

OUTDOOR AMERICA™

PUBLISHED BY THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

2025 ISSUE 3

Angling for Greater Engagement in Conservation and Outdoor Recreation

ALSO INSIDE:

Saving Habitat and Wildlife
at League Chapters

Celebrating Service and
Achievements:
Award-Winning Ikes

Meet a Water Monitor

Former Staff Member Donates Famed Fish Carving to the League

On behalf of their family, Jane Butler Gavis and husband Alex Gavis deliver a sculpture by renowned wood carver R.L. Blair as a gift to the League.

In July, the Gavis family donated to the Izaak Walton League a fish sculpture by renowned wood carver R.L. Blair. The sculpture was in the collection of Ruth and Jerome Gavis of Baltimore, Md. who displayed it for many years in their home.

Dr. Jerome Gavis was a scientist and professor at Johns Hopkins University who conducted early and basic research on water pollutants in ecosystems. He was also an authority on ecological problems in the Chesapeake Bay. He passed away in 2011, and with the recent passing of his wife, daughter-in-law Jane Butler Gavis thought the sculpture would be a perfect gift for the League.

Jane had worked at the League in finance and accounting in the early 1990s, and she fondly remembers the organization and its mission. Jane and her husband Alex delivered the sculpture to the League's national headquarters in Gaithersburg, Md.

Fittingly, the fish is a salmonid. Izaak Walton devoted an entire chapter of *The Compleat Angler* to salmon in which the narrator, Piscator, describes the salmon as "the King of fresh-water-fish."

A hearty thank you to the Gavis family! This dramatic artwork will be on display to inspire generations to come.

Thank You!



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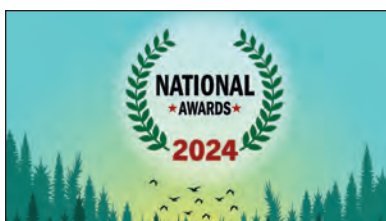
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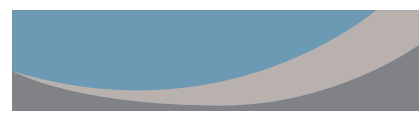
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ABOUT THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA ►

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Take Action for Something that Interests You and Supports Our Mission

SCOTT MEYER | National President

Welcome Ikes to my first column for *Outdoor America* as League President.

After living in Virginia for about 34 years, and a little over a year in Texas, I now live in Minnesota where my family farms. I was introduced to the League in the 1990s in Virginia where I joined the Loudoun County Chapter. In my many years of membership there I held numerous roles up to chapter president. I've also held numerous positions in the League including division treasurer, division vice president, national vice president and most recently national treasurer.

Enough about me, now let's talk about you and the League.

The theme that resonated through this year's convention in Green Bay, Wisconsin was "Take Action!" We heard about the great job the volunteer monitors are doing gathering data on salt levels through Salt Watch, nitrate levels through Nitrate Watch and water quality in general through Save Our Streams. That is awesome news, and all that great data is ready for our use to "Take Action!"

We also heard about the work some of our volunteers are doing with the data. There are many ways you can take action, like using an action alert to contact your members of Congress, writing your own email or letter or calling your elected representatives. There was a recent alert that contributed our voices to remove the selling of public lands from the "Big Beautiful Bill."

There are over 90,000 government entities and agencies across the United States. That means that our local members, chapters and divisions are in the best position to identify areas for action. Stay in touch with your elected representatives and keep on top of the various boards and committees that regulate many things at all different levels—local, state or federal. Become a regular presence at those meetings, and if possible, get to know the elected officials and their staff.

In addition to our conservation activities, I also want to highlight that Izaak Walton League chapters are the largest private operators of shooting sports facilities in the



United States. We are in a strong position on recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3), and many of our chapters host, support and participate in various shooting sports. The shooting sports introduce people to the League and to the outdoors. Many of these programs have a youth component that gets them outside. Some Ikes take action by running shooting sports programs at their chapters.

There are many other ways to take action, and I challenge every Ike to "Take Action!" on something that interests them and supports our mission.

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To conserve, restore and promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of our natural resources, including soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife.

IWLA.ORG

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Izaak Walton League

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Not a member? It's easy to join!

Visit iwla.org to locate a chapter near you or join as a national or corporate member. You can also call 800-IKE-LINE and ask for the membership department. Your membership supports our conservation and education efforts and links you with a nationwide network of people working on common-sense solutions to environmental issues.

League's Bottom Up-Policymaking Tackles the Data Center Challenge

SCOTT KOVAROVICS | Executive Director

A hallmark of the League is our bottom-up process through which members author and approve the policies establishing the League's position on conservation and outdoor recreation issues.

At the national convention in July, chapter delegates unanimously adopted a resolution setting standards for development and operation of new data centers. Adopting policy is an important first step; however, members recognized that addressing the many challenges posed by data centers requires grassroots engagement in communities where these facilities are proposed.

Most of us are familiar with data centers: essentially buildings filled with computer servers running 24/7 largely to support artificial intelligence processing. Once confined to Silicon Valley and northern Virginia, data centers are being built and proposed in communities nationwide.

There is growing awareness of and concern about the impact of these facilities on the environment, residential electricity bills and quality of life. Data centers require gigawatts for electricity, consume vast quantities of fresh water for

cooling, produce wastewater requiring treatment and create noise pollution.

In many cases, new data centers are approved for construction without adequate assessment of these and other impacts on the front end.

The League policy prioritizes thorough environmental review and robust public participation before new data centers are permitted and built. It stipulates electricity for data centers should be generated from renewable and low-carbon sources. It opposes use of eminent domain to take private property specifically to build transmission infrastructure to deliver electricity to data centers.

Engagement at the grassroots is the essential next step—and this is where the League excels.

At convention, members were already focused on how to use this new policy. It quickly became clear that many of the most consequential decisions about data center siting, water use, wastewater discharge and noise pollution will be made by your local government.

Although everyone embraced this view, some were concerned



about having the expertise to address technical issues in zoning hearings, for example. No one needs to be hydrologist or a chemist to make their voices heard. League members have a wealth of knowledge about the environment where they live. Fact is, Ikes are actively engaged every day on local land use decisions. To support participation locally, League staff have developed a simple fact sheet at Get Involved/Take Action section of our website at iwla.org, which highlights the most common impacts of data centers.

Adoption of this new policy about data centers builds on the League's track record of confronting the most pressing conservation issues of the day. Engagement at the grassroots is the essential next step—and this is where the League excels.

League Trains National Park Service Rangers to Monitor Streams

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

Along the eastern flank of Appalachian Range, Shenandoah National Park covers a wild expanse of forests, hollows and waterfalls following the Blue Ridge Mountains 100 miles north through Virginia. Just a few hours from Washington, D.C., it is a popular park.

Earlier this year, Maggie Dombroski provided Virginia Save Our Streams (SOS) certification training for six rangers at Shenandoah National Park who had heard her speak at an environmental education conference. The rangers serve on the education team at the park and lead a number of programs for children. With the SOS training, they plan to add stream monitoring to the repertoire of activities for youth.

Dombroski, Mid-Atlantic Save Our Streams Coordinator for the League, said that during the field training at a small stream in the national park, “the rangers picked up the protocol quickly and jumped into identifying the macroinvertebrates from the stream.”

Macroinvertebrates are stream bugs that have varying levels of tolerance to pollution, Dombroski said. So the species found in a stream often provide a valuable and actionable indicator of the waterway’s health. In fact, data collected as part of the Virginia Save Our Streams protocol is accepted as valued data by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

The newly certified SOS rangers in the national park join hundreds of other certified monitors across the commonwealth who track and record the health of Virginia’s streams.

Visit vasos.org to get more information.

More monitoring news: The League’s Salt Watch Coordinator Abby Hileman (in the photograph on the right) was interviewed as an expert resource for the Maryland Department of the Environment’s Smart Salting Enhanced Winter Maintenance training program. That training helps road crews and private applicators across the state reduce the tonnage of salt applied during icy weather while maintaining safe streets, highways, parking lots and sidewalks.



Education team members at Shenandoah National Park quickly picked up the League’s Save Our Streams protocol for evaluating stream health in the park.

 **SAVE OUR STREAMS®**
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA



A film crew interviews the League’s Abby Hileman for a Maryland Department of the Environment video about better approaches for road salt.

TOP: MAGGIE DOMBROSKI BOTTOM: MICHAEL REINEMER



Thank You for Defending Our Public Lands!

By JARED MOTT, Conservation Director

League members step up to defend public lands

In May and June, a controversial effort to privatize millions of acres of America's public lands nearly made its way into the massive budget reconciliation package that Congress ultimately passed and was signed into law in early July.

Spearheaded by Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah), the proposal would have mandated the sale of between two and three million acres of federal lands across 11 Western states, including parcels managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. Supporters framed it as a way to raise revenue for housing and infrastructure, but the plan would have bypassed environmental safeguards and public review, effectively putting cherished hunting grounds, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation areas on the auction block.

The proposal to privatize public land met swift and overwhelming opposition, including from Ikes across the country. Hunters, anglers, conservationists, outdoor businesses, and local communities mobilized, informing their lawmakers that selling off public lands would undermine the outdoor recreation economy

and America's outdoor heritage. The backlash was bipartisan, with some Western Republicans opposing the measure.

The proposal to privatize public land met swift and overwhelming opposition, including from Ikes across the country.

Facing procedural hurdles and fierce public outcry, Senator Lee withdrew the proposal. The episode underscores a powerful truth: public lands belong to all Americans—and Ikes and conservationists across the country are ready to fight to keep them that way.

Administration actions target boundary waters wilderness

The proposed Twin Metals copper-nickel mine near Ely, Minnesota—in the Rainy River headwaters just upstream of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)—is again threatening the pristine waters of



The proposal to sell off millions of acres of public land would have applied to places like Colorado's Rio Grande National Forest, shown here.

America's most visited Wilderness. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins and Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum both have declared their intentions to lift the restrictions keeping the mine, which could poison pristine lakes with acidic runoff and devastate the outdoor recreation economy, on the sidelines.

In 2023, the Biden administration placed a 20-year federal moratorium on mining across 225,000 acres of the Superior National Forest, where the mine would be located, to protect the BWCAW watershed. That moratorium followed the

decision from Interior Secretary Deb Haaland not to renew expired mineral leases held by Twin Metals.

