU daypack, a gear that has been of tremendous benefit to me as I navigate the challenges of field research. I initially applied to use the grant for my thesis fieldwork this summer at the Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area in Western Oklahoma, where I would study the impact of oil and gas extraction activities on the annual occupancy and breeding success of Mississippi Kites. However, due to funding constraints, I ended up conducting a survey of Red-winged Blackbirds nesting within the Miller Nature Reserve, Benton, MO. The KUIU daypack became a very essential component of my research as I had to move around with equipment to conduct nest search, monitoring, and vegetation measurement. Besides the physical benefits of having the very beautiful daypack with me in the field, I also felt so much confidence and inspiration knowing that I belong to and receive so much support from an amazing society. To the Student Development Working Group of The Wildlife Society, which deemed me a worthy recipient of the TrailBlazer Grant, I say a big thank you. You have inspired me in my pursuit of a career in wildlife biology. As I move forward, I will always look back to this moment and be motivated. I will cherish my daypack for as long as I can.



Madeline Showers

I'm working with the Idaho Fish and Game Department this summer. I am a wildlife diversity technician monitoring various native species in the Salmon region. The binoculars donated by Vortex, through The Wildlife Society, have helped me learn about this beautiful state's fauna and assisted me in my everyday work. With the help of the Vortex binoculars I have glassed mountainsides to locate and observe collared ewes to determine their lambing success, searched tall five-needle pines for signs of blister rust, and scanned wetlands for amphibian species. In addition to my work, I have also used these binoculars in my personal time to learn the birds of the area and watch pronghorn prance through the sagebrush. I am thankful for the donation and the opportunity to learn the fauna of a new region.



Alma Rose Sanchez

One of the most important and missing items from my field toolbox was a light-weight, tough, rain jacket and I was fortunate enough to have gotten the TrailBlazer Grant from The Wildlife Society and supported by Vortex to fulfill that need. This summer has been busy with field days in search for active wolf rendezvous sites as well as tracking courses in Yellowstone and I'm happy to have that extra gear to keep me dry and not take up too much space in my pack!





Madison Gover

I wanted to start off by saying how thankful I am that this grant exists. With the rising cost of living today, I would have never been able to justify the price of my new Vortex rain jacket, even though it is something I have desperately needed. This summer in Texas has been quite different from the past two years, and it feels like every time my team and I go out to do small mammal surveys on military bases, it rains. I got my TrailBlazer gift between that last trip and my most recent trip. It rained a little bit so I had the opportunity to use my Vortex rain jacket, and I was completely dry and unbothered! Thank you so much to the SDWG and Vortex for allowing this to be possible for me!

Sarah Wyrick

This grant allowed me to buy better protection from the sun and bugs, like this long-sleeve UV-shirt and wide brim hat, perfect to ward off the intense rays, and keep the flies off my neck as I work in the Carolinas. Being newlywed, and a first-generation graduate student, sometimes it can be hard affording the simple things that make fieldwork easier. Grants like the TrailBlazer really help. I appreciate the chance to get much-needed gear to round out my field supplies. This grant allows me more comfort in my new endeavors such as exploring wildlife photography and assisting the local state park remove invasive plants and survey for box turtles. It will continue to help me this upcoming semester, volunteering as the graduate student liaison for my university's student chapter of TWS.