The House of Representatives tried to include language reinstating the leases for Twin Metals in the One Big Beautiful Bill budget reconciliation legislation, but pressure from the League and other Boundary Waters champions led to removal of that language. However, the Trump administration continues to signal that federal protections for the Boundary Waters are under renewed threat.

An executive order in early 2025 fast-tracked domestic critical minerals development—jeopardizing protections for public lands including the Boundary Waters. In June, Secretaries Rollins and Burgum announced that they intend to remove the mining moratorium. The Department of the Interior followed up in late July by announcing that it was reinstating Twin Metals' eligibility to renew its previously-held mineral leases.

Public opposition to mining near the Boundary Waters remains broad: in 2023, over 675,000 comments flooded federal channels in favor of the mining moratorium, with polling showing roughly 70 percent of Minnesotans support safeguarding the Boundary Waters.

In response, the League and other conservation groups have championed permanent protections for the Boundary Waters found in legislation introduced in the House by Rep.

Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) and in the Senate by Senator Tina Smith (D-Minn.). Ask your members of Congress to support these protections by going to iwla.org/advocate.

Budget reconciliation bill sets back progress on climate change

The budget reconciliation bill passed by Congress and signed by President Trump in early July, often referred to as the “One Big, Beautiful Bill,” includes a range of provisions that threaten the health of our environment. While League members and supporters were able to keep some harmful provisions, like public lands privatization, from being included in the final legislation, the League has serious concerns about how certain measures may affect clean energy development, public health and natural resource management.

The “One Big Beautiful Bill” will drastically impede the ability of the United States to stave off the most catastrophic effects of climate change.

One of the most notable changes is the scaling back of clean energy tax credits created under the Inflation Reduction Act. Credits for wind, solar, electric vehicles, and energy-efficient homes would be reduced or phased out. Independent studies project that these changes could lower renewable energy

deployment by more than half over the next decade, with potential increases in electricity costs and U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

The bill also expands opportunities for fossil fuel development, including mandated leasing on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, western public lands and offshore areas. It lowers royalties on some projects and accelerates permitting, changes intended to boost domestic energy supply but they will likely increase environmental risks and reduce federal revenue from royalties paid for energy leasing.

Several provisions address environmental programs and oversight. Funding for initiatives that reduce diesel emissions, support clean ports, and monitor local air quality is cut, while limitations are placed on how settlement funds from pollution cases can be used. In addition, adjustments to environmental review requirements could accelerate development; however, they will reduce opportunities for public input.

The projected impacts of these measures include slower growth in renewable energy industries, higher emissions compared to previous policy trajectories and shifts in federal support for environmental programs. As the climate crisis worsens, the “One Big Beautiful Bill” will drastically impede the ability of the U.S. to stave off the most catastrophic effects of climate change.

Saving Habitat, Growing Wildlife on Private Land

League Chapters Practice What They Preach

By **BRUCE INGRAM**, Field Editor



The Illinois Division manages 252 acres of the Goose Workshop where educational programs connect youth with the outdoors.

At 85 years of age, Bruce Jones admits that he would never have predicted that the life journey he and his wife Susan would ultimately take would result in them living in rural America and “growing wildlife” as he puts it.

A lifetime spent working and living in cities does not often lead to such a different lifestyle. In short, Jones has carefully restored 175 acres of land in Rappahannock County, Virginia so that every section of it benefits native plants, insects, mammals...indeed, the entire spectrum of indigenous flora and fauna.

How did this journey begin and what can we Ikes and others learn from it? Jones cites three formative experiences, beginning some 35 years ago.

Led down the primrose path

“The first was meeting West Virginia’s Peter Heus, who dropped out of Virginia Tech after one year

and then spent his life learning everything he could about native plants and even opening a nursery to help spread his knowledge,” Jones said.

“Every time I would talk to him, he would inspire me on the virtues of several different native plants. He collected seeds from the wild and grew them in his nursery. I would plant them, see their benefits, and then want to buy more and learn what they brought to the environment.”

Jones says his second epiphany “was when our oldest son hiked our woodlands in the winter and early spring and found two or three strange-looking plants...all in the orchid family. Afterwards, we tried to identify them. It was a major mindset change to start looking very closely at the forest floor, as there were many pleasant surprises to find!”

Then in the mid-1990s, Jones met Dr. Douglas Tallamy of the University of Delaware. Tallamy’s

widely acclaimed guidebook for native flora, *Bringing Nature Home*, inspired the Virginian to become even more involved with the movement. “Every time I would come back from a conference, especially the ones given by the native plant society, I returned with a car full of plants.” (Tallamy spoke at the League’s 2023 national convention.)

Later, Jones used programs like the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which is a USDA program that helps land owners implement long-term conservation practices--such as maintaining riparian buffers, wetlands and pollinator plantings. Those features can provide wildlife habitat, enhance water quality and reduce erosion. He also tapped the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, which at the time was managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. But by that time, he had already managed the landscape extensively.

To control the heavy damage from the deer population, Jones installed a fence surrounding about 12 acres of the property, which helps to protect some enclosed gardens and woodland ephemeral plants that emerge in the spring.

Keeping up the with Joneses

When my wife Elaine and I arrived at the Jones’ house in late May, the first thing we noticed were dozens of purple martins hawking for insects in the vicinity of their gourd-adorned nesting poles. Jones, who keeps records of seemingly everything about his land, informed us that the martins had averaged 5½ eggs per gourd and raised over 190 fledglings.

The property was clearly welcoming to winged creatures and bipeds alike. Susan Jones told us that 120 people had visited their property in April, and a mid-May birding expedition had recorded 83 bird species. Since habitat improvements by the Jones, well over 200 species had been noted breeding or visiting there.

All of us were eager to traverse some of the trails, and we started down a woodland path that begins at the Jones’ house.

“You’re too late to see the blood roots, trilliums in bloom, and Virginia bluebells, but there’s still plenty to see,” Jones said. “We’ve tried to plant or encourage a wide variety of plants so that pollinators will always be able to find something when they

come here. For our visitors, we want to create a desire for them to create their own beneficial habitats on their rural properties or backyards.”

As we ambled through the woodlot, it was a dizzying experience to keep up with the octogenarian who was a whirlwind of information and enthusiasm. He rattled off the names of numerous plants: wild geranium, butterfly weed, yellow lady’s slipper, Indian pink, golden ragwort, Solomon’s seal and many others.

What was so impressive was that in many instances, Jones even knew which specific pollinators benefitted from the presence of individual plants. And when he wasn’t quite sure of some aspect, he whipped out his cell phone and used various apps to confirm or add to his knowledge.

Brambles and vernal pools

Then it was time to ramble to what Jones dubs as one of his numerous “bird thickets.”

“When we first came here, the land was just a worn-out, overgrazed old cattle farm with grass and fescue,” he recalled. “But then I began planting native shrubs and flowers and sort of let nature take care of itself. In the winter, it’s so exciting to see all the bird nests from the spring and summer in our thickets.”



Bruce Jones inspects one of the vernal pools he excavated by hand in order to create breeding grounds for frogs and salamanders.



More than 200 bird species, including the great crested flycatcher, visit or breed in Bruce Jones' preserve.

At our initial thicket sojourn, we hear the witchety-witchety-witchety sounds of a common yellowthroat and soon afterwards yellow-breasted chats, brown thrashers, white-eyed vireos and catbirds add their songs to the avian symphony. Blackberries, black cherries, plums, dogwoods, redbud, and various viburnums compose the copse.

Next, Jones proudly shepherds us to the vernal pools and wetlands.

"I dug out some low-lying areas to create three or four vernal pools," he said. "It's so amazing in the spring to see all the salamander and frog egg masses. Right now, there seems to be a lot of wood frog tadpoles about. I had somebody set up sound recording equipment to record frog calls. I can't wait to see how many species are captured on tape."

Two of the most interesting aspects of the outing come next. We arrive at a small pollinator plot where all the wildflowers seem smaller in stature than is the norm. And in the background, I note a number of dead black locust trees.

"I heard that you could create a pollinator plot without any or very few invasive plants if you removed the top 12 to 15 inches of soil down to its mineral base," Bruce explained. "Then just scatter various wildflower seeds and see what happens."

Because of the lack of good soil, the plants don't grow very tall, but the plots are pretty much free of invasive plants.

"I anchored all those locust trees so that perching birds would have somewhere to go to rest or where hawks could come and wait to ambush. Locust wood lasts a long time, so they're perfect trees for that purpose."

Our final stop is at what Bruce calls his "Big Sky Fields." Bluebird and various birdhouses as well as several silos are scattered about, and Jones says barn owls often nest in one of the silos but not this year. Black vultures are nesting in one of the structures, though, and I peak into it. Two down-covered vulture nestlings quickly turn their backs to me as if doing so will conceal themselves.

After the tour, on our way home, one of his comments to Elaine and me stands out.

"I'm enjoying my time educating groups who come here," Jones said. "We don't charge anyone to come here. I just want to show and tell—and maybe plant a seed in someone's mind about the value of native plants."

For more information:
Jonesnaturepreserve.wordpress.com

Chapters and Divisions Practice Conservation on their Lands

Giant Goose and Preserve Managed by the Illinois Division

In 1965, the League's **Illinois Division** took over management of a 252-acre area dubbed the Giant Goose Conservation Education Workshop, now simply called the Goose Workshop.

Originally, that property had been mined for coal. When production ended, the owner wanted to prove that strip-mined land could be reclaimed. Over the decades, a series of habitat improvement projects took place with involvement from groups including the U.S. Forest Service, Henry County Soil and Water District, Department of Natural Resources, Boy and Girl Scouts and Future Farmers of America.

Luann Noll, who is a National Director representing Illinois and member of the League's Executive Board, says the Illinois Division purchased the Goose Workshop over a period of years and managed it with some help from the Illinois Department of Conservation. Mostly, though, the division relied on the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment, and members volunteering and chapters running raffles, hog roasts, and other fundraisers to pay for it.

"The property gained its name because three breeding pairs of giant Canada goose were reintroduced there—as were wild turkeys," says Noll.

Now the Division uses the Goose Workshop for education programs. Noll says, "local teachers and Future Farmers of America members take advantage of the facilities for professional development. Many local groups use the facilities free of charge for



At The Preserve, the Illinois Division manages 519 acres for conservation, no-till agriculture and wildlife habitat.

outdoor recreation, like camping, fishing, hiking and boating."

The Division also manages a 519-acre area called The Preserve, which contains conservation areas, low-till agriculture and prairie designed for pollinators. The Preserve, which is just south of the Goose Workshop, is not open for public use, Noll says.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers a variety of programs to help farmers, ranchers and landowners implement beneficial conservation practices. For a list of available programs, visit: nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives or get in touch with your local USDA service center.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Md.: No-Till Farming and Habitat Preservation



Clover fields have been planted for wildlife and pollinators at the farm on the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter in Maryland.

Chapter President Andrew Wight explains that the **Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter**, formed in 1935, initially bought a 366-acre worn out tobacco farm south of Poolesville, Maryland in 1949. Over time, their volunteers have added structures, facilities and acreage. The property now totals 624 acres, mostly wooded, with around 75 acres actively farmed.

“Our conservation focused farm is all about sustainable land management, supporting soil health, wildlife and membership engagement. We make various plantings of cover crops such as broadleaf grasses, brassicas and legumes, plus practice no-till farming and habitat maintenance to improve the soil and benefit wildlife,” Wight says.

The Chapter also built firearms and archery ranges, maintains two ponds for fishing and allows hunting on the land. Wright adds, “We’ve placed the land under several conservation easements so the land can never become a subdivision.”

McCook Lake Chapter, SD: Using CRP Funds to Manage Land for Wildlife

Members of the **McCook Lake Chapter** in South Dakota began to look at ways to improve 476 acres the chapter purchased using dues and fundraisers, with bingo being especially effective for raising money.

The chapter also established 78 acres of pollinator plants with 14 or 15 different natives such as milkweed and various asters leading the way.

“We even have a beekeeper set up near the pollinator plots, and he donates a dollar a jar to us from honey sales,” says Kelly Kistner, a chapter member and former national president of the League.

“We’ve been able to have bowhunting hunts for deer and turkeys on the land and hope to eventually have a youth pheasant hunt,” Kistner says.

The Chapter eventually used the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to plant aquatic plants and wetland grasses on some 110 acres. CRP encourages landowners to convert highly erodible acreage to vegetative cover, such as native grasses, trees and buffers along waterways.



The McCook Lake Chapter in South Dakota used CRP funds to restore wetland grasses on about 110 acres.

Kistner found the process to gain CRP funding very easy. “Basically, all we had to do was bring an empty bag of seed back to the local USDA office after we had done our planting,” he says. “We split the cost of the seed, and a volunteer with a tractor planted the seed.”

Porter County Chapter, Ind.: Native Plants and Bat Poles

The **Porter County Chapter** owns and manages the 60-acre Frame Family Little Calumet Conservation Area. Chapter Vice President Jim Sweeney says that his group bought the property about a decade ago, with funds from the state, a federally mandated habitat improvement project, and NIPSCO the local gas and electric utility.

“Frame was purchased in two acquisitions,” he says. “For Frame I, we used \$50,000 NIPSCO money, \$32,000 in chapter funds and \$50,000 from the Indiana Heritage Trust.” Sweeney explains that Frame II was purchased with \$180,000 from the Enbridge/Conservation Fund and the Indiana Bicentennial Nature Trust matched every dollar from Enbridge.

“Later, the chapter utilized grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NIPSCO, to initiate a series of habitat improvement projects. We have an ongoing prairie restoration project where we plant native seeds, and many years we plant trees and conduct prescribed fires. We are also involved with wetland restoration and the local Audubon chapter has helped fund that.”



One of the conservation programs at the Porter County Chapter in Indiana provides nesting and roosting habitat for bats with specially design poles.

Sweeney says that one of the chapter’s members, Liz McCloskey, used to work for the USFWS, so she is adept at gaining funding for various projects. He also feels the chapter has done a great job with using the strengths of individual members to accomplish projects.

Harford County Chapter, Md.: Conservation Easements and Public Access

Mike Horsmon, president of the League’s **Harford County Chapter**, Maryland, reports that his group has been involved with two tracts: Welzenbach Farm (48 acres) and the Bosley Conservancy (355 acres) which have headwater streams of the Bush River and that border and buffer the U.S. Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds from surrounding private land. These lands provide hiking, birding, fishing, and research opportunities for the public, as well as hunting opportunities for members.

“The Harford Land Trust partnered with the Aberdeen Proving Grounds and Maryland Environmental Trust to put that land under a conservation easement,” Horsmon said. “The U.S. Army likes to identify large tracts that would provide a cushion between their land and civilization. Then the service uses its Army Compatible Use Buffer Program to help put that land under a conservation easement.”

“The Bosely Conservancy is left in its natural state, and the Maryland DNR conducts research on emergent vegetation in the freshwater marsh and how it responds to human and climactic impacts. Our chapter bought the Welzenbach Farm tract from the land trust and plans to restore the woodlands and open access to the public and school groups.”

Bruce Ingram, a League member, is field editor for Outdoor America. He has written young adult novels and books about the outdoors.

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The Imperative of Preserving Grasslands and their Native Wildlife

By LISA BALLARD

North America's grasslands are among the most underappreciated yet diverse ecosystems in the world. Historically, they were part of or totally encompassed 17 states. But 70 percent of our grasslands have disappeared, replaced by croplands, residential sprawl and commercial development.

In Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota and Wisconsin, virtually all native grasslands are gone. What's more, wildfires that now burn hotter and cover larger areas than ever before have denuded the remaining grasslands at a pace of a million acres per year. As a result, North America's grasslands are among the most threatened biomes in the world.

In October 2024, the bi-partisan North American Grasslands Conservation Act (NAGCA) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Izaak Walton League, in partnership with a number of other conservation, hunting, fishing

and environmental organizations, supported this initiative and is working to reintroduce it again in 2025. If passed, the bill would create an incentive-based grant program to conserve what native grasslands we have left, restore what we can and then manage these vital but declining tracts as sustainable lands for wildlife, outdoor recreation and agriculture. And help mitigate catastrophic wildfire and climate change.

What's a grassland?

In North America, our midwestern grasslands are broadly categorized as tallgrass prairie, mixed-grass prairie and short-grass prairie, though they also include sagebrush steppe. There are other types of grasslands, including Chihuahuan grasslands in the arid Southwest and the sand prairies on parts of the western Great Plains.



Grassland restoration underway at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

In the Northeast, our grasslands include the coastal plains of Rhode Island and the blueberry barrens in Maine. There are also savannahs, wetland grasslands and sand dune grasslands in the Southeast and along the Gulf of Mexico—all of which are in decline. For the purposes of this article, let's look at our midwestern grasslands, which are by far the largest of these temperate ecosystems and would be a focal area for conservation under NAGCA.

Grass height and density define our prairie grasslands, which are influenced mainly by rainfall, but also by soil make-up, longitude, other weather conditions

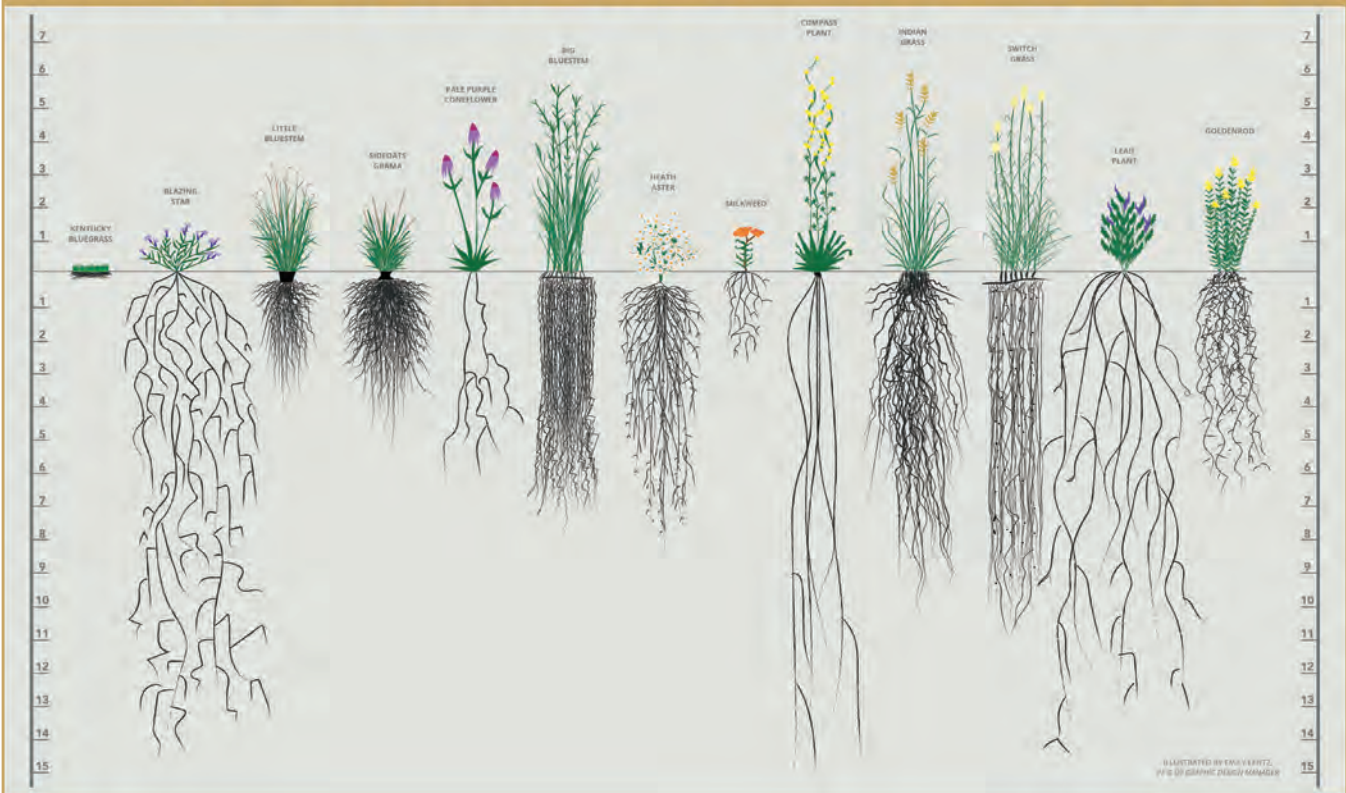
and the wildlife that live there. In general, the further east you travel on the Great Plains, the taller, denser and lusher the grassland.