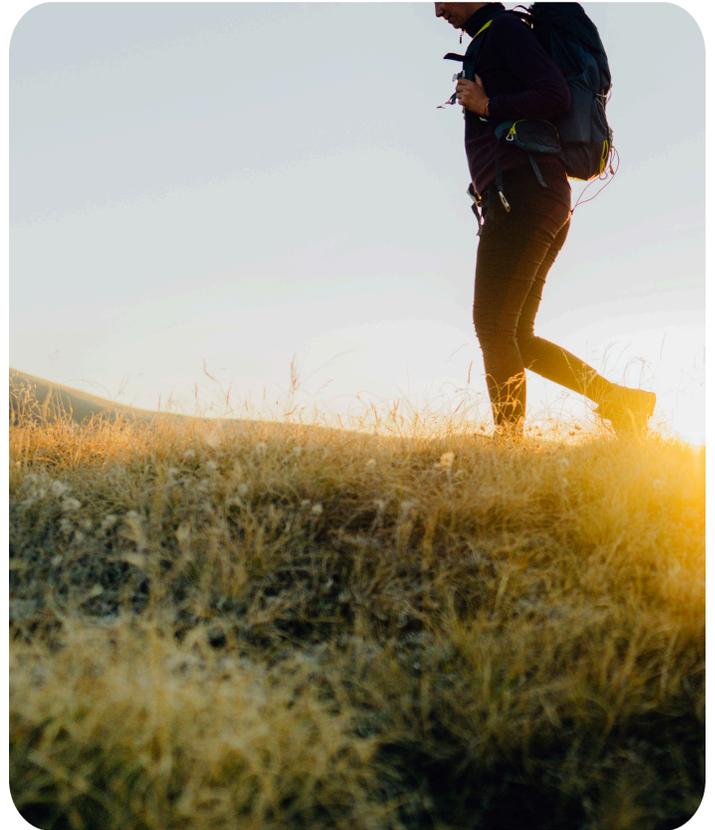
Caley Johnson

Navigating the wildlife field as a non-traditional student has been challenging. As a queer, femme, single parent, I've sometimes faced amplified difficulties, requiring immense diligence and self-discipline. Despite a longer journey, my passion for conservation has kept me pushing forward. I've overcome many hurdles, from working full-time while raising a young child to completing my bachelor's in wildlife biology and now pursuing a master's in biology with a focus on wildlife conservation. I owe much of my success to the support of family, friends, professors, advisors, and colleagues who have recognized my potential. I'm also grateful to organizations like The Wildlife Society and donors like KUIU for their essential field gear donations, which have made my research easier and more effective. Sharing my story, I aim to inspire others in similar positions to strive for success and promote inclusivity in conservation and STEM fields. Wildlife conservation requires diverse voices and viewpoints to address today's challenges. Support from organizations like The Wildlife Society and KUIU reduces barriers, fostering an inclusive and diverse community. I'm incredibly grateful for their positive impact and will continue using my experiences to create a more inclusive space for others.



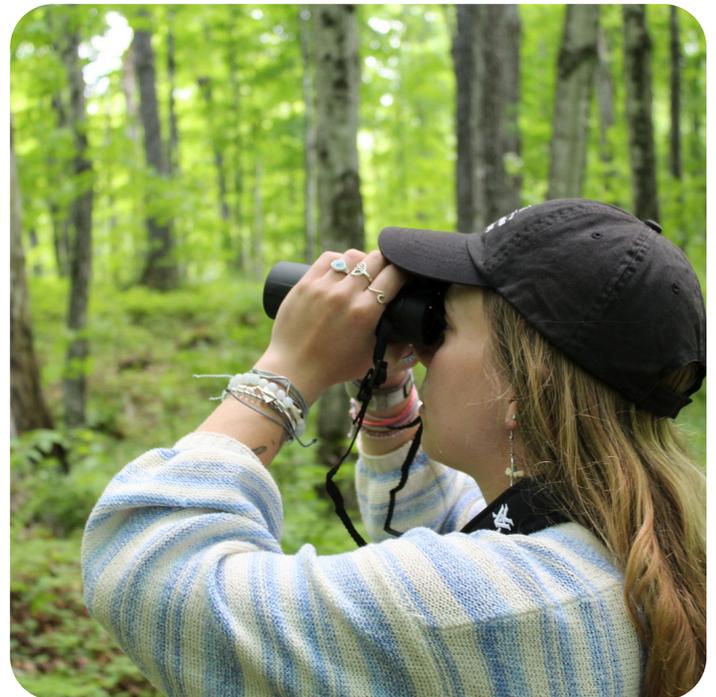
Mackenzie Kleinpeter

I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for selecting me as a recipient of the KUIU Daypack through your scholarship program. Winning this scholarship and receiving the daypack has truly been a blessing for me. As someone who is passionate about wildlife conservation but faces financial constraints, this support means the world to me. The KUIU Daypack has already proven invaluable, especially during my Basic Wildland Firefighter field day course. I received numerous compliments on the bag and took great pride in sharing with others the role that The Wildlife Society plays in supporting young wildlife professionals like myself. Your generosity not only helps alleviate financial burdens but also inspires me to continue pursuing my dedication to wildlife conservation. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities this daypack will afford me in my endeavors to contribute to the protection and preservation of our natural world. Once again, thank you for your generosity and support. I am honored to be a part of The Wildlife Society community and look forward to continuing to make a positive impact with your encouragement.