The Act would create an incentive-based grant program to conserve what grasslands we have left, restore what we can and then manage vital but declining tracts as sustainable lands for wildlife, outdoor recreation and agriculture.

Though called grasslands, grasses are not the only plants in these landscapes. While native grasses are the primary flora, there's also a generous mix of forbs and shrubs. Trees in grasslands are mainly limited to its edges, in canyons and draws, along rivers and in manmade windrows. A healthy grassland

is also free of invasives, such as cheatgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, Canadian goldenrod and smooth brome, which crowd out native plants.

PF & QF PRAIRIE GRASS ROOT SYSTEMS



Some prairie grasses may only be 18 inches tall but their roots can extend as many as 14 feet into the ground.

Looks can be misleading. What you see above ground is only a fraction of the plant structure. Plant roots typically penetrate much deeper below the surface than the height of the stalks. For example, buffalo grass, which grows about **six inches tall**, can have roots that are over **six feet long!** The prairie's intricate root systems shelter a plethora of wildlife, filter water, hold the soil in place and sequester carbon.

Wildlife at stake

Similarly, the web of animal life in our grasslands influences the health of its plant life and vice versa. As our grasslands become more imperiled, so does much of the wildlife it harbors. Various government agencies and conservation organizations have estimated this decline at anywhere from 40 percent

to more than 90 percent, depending on the species. For example, according to the National Audubon Society, grassland birds as a group have decreased by more than half since 1966, while some species, like the lesser prairie chicken, flirt with extinction. It's an

astounding, worrisome loss.

On the bright side, even small-scale remnants of native grassland can have as much plant diversity as a tropical rainforest. But without connectivity to other grassland acreage, these isolated pockets pose issues

Without connectivity to other grassland acreage, these isolated pockets pose issues for the long-term sustainability of many species.

for the long-term sustainability of many wildlife species because of their lack of genetic diversity and their increased vulnerability to catastrophic flooding, weather events and wildfire.

Here's a closer look at how key indicator species are faring within America's grasslands:

Bison. Around 120 different species of mammals live in our grasslands, including coyotes, mountain lions, mule deer, pronghorn, elk, black-footed ferrets and jack rabbits, but none are more iconic than bison. Prior to westward expansion by European settlers and uncontrolled market hunting during the early to mid-1800s, between 30 million and 60 million wild bison roamed the Great Plains.

That number declined to about 1,000 by the late 1800s. Today, there are approximately 20,000 wild plains bison in the United States, plus 360,000 domesticated ones on private ranchland, raised for their meat similar to cattle ranching. These bison are the descendants of the one surviving wild herd of less than 50 bison in Yellowstone National Park and the breeding efforts of ranchers who maintained a handful of “hobby” bison.

Before their near-extinction, bison were a keystone species of our native grasslands. Their behavior created a mosaic of habitats and thus greatly contributed to the diversity of plant and animal life. The combination of their selective grazing and trampling of flora promoted grasses of varying heights and species.

In addition to encouraging plant diversity, this mosaic also helped control the size and intensity of wildfires. When they wallowed (rolled on the ground) to scratch, remove excess dirt, old fur and bugs and as a mating ritual, it created depressions in the earth that collected rainwater and snowmelt. These depressions acted like mini-wetlands and vernal pools, which supported a number of plants, insects and amphibians.

In addition, bison were a food source for predators and scavengers. Even their carcasses had value, adding nutrients to the soil as they decomposed. For these reasons, it makes sense that the health of our remaining grasslands, the re-establishment of historical grasslands and the recovery of the bison go hand in hand.

Prairie dogs. Sometimes certain animals exert an influence on an ecosystem that has nothing to do with their size—for instance, black-tailed prairie dogs. Biologists sometimes call these barking rodents the engineers of the grasslands. Their sizeable “dog towns” (burrow systems) provide shelter not only for themselves, but also for a number of other species,

RESTORING GRASSLANDS

Restoring even an acre of grassland is a long-term project. It takes about five years to reestablish native species, but maybe decades for the ecosystem to fully return to its historic state. Here are the basic steps:

1. Gain local, state and national support for grassland conservation.
2. Remove trees and invasive species that are not part of a traditional grassland ecosystem.
3. Prepare the soil, then reintroduce native grasses and other plants through seeding.
4. In the long term, use prescribed burns to reduce leaf litter, stimulate plant reproduction, and improve the soil.
5. Introduce grazing animals, wild and/or domestic, to copy the historic impact of grazers on the grassland.
6. Create corridors to connect restored patches of prairie to encourage wildlife and plant dispersal and genetic diversity.

SOURCE: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY



Without prairie dogs' expansive burrow systems and their role in the food web, the health and biodiversity of the nation's grasslands would suffer.

JACK AND LISA BALLARD



A snowberry clearwing (*Hemaris diffinis*) feeds on blue vervain in a restored prairie near the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Wisconsin.

footed ferrets, badgers, weasels and swift fox. Prairie dogs also provide forage to herbivores by nibbling vegetation around their burrow holes. The tender new grasses and forbs that regrow are favored by bison, mule deer and other grazing animals. What's more, their constant digging aerates and mixes the soil, and their waste adds organic matter, improving soil fertility. Without prairie dogs, the diversity and health of our grasslands would suffer.

Grassland birds. Around 300 species of birds depend on our grasslands for all or part of the year. But as this habitat has declined so have its birds, including upland gamebirds. For example, populations of bobwhite quail and sage grouse have both declined more than 80 percent since the mid-1900s.

Due to their troubling low numbers at the end of the 20th century, sage grouse became the poster-bird of habitat degradation and disappearance. That drew attention not only to the plight of the grouse

but also the decline of the prairie ecosystems as a whole where habitat was lost to energy and infrastructure development.

From 2010 to 2015, the broad-based effort to keep sage grouse off the endangered species list, known as the Sage Grouse Initiative, conserved several million acres of sage grouse habitat on both public and private lands in partnership with agricultural needs. Sage grouse were but one of the 350 species of wildlife that greatly benefited from this collaborative effort, including big game animals like mule deer and pronghorn, and endemic songbirds like the Brewer's sparrow (which have increased by 81 percent) and green-tailed towhee (which increased by 55 percent).

The Sage Grouse Initiative is ongoing. Its success to date demonstrates the value of conserving not just sage-lands but all types of grasslands. From a hunting point of view, there are now limited sage grouse seasons in a number of western states, thanks to this initiative. Other grassland gamebirds, including sharp-tailed grouse, dove, gray partridge (Hungarian partridge), pheasant, bobwhite quail and scaled quail, would certainly benefit from a grassland conservation and rehab program. Population numbers of these birds are already subject to wide swings due to drought, other vagaries of weather and the loss of mating and nesting habitat. The threatened lesser prairie chicken is on the verge of extinction because it requires large, intact tracts of native grassland.

And then there are ducks. The prairie pothole region in the north-central part of North America's grasslands supports over 60 percent of the breeding populations of mallards, northern shovelers, northern pintails, redheads and canvasbacks and the majority of blue-winged teal.

As croplands, commercial development, energy extraction and invasive species encroach on this vital part of the prairie, waterfowl populations across a sizeable swath of the country are at risk.

Monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

A vast array of bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, hummingbirds and other pollinators depend upon and support our wild grasslands, as well as the ranchlands and croplands within this biome. Some of these pollinators are generalists, transferring

IT'S A FACT

One acre of tallgrass prairie can intercept 53 tons of water from running off during a one-inch rainfall.

SOURCE: CLEAN LAKES ALLIANCE

pollen from plant to plant as they breed and feed. Others, like the monarch butterfly depend upon a specific plant, in this case certain milkweed species, for part of its lifecycle.

Adult monarchs need to lay their eggs on locally native milkweed as they migrate. When a caterpillar emerges, it feeds exclusively on that milkweed until it is ready to form a chrysalis to transform into an adult butterfly and begin the process again. As our grasslands have disappeared so has milkweed, causing a staggering 90 percent decline in western monarch butterflies and 80 percent decline in eastern monarchs. Conservation efforts to conserve grasslands, including milkweed, are critical to the survival of the Monarch. We can thank this iconic insect and its challenges for increasing public awareness of the importance of our grasslands.

Reptiles and amphibians. Except for snakes, you might not think of the Great Plains as prime habitat for a plethora of reptiles and amphibians, but they are there in large numbers. Over 150 species of reptiles, 32 types of frogs and toads, 33 types of lizards, and 19 types of turtles inhabit our grasslands, or about 30 percent of all herps in North

America. They are an important part of the prairie food web.

Take the Great Plains skink. Skinks eat insects, helping to control insect pests. In turn, they are a food source for other larger reptiles and amphibians, raptors and mammals. Like birds, they also promote seed dispersal by consuming seeds and then leaving them elsewhere on the landscape in their droppings.

These are just a few examples of the many species that contribute to the diversity of life in our grasslands but have suffered the negative effects of habitat loss. At least this precipitous decline has helped us recognize the importance of our grasslands, not only to wildlife but to people as well, forcing us to better understand the value of this disappearing biome to our economy, health and overall well-being. The NAGCA seeks to find this balance. It will conserve what's left and restore what's possible.

View interactive maps for grasslands at mapforgrasslands.org.

Lisa Ballard is an Ike from Red Lodge, Montana, and a long-time contributor to Outdoor America. In 2024, the Outdoor Writers Association of America honored her with its Joan Wulff Enduring Excellence Award (lifetime achievement) for her writing, photography, and television work. She is passionate about wildlife conservation and dedicated to getting people of all ages outdoors. www.LisaBallardOutdoors.com.

NORTH AMERICA'S GRASSLANDS PROVIDE...

- Extensive cropland and rangeland for agriculture
- Habitat for both game and nongame wildlife
- Biodiversity
- Clean water by acting as a massive filtrations system
- Climate change resiliency by storing carbon in its deep, complex root systems
- Wildfire resiliency if there is an absence of invasive species.
- Recreational opportunities including hunting, watching wildlife, hiking, camping, and otherwise immersing oneself in large-landscape experiences.
- Soil health and erosion control.