Maggie Handfelt

This summer, I had the opportunity to conduct research at the University of Notre Dame Environmental Research Center in the Northwoods of Wisconsin. Shortly before heading north, I was able to receive a pair of Vortex binoculars through The Wildlife Society's TrailBlazer Grant. I cannot put into words how grateful I am to have had access to such a powerful pair of binoculars for my summer research, and certainly, photos cannot do justice to the joy using these binoculars brought me. Even when I wasn't conducting research, the binoculars came with me everywhere in the field. Because of this grant, I was able to see my first baby common loon (*Gavia immer*), and I am not ashamed to admit that the encounter brought tears to my eyes. I am a strong believer that everybody should have access to the gear they need to be successful inside and outside of the classroom, especially in a field like Wildlife Ecology. I cannot express my gratitude enough for being a recipient of this grant, and I am so pleased to be a part of a community that is making strides to increase access to the things all people in this field need to be successful.



Madeline Deile

I have attached some photos of me using the backpack to complete telemetry work locating our collared pheasants on local WMAs in south central Minnesota. I am a Minnesota DNR Upland Game Research Technician out of the Farmland Wildlife Research Group in Madelia, MN. I am currently working on two separate studies researching the relationships between pheasants and local agricultural practices. I spend long days in the field, often hiking 3-5 miles, and must carry a variety of sampling equipment into the field. This backpack has been very useful in assisting with this, and the comfort and durability has really stood the test of summer fieldwork. I am so thankful to TWS for providing me with such a high quality piece of equipment that has alleviated some of the financial burden that comes with working in this field. Additionally, I am 1 of only 2 female technicians working out of our office and I come from a non-hunting background. Access to this type of field equipment has given me the ability to "blaze a trail" and bring a more diverse representation to a field that I am so passionate about. Thank you immensely!





Megan Ahern

Much of my work necessitates long days outside in adverse conditions, and having appropriate gear is crucial to my performance. Receiving this Vortex raincoat through The Wildlife Society's TrailBlazer Grant program has ensured my preparedness and allows me to face every day with confidence that poor weather won't slow me down. From contributing to black-footed ferret recovery efforts to assessing stream ecosystem health, I've relied on this raincoat while working towards diverse wildlife management and research goals. This raincoat has become a staple in my daypack, and I expect to put it to good use moving forward.



Laken Mize

Receiving the KUIU day pack has been incredibly impactful for me as a graduate student working in the wildlife field. As a student who grew up in a low-income family and supported themselves independently through college, I never had the opportunity afford nice quality gear for field work. Through the generous donation of The Wildlife Society and Kuiu, I have been able to use the KUIU 1500 Daypack for many of my adventures. From walking miles through the East Texas Pineywoods collecting genetic data for my masters thesis to capturing sandhill cranes in Oregon, this pack helped me immensely this past summer. The pack's durability and design have proven essential for carrying my gear during long field days, allowing me to focus on my research without worrying about the safety or comfort of my equipment. This day pack has not only enhanced my fieldwork experience but has also supported my growth as a wildlife researcher.

Brandon Cluff

I am grateful to have been selected for the 2024 TrailBlazer Grant. I appreciate the support from both The Wildlife Society and KUIU in the form of an amazing daypack. I have used my pack every trip into the field and it's making my work a lot easier. I am the first in my family to complete a bachelor's degree and the first in my family to go to graduate school. I was not able to get financial assistance from my family for school so I enlisted in the U.S. Navy to get education benefits. I finished graduate school in Feb of 2020 when basically the world came to a screeching halt. I was lucky enough to find work throughout the pandemic, but it took another couple years to finally get back into my chosen field and land my dream job. I am now a permanent wildlife biologist for the Bureau of Land Management working in northern Utah. Getting all geared up for field season is quite expensive even with a federal job so every bit of support from organizations like The Wildlife Society and KUIU are greatly appreciated.