DID YOU KNOW?

When an acre of native grasslands is converted to row crops, it releases three times the amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere compared to the amount of CO₂ released annually by the average passenger vehicle. Grasslands are upside-down forests, retaining most of their carbon underground in massive, deep root systems, making this carbon storage system more secure than above-ground forests.

SOURCE: NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION



2025 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Green Bay, Wisconsin

A Call to Action for Our Conservation Priorities: 2025 Convention Highlights

In the face of mounting challenges to conservation

in the U.S., the Izaak Walton League national convention in Green Bay, Wisconsin featured an urgent appeal for people to take action—whether contacting lawmakers or monitoring a local waterway.

The convention theme was “Defending America’s Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations,” and was held just a few blocks from the Green Bay Packer’s famed Lambeau Field, July 18-19.

Outgoing League President Jodi Labs began the convention with an address about the challenges for conservation and threats to clean water, like the growing nitrate crisis.

“We have the power to make a difference,” she said. Labs described the nation’s parks and natural areas as the League’s homefield advantage and conservation as “our playbook.”

“Let’s not be the team who fumbles the future,” she said.

The convention sessions included a panel discussion on combating climate change by harnessing and scaling up natural resource conservation, a presentation by young professionals starting out in the field and a well-attended youth convention.

To address the environmental consequences of the rapid spread of data centers across the U.S., League delegates adopted a resolution urging federal standards for their siting, planning and construction. (See the full resolution text on page 23.)

Executive Director Scott Kovarovich spoke to the need for bold action to counter attacks on bedrock conservation laws and policies. He cited



**“We have the power to make a difference,”
said outgoing president Jodi Labs.**

the Supreme Court *Sackett v. EPA* decision that hollowed out Clean Water Act protections for wetlands and streams and threats from the EPA to exclude even more waterways from protections.

He noted that Congress “just turned back the clock on a generation of progress to develop a clean energy economy,” and has prioritized resource extraction from some of our most cherished public lands.

Kovarovich recalled the words of the League founders who wrote in this magazine, in 1922, that it was “time to call a halt” to the loss and degradation of our woods, waters and wildlife. He



reminded attendees that volunteer water monitoring, for example, is a means to achieving an important end—stopping pollution at the source.

“Now is the time to take action and grow our grassroots,” he said, to pursue a bipartisan priority—defending the great outdoors.

More of us need to take simple actions such as using results of volunteer monitoring, he said. “The status quo isn’t enough to achieve our goals. It’s not enough in response to the magnitude of the conservation challenges facing our country and the planet.”

Measuring the dollar value of conservation

Keynote speaker Matthew Winden, Ph.D. provided an economic view of value of conservation and stewardship of the nation’s natural resources. Winden, an associate dean and economics professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, has spent his career examining and measuring the value of natural assets in the U.S.

Winden said commercial interests have a well-accepted vocabulary and metrics for discussing the value of developing land: for instance, tax dollars generated, jobs created and economic activity.

There are also economically measurable benefits of conservation, which he spelled out: dollars spent on travel and visitation to parks and other places for outdoor recreation, the value of clean water, spending connected to hunting and fishing and the measurable tax revenue gleaned from higher real estate values near parks and healthy waterways.

But there’s much more. For instance, “bequest value” reflects the economic importance of preserving healthy land and waters

Labs described the nation’s parks and natural areas as the League’s homefield advantage and conservation as our playbook. “Let’s not be the team who fumbles the future.”



Economist Matthew Winden, Ph.D., explained how the economic value of clean water and other natural assets can compete with development revenue when land-use decisions are debated.

to future generations. Let’s incorporate and institutionalize these environmental valuations

into debates about land use, Winden said. It should be embedded in planning policy, and we should equip decision-makers with robust data economists collect that demonstrate these values.

This data and analysis helps conservation compete with development when land and water use decisions are

debated. Every state has economists who can help provide this data and perspective, Winden said.



Some of the Youth Convention participants show off their fly-tying skills at the Brown County Chapter, one of their many activities during the convention.

Harnessing natural resources to combat climate change

Mitigating the most damaging effects of climate changes requires a comprehensive approach, including scaling up conservation at the landscape level. The convention included a session focused on harnessing natural resources to combat climate change.

Speakers underscored the importance of conserving and restoring wetlands, grasslands and other natural areas to capture carbon, reduce flooding and protect human health. Speakers included Jayne Black, Wisconsin Field Consultant for Moms Clean Air Force, and League Conservation Director Jared Mott and League Agriculture Program Director, Kate Hansen.

National officers elected

Elections for National Officers of the League were also held at the national convention.

The elected officers are:

President:	Scott Meyer, Lakeville, Minnesota
Vice President:	Jim Storer, Willoughby, Ohio
Secretary:	Anita Stonebraker, Montgomery Village, Maryland
Treasurer:	Craig Enneking, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Future Convention Dates and Locations

2026 National Convention: Bloomington, Minnesota

July 17 -18, 2026

Early Bird welcome reception
July 16

*Hilton Minneapolis-
St. Paul Airport*

2027 National Convention: Roanoke, Virginia

July 16-17, 2027

Early Bird welcome reception
July 15

*The Hotel Roanoke and
Conference Center*

2028 National Convention: Sioux Falls, South Dakota

July 21-22, 2028

Early Bird welcome reception
July 20

*Holiday Inn Sioux Falls-
City Centre*

Resolution Urges Standards for Data Centers

At the 2025 national convention, delegates from the League voted to approve a resolution on “data centers and similarly high energy-consuming and producing facilities.” The resolution has been added to the League’s public compendium of resolutions, Conservation Policies. The full text follows.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The Izaak Walton League of America, assembled in convention in Green Bay, Wisconsin, July 19, 2025, urges federal authorities to establish national standards for data centers and similarly high energy consuming and producing facilities to ensure that future facilities approvals require inclusion of the following provisions in all permits:

1. Prior to construction, data centers and similar facilities should have local and regional input and be built to state-of-the-art standards considering the environment and community as a whole.
2. Whenever possible, locate data centers in industrial “brownfields” areas and well removed from public or residential areas to minimize impacts on neighbors and other land uses, such as agriculture or parks. Studies and data in relation to water, light, thermal, air, noise, and low frequency noise should be presented to the public prior to construction.
3. Require data centers to operate at the maximum extent practical on clean energy (solar photovoltaic, tidal, wind, etc.) power, to avoid additional carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from fossil fuels and not utilize coal power as a means of energy production .
4. National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting is mandatory in every case. Urge the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop stringent guidelines in regulating data centers.
5. Whenever possible, water used for cooling be in a closed system and continuously recycled, with full compliance with all water quality, air quality, noise and other relevant regulations, to minimize impacts on local resources. Construction should not proceed whenever water supplies may be degraded in quantity and quality. Any water that is released into the environment may not be released at higher temperature than receiving water.
6. Prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire energy transmission infrastructure to meet the demand load of any data center or similar facility.
7. Advocate local state and federal levels for the elimination of by-right zoning for data centers.
8. Property tax appraisal of site should be done at the level of the completed project, not at land value prior to development.
9. All studies aforementioned and otherwise are to be performed upon and within but not by the data center and data center industry itself. Studies should proffer guidelines and regulations using scientific methods and produce proof as to what is healthy for humans and wildlife in all environments from the immediate area of all data centers extended outwards in a radius of an anticipated impact to local flora, fauna and human populations.

2025 Izaak Walton League of America Endowment Grants

At its annual meeting in July, the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment awarded the following grants to League chapters, divisions and the national office.

Project	Applicant	Amount \$
2025 Youth Convention	Izaak Walton League, National	2,500
Apiary Equipment	Loudon County Chapter, Va.	3,400
Aquatic Weed Control	Michigan City Chapter, Ind.	2,200
Archery Program Development	Berkeley County Chapter, W.V.	7,000
Blacksmithing Education	Winchester Chapter, Va.	2,500
Conservation Scholarship	Izaak Walton League, National	5,000
Educational Gardens	Mount Healthy Chapter, Ohio	5,500
Forest Restoration	Harford County Chapter, Md.	5,000
Junior Leader Conservation Camp	West Virginia Division	2,700
Kids Fishing Day	Fremont Chapter, Neb.	1,500
Kids Fishing Derby	Winchester Chapter, Va.	2,000
Kids Fishing Tournament	Decatur Chapter, Ill.	2,000
Kids & Seniors Fishing Contests	Geneseo Chapter, Ill.	1,500
Landowner Pollinator Habitat Enrollment	Panora Conservation Chapter, Iowa	2,000
Learning Center Solar Panels	Owatonna Chapter, Minn.	2,205
Outdoor Education & Outreach	Illinois Division	4,000
Pollinator Garden	Walter Sherry Memorial Chapter, Ill.	1,278
Prairie Restoration	Jaques Chapter, Minn.	4,000
River E. Coli Testing	Panora Conservation Chapter, Iowa	6,468
Salt and Nitrate Watch Materials	Izaak Walton League, National	16,200
Stream Monitoring Chemicals	Mount Airy Chapter, Md.	3,454
Stream Testing and Education	Cincinnati Chapter, Ohio	8,067
Trap Field Renovation, Enhancement	Linn County, Iowa	25,000
Trap Machine Replacement	Jefferson County Chapter	10,345
Young Ikes Program	Southern Brown Conservation Chapter, Wisc.	1,355
Youth Conservation Camp	Sioux Falls Chapter, S.D.	750
Youth Environmental Education	Will Dilg Chapter, Minn.	20,000
Youth Fishing Club Equipment	Emerson Hough Chapter, Iowa	5,000
Youth Fishing & Pond Stewardship	Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter, Md.	10,000
Youth Shooting Program	Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter, Md.	7,500
Wood Duck Education, Houses, Camera	Three Rivers Chapter, Iowa	1,800
Total Grants		172,222

For more information about the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment, visit iwla-endowment.org.



GREEN BAY PACKAGING

GEORGE KRESS FOUNDATION

*Dedicated to Preserving Our
Nation's Natural Treasures for
Future Generations*



PROUDLY SUPPORTING THE
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

NATIONAL ★ AWARDS ★ 2024



AWARD-WINNING IKES



Each year, the Izaak Walton League recognizes people and organizations within and outside the League for their achievements in conservation, outdoor ethics, water quality, shooting sports, communications and youth-focused work at the local, state and national levels. We also honor members and organizations for their lifelong accomplishments and devotion to natural resources conservation.