Nicole Ibrahim

As a first-generation biracial student who grew up in an urban environment, my exposure to the natural world was limited. Now, as a graduate student, I am fortunate to explore outdoor spaces despite these spaces often feeling unwelcoming to people from marginalized communities. I am incredibly grateful to The Wildlife Society's TrailBlazer Grant for providing me with a pair of quality binoculars essential for my fieldwork. These binoculars will be indispensable during my upcoming two-month field season at a remote bird banding site in Kazakhstan, where equipment is crucial for accurate research. This support not only enhances my own research capabilities, but it also helps pave the way for more individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute to and thrive within the wildlife community.



Rowan Coogan



I have spent this summer participating in a natural resource management internship with Alachua Conservation Trust, working on building field experience in areas such as trail clearing, fire ecology, small animal surveys, and native plant identification. Where I work in Florida, the weather is very unpredictable and it often starts storming at the drop of a hat, so having a quality, waterproof raincoat has made a world of difference in my ability to do my work, rain or shine. I have just entered the field of conservation, and have not yet had the opportunity or funds to build up a collection of gear. As a Pell Grant recipient, I would not have otherwise been able to afford this crucial piece of gear. When I began the semester I often came home sopping wet, but now I am able to stay dry and comfortable throughout the day. I am incredibly grateful for the financial assistance that the TrailBlazer Grant has awarded me, as that assistance has allowed me to be fully prepared to gain skills that will help me in my career for years to come—thank you!

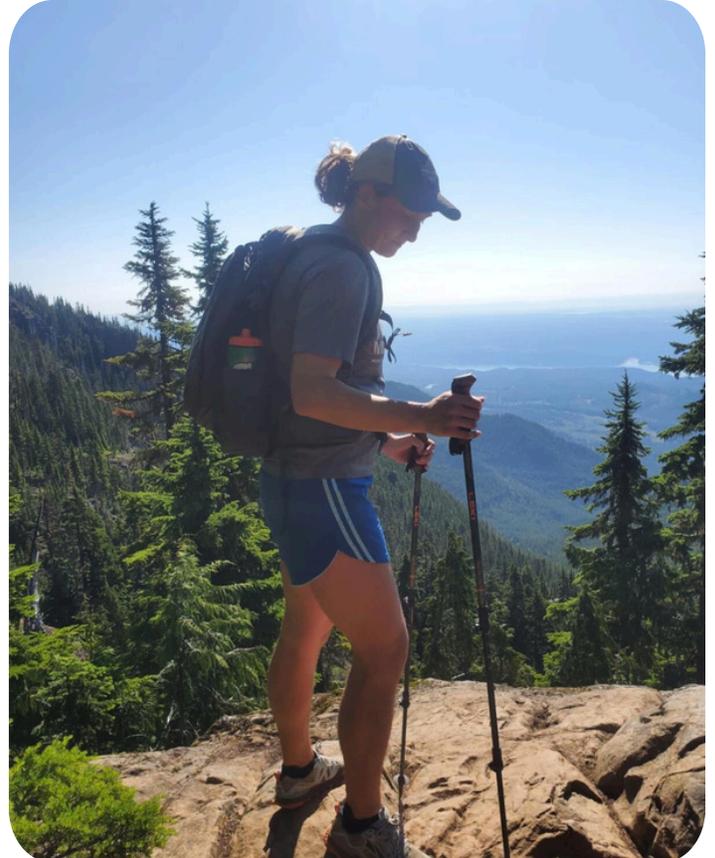


Caitlin Markus

My new Vortex rain jacket has already made an incredible addition to my field work gear collection. A lot of my field work involves nighttime herp surveys, so conditions are often chilly, humid or rainy, and buggy. I love that this jacket is lightweight and packs small in my pack, but also keeps me warm while still being breathable. The last frog call survey I was on, I was dry and warm and comfortable the whole time thanks to this jacket. It's exactly what I've been looking for, and I'm so grateful to have been chosen to receive it!