**It is our honor and pleasure to recognize individuals
and organizations who made a difference in 2024.**

NATIONAL AWARDS

54 Founders Award

Considered the League's highest honor, this award is bestowed to an individual or organization for outstanding contributions to the conservation of America's natural resources.

Jodi Labs (Wisconsin):

Jodi joined the League more than two decades ago embracing the League's mission right from the start. She had served on the Brown County Chapter board, eventually becoming president. With a vision of having more families and youth involved, the Chapter increased opportunities for all to engage in the outdoors and grew membership four-fold. Jodi continued to rise in the League leadership while providing expertise in communications, management and legal matters. Having served as an officer at the division level and as a national director, Jodi served on the national Executive Board, including as chair, and then led the organization as national president.

Stanford M. Adams Memorial Award for League Leadership

This Executive Board award recognizes the national director or director-at-large for continued commitment to the duties and responsibilities that come with their elected leadership position.

Kelly J. Kistner (South Dakota):

A Family Life member from South Dakota, Kelly served in various leadership positions at the McCook Lake Chapter since joining in 2005 and in 2015, he was elected president of the South Dakota Division. At the national level, he has served as chair of the League's Water Resource Committee, as a national director for the past 10 years and was elected national president in 2019. He served on the Executive Board until 2024. After decades of service, Kelly continues to gather details and inspirations about available resources to share with the South Dakota chapters.

Hall of Fame Award

Recognizes a member's outstanding accomplishments in furthering the mission and goals of the League.

Jeanne Agneessnes (Wisconsin):

Jeanne is a Life Benefactor and member of Brown County Chapter who provided leadership as chapter and division president. She was instrumental in the acquisition and restoration of the native prairie and oak savanna forest of the Chapter's Osprey Point Environmental Center, and she served on the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment board for 17 years.

Richard "Dick" Brown (Minnesota):

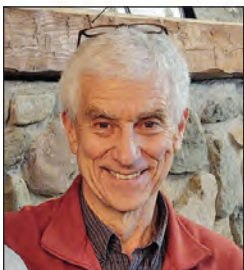
Dick is member of more than 40 years and former president of the Walter J. Breckenridge Chapter. He's best known for his lobbying efforts to "Save Our Wetlands" and for promoting the passage of Minnesota's State Legacy Amendments. Dick recently retired as Chapter's conservation issues chair at age 95.

Anita Stonebraker (Maryland):

As president of the ever-growing Lois Green-Sligo Chapter in Maryland, Anita has also held leadership positions in the Maryland Division, including a key role in financial management. Her life's focus and priority is engaging people and especially youth in conservation. She currently serves as national secretary for the League.

Brenda Swartz (Ohio):

Brenda has held multiple leadership roles including chapter president and president of the Ohio Division. From Ohio's Medina Chapter, she is currently a member of the League's Executive Board. Dedicated to our conservation mission, Brenda is committed to ensuring that the League thrives for future generations.

**Mat Webber (New York):**

Currently the president of the Central New York Chapter, Mat has been an active member since the mid-1990s. He was a key player in the chapter's Project Watershed Program that included a partnership with the Science

Teachers Association of New York State to train high school teachers about stream biology and monitoring techniques.

Conservation Award

Recognizes member contributions to conservation in the name of the League.

**Richard N. Corey (South Dakota):**

A member of the Sioux Falls Chapter, Richard is a farmer who practices conservation intensely. He has planted multiple shelterbelts and groves of trees on a barren section of his land and

has enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program to improve wildlife habitat and has enhanced wetlands for waterfowl nesting.

**Tony DiNovo (Ohio):**

As an active member from Columbus, Ohio, Tony assisted in the fundraising for the Poston Preserve expansion of hundreds of acres in conservation easements and has been involved in bat studies with the Ohio

Department of Natural Resources. He also led the efforts for significant riparian plantings of native trees and understory plants on the Upper Alum Creek Project.

**Richard Graham (Ohio):**

A member of the Executive Board from the Ohio Division, Rick has held various officer positions at the chapter and division levels. He is a conservationist with a passion for protecting the Great Lakes and is a strong advocate

for soil health. Rick regularly contacts the media and elected officials regarding water quality concerns and conservation issues in the Great Lakes region.

**Jack Johnson (Iowa):**

Jack is a longtime national director for the Iowa Division and a member of the national Executive Board. He was deeply involved with his chapter's purchasing a tract of pheasant habitat with wetlands that

eventually became Crawford County Conservation Commission parkland—now open to the public. He led the way for the West Central Chapter to improve inherited property that is now a showcase for songbird and wildlife conservation.

**Ralph Kinch, Jr. (Virginia):**

As chapter treasurer, Ralph helped to foster high-yielding investments that eventually funded improvements to the Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter's grounds. His work also enhanced the Chapter's status as a

vital conservation organization by providing funding for many conservation efforts in the Spotsylvania region of Virginia.

**Brintney Lam (Indiana):**

Brintney has renewed the spirit of conservation at Indiana's Huntington County Chapter. Her work has included the "Plan Bee" pollinator project, efforts to inform the community about the problem of invasive species and

renewed outreach to like-minded conservation groups in the region.

**R. Michael Lane (Virginia):**

Mike is a previous Conservation Award recipient for his advocacy efforts to enhance habitat on the Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. For 2024, the Suffolk-Nansemond Chapter nominated him for his role in securing five

adjacent landowners to allow the completion of the Jericho Lane Trail—which will give future generations an added gateway to explore the Refuge.

**Michael O'Deay (Iowa):**

Michael, from Iowa's Des Moines Chapter, has been a League member for more than 50 years, leading the charge to protect our air, land and water resources. Through the years, he has encouraged the Chapter to stay

on top of regional conservation issues and, more recently, has worked to raise funds for many conservation projects and community outreach.

**Don Perino (Maryland):**

Because of Don's tireless efforts and work on the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter's meadow filled with native milkweed plants, the site has been officially designated Monarch Waystation #8355 in North America. He has worked

on removing invasive species on the chapter grounds that threaten native plant diversity and reduce the habitat's ecological value.

**The Stalnaker Family (West Virginia):**

The Mountaineer Chapter nominated an entire family—Matt Stalnaker, his wife Jenna and daughter JJ—for their passion for conservation. As caretaker of the Chapter's 1,000-acre

property, Matt maintains the grounds, controls invasive plants and manages aquatic and wildlife habitat. Jenna chairs the Chapter's Adopt-A-Highway program. JJ serves as the youth liaison to the West Virginia Division and encourages participation in conservation projects. The entire family participates in the annual red spruce planting at Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge and the garlic mustard pull at the Seneca Rocks State Park.

**Tony Sutton (Maryland):**

As a devoted conservationist, Tony is working to revive the American Chestnut tree, managing the American Chestnut Research Orchard at the Rockville Chapter and another site on the nearby Black Hill Regional Park.

**Joe Walther (Maryland):**

Also from the Rockville Chapter, Joe has taken the Chapter's Wood Duck Nesting Box Program to the next level with the increased birth of new hatchlings. This was attributed to his innovation of adding a blue bird box onto the back of each duck box to lure competitive Prothonotary Warblers away from and nesting inside the duck boxes.

Outdoor Ethics Award

Recognizes individuals, groups, or organizations judged to have done outstanding work in outdoor ethics.

**Women Sharing the Outdoors Program (Ohio).**

The Mount Healthy Chapter of Cincinnati, Ohio, hosts this annual program with a focus on providing females with training and educational experiences that embrace outdoor skills. The program also promotes ethical and responsible use of the natural resources. Over the last four years, more than 300 women from the surrounding community have participated.

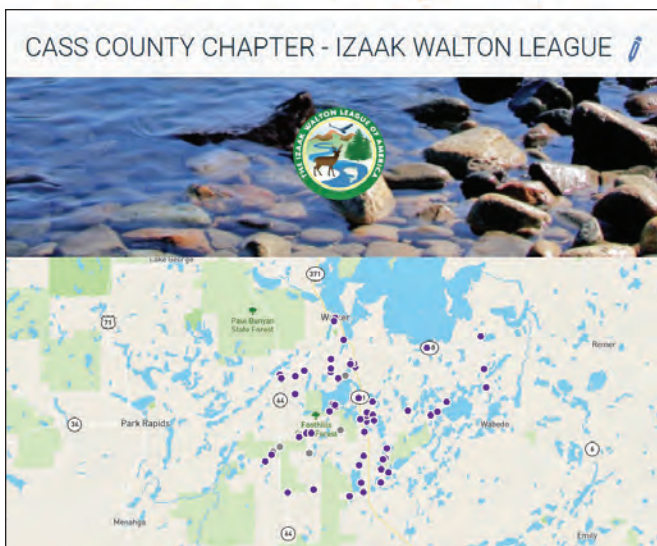
Save Our Streams Award

Recognizes outstanding work in environmental education and citizen activism for clean water.

**Frederick #1 Chapter Save Our Streams Team (Maryland):**

This team of chapter volunteers is led by two enthusiastic co-team leaders,

Chris Barrett and Steve Meyer. They use and promote the League's Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch testing kits, monitor area streams and make clean water presentations to local schools. On behalf of the Chapter, they continue to pursue their interest in conservation and protecting the environment.



Cass County Chapter (Minnesota):

These Ikes are fully invested in the League's Nitrate Watch program. In a short period, they reported 74 test results while monitoring 68 sites that span a wide area of northern Minnesota. Going forward, the Chapter hopes to increase public awareness about nitrate pollution in their community.



Art Foltz (Virginia):

The Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter noted that in his 10 years as a member, Art has led the charge for growing the Chapter's involvement in monitoring stream health in the piedmont region of Virginia. He

displays leadership for many other conservation activities, projects and endeavors at the Chapter.



Alison Lang-Hickey (Ohio):

This Cincinnati Chapter member is recognized for her work demonstrating the principles of environmental education and citizen activism for clean water. Alison relaunched the state's Saturday Stream Snapshot

Program for the lower Little Miami River watershed.