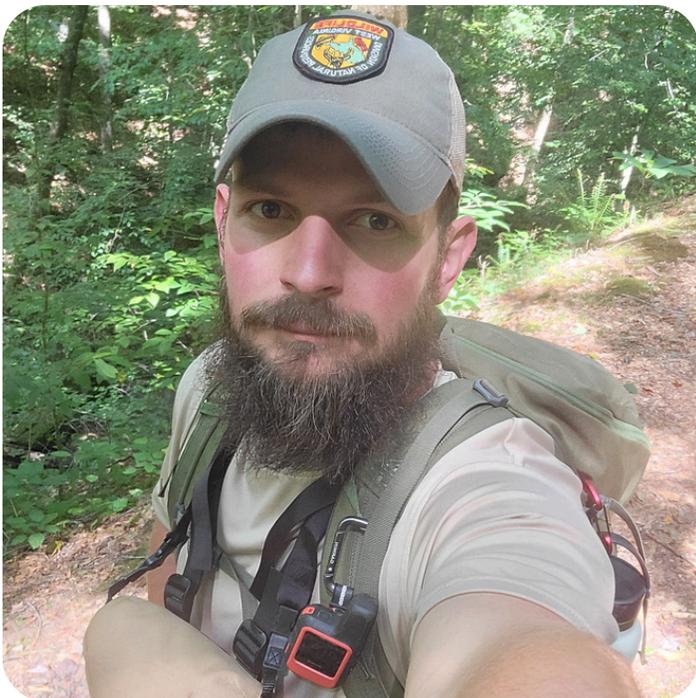
Rebekah Hellesto

I have always been a driven and determined person, but working in the wildlife field always has its shares of challenges. Even with the competitiveness of jobs and the financial hurdles of seasonal jobs and frequently moving, I am more excited than ever to be working in the natural resources community and helping conservation first-hand. I won't pretend that I have had more to overcome than others, but I do feel that there is an added hurdle as a woman. While other wildlife professionals have always been supportive, I often have had landowners and members of the public disregard what I say or try to correct me when I am working. None of this has ever slowed me down, and The Wildlife Society has been a steady support system through the past 10 years of undergrad, seasonal technician jobs, and pursuing my master's degree. Now, having successfully finished my master's degree, I am in the workforce once again, and so thankful for the opportunity to be one of the recipients of the TrailBlazer Grant. For previous jobs, I either used daypacks that were falling apart or went without, and having a new daypack because of the combined efforts of TWS and KUIU makes day to day field work much easier. The pack has already been on many adventures in the field, from mountain goat surveys at 6000 ft. to collecting genetic material from salmon on the ocean. Thank you again to TWS and KUIU for helping early career professionals have one less thing to think about and your continued support of science and conservation.



Tyler Miller

I want to express my deepest gratitude to The Wildlife Society for awarding me the TrailBlazer Grant, which has had a profound impact on my journey as a nontraditional student and veteran transitioning into the wildlife conservation field. As a recipient of this grant, I was able to acquire the essential gear required for various wildlife positions in the state of West Virginia and utilize this gear during volunteer efforts, which has been invaluable in advancing my career and education. One of the most significant opportunities that gear purchase with the TrailBlazer Grant afforded me was the ability to coordinate a general herpetofauna survey. This survey not only allowed me to gain practical experience in the field but also contributed to the efforts of a local watershed association by providing crucial data on reptiles and amphibians present in their watershed during the spring vernal pool season. With the financial support from the grant, I was able to purchase essential items such as muck boots and chest waders, which are fundamental for fieldwork, without facing significant financial strain. Additionally, the grant facilitated the acquisition of a quality outdoor backpack, a crucial asset for wildlife fieldwork and camping. The impact of this support has been far-reaching, as it has enabled me to seamlessly transition into a new career field while managing adult responsibilities. Furthermore, I am thrilled to share that since receiving the TrailBlazer Grant, I have secured employment with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. Even though most gear is provided by the agency, having a quality backpack has proven to be indispensable for carrying items such as game cameras, extra clothes, or lunch. The significance of the Trailblazer Grant in bolstering my career cannot be overstated, and I am truly grateful for the support and opportunities it has provided me.



Gavin Moon

Through the support provided from the TrailBlazer Grant and KUIU, I received the KUIU 1500 Daypack. Thanks to the storage and compartments in this pack, I was able to carry snacks, water, and field equipment with no issues! With the extra space, I was able to bring along spare gloves, socks, medical supplies, and my binoculars. Thanks to this pack, I had everything I needed when I was in Oklahoma assisting with vegetation transects. As a first generation graduate, I haven't been able to afford high quality gear and I thank The Wildlife Society and KUIU for providing me with this backpack! My success is thanks to the support from my mentors, friends, and family who saw potential in me. I hope to give back to the community that supported me and inspire others to overcome the challenges and adversity that comes their way.



Robin Simmert

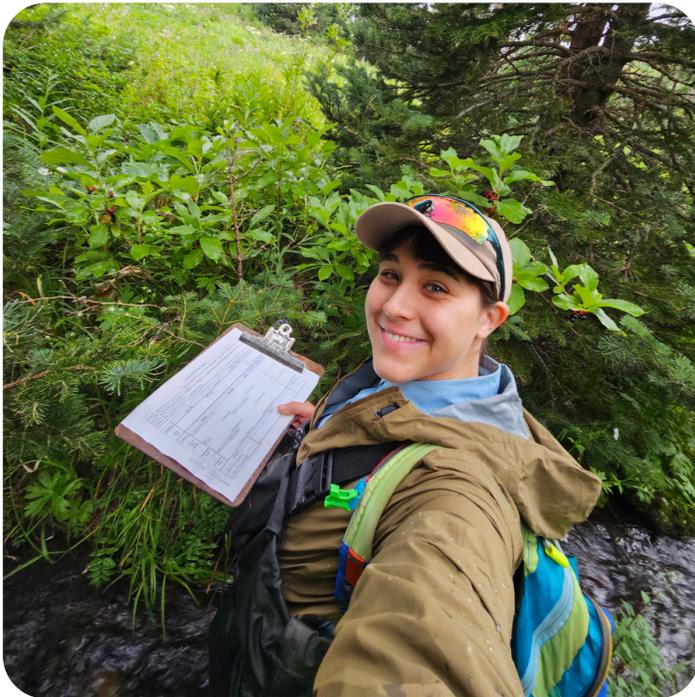
I don't have any photos of field work with my binoculars but I can share my experience so far. Thanks to the generous support in providing me these binoculars, I have been able to use them to better view and monitor the wildlife in my area. Unfortunately, even working full time doesn't provide me enough disposable income to buy these binoculars myself, so the help provided by this grant program has actually been a life-changing experience for me. I felt as though income may have been a limiting factor for me on how successful I could be as a wildlife professional starting out, and now I know that it isn't necessarily so thanks to the opportunities you've provided. I plan on using my binoculars when I go perform volunteer work for The Nature Conservancy at Nachusa Grasslands for better viewing of their bison herd. We will be having our annual autumn festival in September where I hope to help by volunteering as a bison "interpreter" sharing facts about bison with our visitors.

Hannah Tiffin

Receiving the TrailBlazer Award was a huge help in ensuring my new lab has gear available for team members that may have never experienced outdoor fieldwork before and not have the initial gear needed. These funds were used to purchase treated gear to help keep team members "bite safe" from ticks and mosquitoes while out and about- with professionally treated gear that they can continue to use in their personal and professional lives even after positions with my lab! As an early career scientist, I am especially grateful for these funds as I remember being in the position of needing gear before receiving my first paycheck, and other scientists stepping up to help. With these funds, I can ensure students have some of their initial gear needs met and can continue to use these items in their future outdoor adventures. Thank you TWS!

Danielle Terry

This coat has been greatly for my field work this summer! I especially love the spacious hood and vents.



Other Trailblazer Grant Awardees:

- Bijit Khadka
- Arefine Karin Mimi
- Angelleigh DeTroy
- Tiffany Stevens
- Alice Stitzer
- Sarah Westwood
- Danielle Owens
- Ashley Marshall
- Myriam Tougas-Dumesnil
- Samantha Maywald
- Emily Thoroski
- Kierrea Woods