Mount Airy Chapter (Maryland):

The Chapter fully supports the League's Save Our Streams program (SOS) to protect waterways from pollution and inform their community about water quality. With four chemical test kits, the trained volunteer members monitor 40 locations in central Maryland, including various tributaries of the Monocacy and Potomac Rivers and several public reservoirs and parkland lakes.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter Pond and Stream Committee (Maryland):

This volunteer committee is the driving force behind this Chapter's SOS monitoring efforts on Chapter property and on waterways throughout upper Montgomery County, Maryland. They also manage improvements for the aquatic habitat on their two ponds and adjacent wetlands.

Thelma "Pete" Reed Award

Recognizes the member who has volunteered in many conservation projects, educational efforts, community service or chapter leadership development, and is not serving as a national leader of the League but is considered an "up and coming" future League leader.



Phillip Mariscal (Maryland):

He was recognized last year with the Save Our Streams Award, and this year we recognize this Rockville Chapter member for leadership in conservation and community outreach. When

Phillip joined the Chapter, he took over as chair of the SOS program and recruited additional stream monitors. He is a regular at the state-level Water Monitoring Council and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Black Bass Advisory Committee meetings. As an up and coming future League leader, Phillip represents our clean water programs well and shares his knowledge with others in the community.

Outdoor America's Future Award

Recognizes the Izaak Walton League youth or student member who has volunteered in conservation projects, educational efforts, community service or chapter leadership development and is considered a young "up and coming" future League leader.



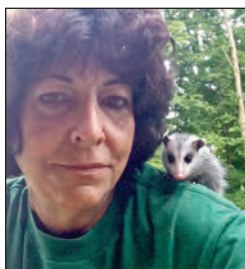
Griffith Pugh (Minnesota):

Recently featured in an issue of *Outdoor America*, this young Ike is an elected vice president of the Minnesota Valley Chapter. Griffith is a founding member of this Chapter's Scouting Green Crew and is active in the Minnesota

Division. He has also played lead roles in the Tree Equity and Elm Tree Restoration projects and demonstrates great potential as an up and coming League leader.

Honor Roll Award

Recognizes outstanding accomplishments in conservation, public education and/or publicity in keeping with the League's goals by an individual or organization.



Louise Broderick (Ohio):

Louise owns and operates a private wildlife sanctuary as part of the Second Chance Wildlife organization and provides training for rehabilitation of displaced and injured wildlife.



Chesapeake Women Anglers (Maryland):

This volunteer group focuses on fostering women's participation in fishing, while promoting outdoor ethics, environmental awareness and conservation practices throughout

the mid-Atlantic region.



Joe Dorrian (Ohio):

Through public presentations as the director of the Ohio School of Falconry, Joe promotes the practice of falconry while advocating for responsible raptor conservation and management.

Shooting Sports Award

Presented to individuals, groups or organizations judged to have done outstanding work to promote shooting sports.



Huntington County Chapter's Shooting Sports Program (Indiana):

Program co-chairs Benny Sams, John Septer and Steve Williams have led the chapter's resurgence and significant membership growth centered around range

improvements and the recruitment of area shooting sports enthusiasts as members.



Brett Johnson (Maryland):

This Rockville Chapter member is well known locally as an avid and skilled recreational archer who has traveled nationwide to 3-D archery tournaments. Brett has shared his experiences and expertise to develop and maintain

a topnotch 3-D course at this Chapter in suburban Maryland.



Loudoun County Chapter (Virginia):

Throughout the last few decades, the Chapter made many recreational improvements on their property, including skeet, archery and rifle/pistol ranges. They offer a wide variety of

education and training programs open to the public and promote recreational shooting sports to women, youth and first-time gun owners.

Mount Airy Chapter Scholastic Youth Trap Program (Maryland):

Led by co-chairs Brandon Jordon and Mark Uzarowski, the Chapter has kept a steady course in training dozens of local youth each year to be safe, responsible and skilled shotgunners.



**Tom Swartz (Ohio):**

Tom, a member of the Medina Chapter since 1963, is an active recreational shooter who organizes the chapter turkey shoots, oversees trap shoots and maintains the archery equipment and course. He plays a critical role

in the Chapter's annual National Shooting Sports Month event where they invite the public and introduce first-time participants to the shooting sports.

**Val Voeltz (South Dakota):**

An avid recreational and competitive shotgunner at the Sioux Falls Chapter, Val plays an important role in successful trap shooting events and engaging young people in target shooting. She also serves as Chapter

treasurer, publishes a newsletter and maintains the website.

Arthur R. Thompson Memorial Award

Recognizes division accomplishments in conservation.

**Ohio Division:**

In collaboration with the 23 local chapters, the Ohio Division contributes to a variety of conservation efforts across the Buckeye State. The Division

has its own grant program for chapters to implement conservation projects, host educational events and promote the League's Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch programs in their communities statewide.

James Lawton Childs Award

Recognizes chapter accomplishments in conservation.

**Minnesota Valley Chapter (Minnesota):**

The Chapter is well known locally for their Elm Tree Restoration Project. They also formed a specialized, co-ed Scouting Venturing Crew Unit with a conservation mission (the Green

Crew) and held annual Earth Day tree-planting events. In addition to reforestation, Chapter projects focused on removal of invasive plant species, water quality testing and trail restoration.

**Dragoon Trail (Iowa):**

The Ankeny Ikes are well-known for state-of-the-art ranges that support shooting sports. The Chapter grounds are also a showcase for conservation. Their prairie restoration efforts added pollinator-friendly plants and

included prescribed burns to foster a diversity of flora. They also installed ponds, creating habitat for stocked fisheries, added an apiary for honeybees and built an outdoor classroom for community use.

Robert C. O'Hair Award

Recognizes outstanding chapter youth programs.

**Brown County Chapter (Wisconsin):**

For years, one of the Chapter's top priorities has been working with local youth and their families. They hosted teddy bear hunts and fishing derbies, sponsored Scout units and welcomed Scouts to

use their grounds, maintained a natural playground and sensory garden, offered a youth archery program and established a family adventure in nature club.

**Rockville Chapter (Maryland):**

This Chapter makes a point of hosting many events and sponsored projects for young people within the membership and throughout the community. The Chapter charters multiple Scout units and offers a youth

conservation program, environmental scholarships, junior air rifle and BB gun training and sponsors 4-H awards.

Best Chapter Newsletters

Based on appearance, originality, timeliness, and news coverage, including national and state news and community conservation.

Hamilton Chapter News:

Every month, the Hamilton Chapter of Ohio publishes this informative e-newsletter for members to highlight Chapter events related to conservation issues. The newsletter also goes to local elected officials, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Soil and Water Conservation District and to the county parks and recreation agency. Articles and photos about nature and outdoor recreation are welcomed by the newsletter team.

Arlington-Fairfax Chapter Newsletter:

Published quarterly by Virginia's Arlington-Fairfax Chapter, this full-color newsletter features articles on activities, program announcements and a complete listing of contacts for Chapter officers and volunteers. It is distributed and also posted on the Chapter website. The editors seek articles about local and regional conservation and contributions from members.

Best Division and Chapter Websites

Based on appearance, originality, timeliness, and news coverage.

Iowa Division:

The division's recently launched website (iowaikes.com) is informative, colorful and easy to navigate. Complete information about the League, Iowa Division and all Iowa chapters is readily accessible. It clearly promotes the Izaak Walton League as a community of outdoor lovers in Iowa dedicated to protecting conservation and outdoor adventure for future generations.

Marshall County Chapter (Iowa):

Located in Marshalltown, the Chapter's website (marshallcountyikes.org) is equally informative, colorful and easy to navigate. Information includes Chapter activities, newsletters, membership requirements and a calendar loaded with their many events. It is thoughtfully organized and user-friendly.

MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

In an effort to continue to promote member recruitment and retention, we recognize several chapters and one division that successfully grew their membership over the past year.

Best Chapter Membership Recruitment and Retention Award

Recognizes the chapter that carried out the most effective membership recruitment and retention program.

Minnesota Valley Chapter (Minnesota):

The Chapter's membership committee employs an intricate combination of planning, scheduling, recruiting and retention activities as well as communications, resource and people management tools to grow and retain membership. In 2023, the Chapter increased by 49 percent with a net gain of 42 members, and the trend continued through 2024. This well-planned effort has produced a high renewal rate of 77 percent, and the Chapter has grown to nearly 150 members.

John C. Gregory Award

Awarded to the division with the highest numerical increase in members.

Indiana Division:

With a net increase of 54 net new members in 2024.

Membership Achievement Awards

Recognizes chapters with the largest percentage increase and net gain in membership.

Greatest Percent Increase:

Huntington County Chapter (Indiana)

With over 119-percent increase growing from 64 to 140 members.

Greatest Net Gain:

York Chapter #67 (Pennsylvania)

Added 138 new members to grow their total membership to 1,341.

Membership Merit Awards

Recognizes membership growth based on chapter size.

50-and-Under Member Class for Percent Increase:

Davenport Chapter (Iowa)

50-and-Under Member Class for Net Gain:

Wayne Chapter (Nebraska)

51-to-250 Member Class for Percent Increase:

Huntington County Chapter (Indiana)

51-to-250 Member Class for Net Gain:

Miami Chapter (Indiana)

251-to-500 Members Class for Percent Increase and Net Gain:

Dubuque Chapter (Iowa)

501-and-Over Class for Net Gain:

York Chapter #67 (Pennsylvania)

501-and-Over Members Class for Percent Increase:

Fort Wayne Chapter (Indiana)

110-Percent Awards

These chapters grew by 10 percent or more in 2024.

California Orange Fullerton	Iowa Clinton County Davenport Ding Darling Green Bay Iowa County Muscatine Panora Conservation Worth County	Ohio Anthony Wayne Buckeye State Youth Central Ohio Dry Fork Fremont Medina	West Virginia Tucker Zip Little
Florida Cypress Florida Keys			Wisconsin Beloit
Idaho Caldwell		Pennsylvania York #67	Wyoming Travelle
Illinois Calumet Region Des Plaines	Maryland Sportsman's	South Dakota Bon Homme Day County Rapid City Rosebud Yankton Area	
Indiana Fort Wayne Grant County Huntington County Miami Porter County	Minnesota Minnesota Valley Will Dilg	Virginia Arlington-Fairfax Juniors	
	Nebraska Crete Fremont Wayne		

Defenders Chapter Achievement Awards

The following chapters received this annual recognition for their 2024 contributions to the League's mission through successful programs, promoting membership, education, conservation, youth involvement, community outreach and the principles of philanthropy.

Arlington-Fairfax (Virginia)	Dwight Lydell (Michigan)	Loudoun County (Virginia)	Rockville (Maryland)	Wayne County (Ohio)
Austin (Minnesota)	Elgin (Illinois)	McCook Lake (South Dakota)	Sioux Falls (South Dakota)	Wes Libby-Northern Lakes (Minnesota)
Berkeley County (West Virginia)	Frederick #1 (Maryland)	Mid-Shore (Maryland)	Sportsman's (Maryland)	West Central (Iowa)
Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Maryland)	Fredericksburg-Rappahannock (Virginia)	Minnesota Valley (Minnesota)	Sunshine (South Dakota)	Wildlife Achievement (Maryland)
Bill Cook (Wisconsin)	Grand Island (Nebraska)	Mountaineer (West Virginia)	Tiffin-Seneca County (Ohio)	Will Dilg (Minnesota)
Brown County (Wisconsin)	Hamilton (Ohio)	New London (Minnesota)	W.J. McCabe (Minnesota)	York #67 (Pennsylvania)
Bush Lake (Minnesota)	Kampeska (South Dakota)	New Ulm #79 (Minnesota)	Walter J. Breckenridge (Minnesota)	
Cass County (Minnesota)	Lincoln (Nebraska)	Owatonna (Minnesota)	Warren County (Iowa)	
Central New York (New York)	Linn County (Iowa)	Prairie Woods (Minnesota)	Warren County (Virginia)	
Des Moines (Iowa)	Lois Green-Sligo (Maryland)	Rochester (Minnesota)		

2024 Financial Highlights

Combined balance sheet and statement of activities and changes in net assets for the year ending December 31, 2024.

PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Membership Dues	1,684,359
Contributions and grants	842,654
Grants from federal and state government	71,316
Investment income, net	231,743
Charitable remainder unitrust	839,890
Rental income, net	440,647
In-kind services	140,604
Other	<u>23,229</u>
Total Public Support and Revenue	<u>4,274,604</u>

EXPENSES: CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION

Conservation	420,375
Membership	554,422
<i>Outdoor America</i> magazine	234,563
Annual national convention	112,847
Chapter relations	186,483
Communications and media	360,985
Water	709,790
Agriculture	240,575
Missouri River Initiative	<u>92,744</u>
Total Program Services	<u>2,912,784</u>

Supporting and Planning Services	
Management and general	145,929
Fundraising	<u>396,310</u>

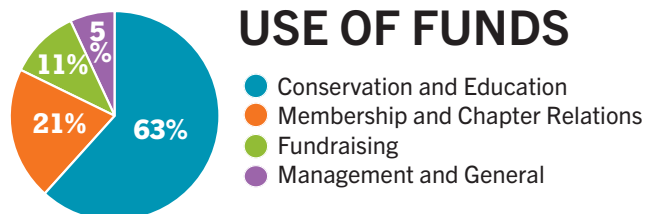
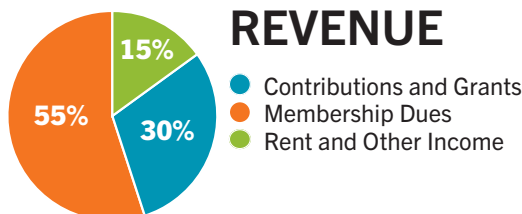
Total Supporting and Planning Services	542,239
Total Expenses	3,455,023

Changes in net assets from operations	819,581
Unrealized (loss) gain on investments	157,750
Changes in Net Assets	977,331
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>11,578,869</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>12,556,200</u>

BALANCE SHEET

Assets	
Cash and cash equivalents	2,620,364
Grants receivables	14,493
Contributions and other receivables	397
Rent receivable	17,405
Prepaid expenses	25,180
Property and equipment, net	1,626,034
Investments	8,276,405
Rent receivable, net current portion	182,306
Operating leases right to use asset, net	<u>41,184</u>
Total Assets	12,803,768

Liabilities and Net Assets	
Liabilities	
Accounts payable and other	114,464
Accrued expenses	105,029
Refundable advances	-
Security deposits	<u>28,075</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>247,568</u>
Net Assets	
Without donor restriction	10,647,046
With donor restriction	<u>1,909,154</u>
Total Net Assets	12,556,200
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	12,803,768





The Future Is Theirs!

The Izaak Walton League builds a brighter future through conservation and engaging Americans in outdoor traditions.

For generations, the League's tireless work and unprecedented success has protected our woods, waters and wildlife—and promoted outdoor recreation in every corner of the U.S.

Through your will, retirement plan, life insurance or trust, you can help continue this legacy.

Plan your gift to the Izaak Walton League and pass along a lifetime of benefits.

Email develop@iwla.org or visit iwla.org to get started.



Izaak Walton League of America
707 Conservation Lane
Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Contact us today for information about including the Izaak Walton League in your will or naming the League as the beneficiary for insurance or other investments.

IKES ON TARGET



Youth said trying out shooting sports would interest them if it included having fun, making friends, challenging themselves and learning about firearms and their safe use.

R3 Research Offers Insights to Boost Youth and First-Time Participation

By SCOTT KOVAROVICS, Executive Director

The Izaak Walton League of America was excited to sponsor and participate in the National R3 Symposium again this year. The Symposium, held May 19-22, 2025, is a national event focused on recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) of hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts.

For more than 100 years, the Izaak Walton League, our chapters and members have connected generations of Americans to the outdoors and conservation through hunting and recreational shooting sports.

The public still overwhelmingly supports legal, regulated hunting, and using these words when talking to nonhunters resonates positively.

About 200 people representing state fish and wildlife agencies, firearms and ammunition

manufacturers and non-governmental organizations gathered to learn about the latest trends and strategize about how to engage more people in hunting and shooting sports.

Here are a few highlights that are especially relevant to League chapters working to grow participation, engage new firearms owners and sustain our hunting heritage.

First-time buyers drive firearms sales

Joe Bartozzi, president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), which is the trade association for the firearms and ammunition industry, briefed attendees about the growth in ownership among first-time gun buyers:

- Between January 2020 and December 2024, there were 26 million first-time buyers.
- Of the 4 million first-time buyers in 2024, 57 percent were under the age of 40.
- In 2024, Asian and African Americans accounted for the largest proportion of new target shooters.
- Retailers and NSSF continue to report that first-time purchasers are especially interested in learning about firearms safety—from use on the range to storage at home—and actively seek out information about where they can obtain safety training from qualified experts. NSSF reported that 44 percent of new buyers inquired about training and 40 percent signed up for a training course.

Support for hunting still high—signs of slippage

Mark Duda of Responsive Management and Scott Lavin from the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports (which organizes the Symposium) reported on public attitudes toward hunting and shooting sports. Using surveys between 1995 and 2024, they reported that public support for both activities remains high with 76 percent of respondents supporting legal, regulated hunting and the same proportion supporting recreational shooting sports in 2024.

However, support has declined slightly year-over-year for the past few years.

Although the decline is not dramatic overall compared with the historic average, eroding support in consecutive years prompted discussion. Experts continue to explore the impact of the long-term trends affecting public opinion, including declining participation in hunting and urbanization.

Another topic was the degree to which nonhunters might equate hunting with guns and guns with violence, which then contributes to declining

support for hunting. League members and current hunters understand these issues are not linked at all. However, it is equally important not to dismiss how the broader public, the vast majority of whom do not hunt and increasingly do not have a family history of hunting, could make this association.

In wrapping up the discussion, Mark Duda reiterated that words matter: the public still overwhelmingly supports “legal, regulated hunting” and using these words when talking to nonhunters resonates positively.

Take a cue from young people

The consulting firm DJ Case presented findings from a survey of young people that was conducted to hear directly from them about whether they would be interested in firearms-related shooting sports and archery. In general, adults assume they know or just keeping doing the same thing every year to recruit youth to shooting sports. The research here flipped the script—rather than assume we know, ask prospective participants.

From hundreds of interviews, the most common reasons young people expressed interest in shooting sports are: have fun; make friends; challenge themselves; and learn about firearms and their safe use.

In addition, because this project is focused on engaging new participants, DJ Case has produced a wide range of materials, including simple, customizable flyers for events, videos, social media content and thousands of pictures.

All of these resources are publicly available for League chapters and others to use in their outreach. These materials were tested with young people. For example, flyers with the themes “Give It A Shot” and “Join the Team” provided the best response.

Read more at DJ Case, djcase.com/work/youth-shooting-sports and Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, cahss.org.

2026 National R3 Symposium

Planning is already underway for the 2026 Symposium in Des Moines, Iowa, tentatively scheduled for May 4-7. As details about the 2026 Symposium become available, the League will share them with chapters.



The author has introduced small game hunting to many novices.

Small Game: Big Opportunity for Recruiting New Hunters

By JARED MOTT, Conservation Director

My office at League headquarters is awash in taxidermy. There's a whole little flock of ducks and geese shot in the teeth of a cold north wind, a handful of whitetails pulled from hours on stand in rut funnels, a mule deer stalked in a wildfire-scarred canyon miles from any road and the fan of a wild turkey that had a zig for all my zags and whipped me so soundly for three hunts in a row that on morning number four, I almost slept in.

Today's outdoor media tends to reflect my office. It generally showcases big game, like deer and turkeys, and hunts with specialized gear like those for waterfowl or technical mountain hunts for western game like wild sheep. There's no problem with giving people what they want of course, and most hunters identify pretty readily with at least one of those buckets. But most hunters didn't start by hunting deer or waterfowl, we started by hunting small game, like rabbits and squirrels.

In 2022, the United States had about 14.5 million hunters—and states have reported slightly declining

sales of hunting licenses in the years since. While there have been some encouraging signs of increased hunting participation, especially around the years of the Covid pandemic, long-term trends are unmistakably going in the wrong direction. With fewer hunters, conservation funding shrinks, and at the current rate of loss, hunters could represent only a small fraction of the population by 2050.

When it comes to welcoming new or returning hunters, few experiences are better than a small-game hunt.

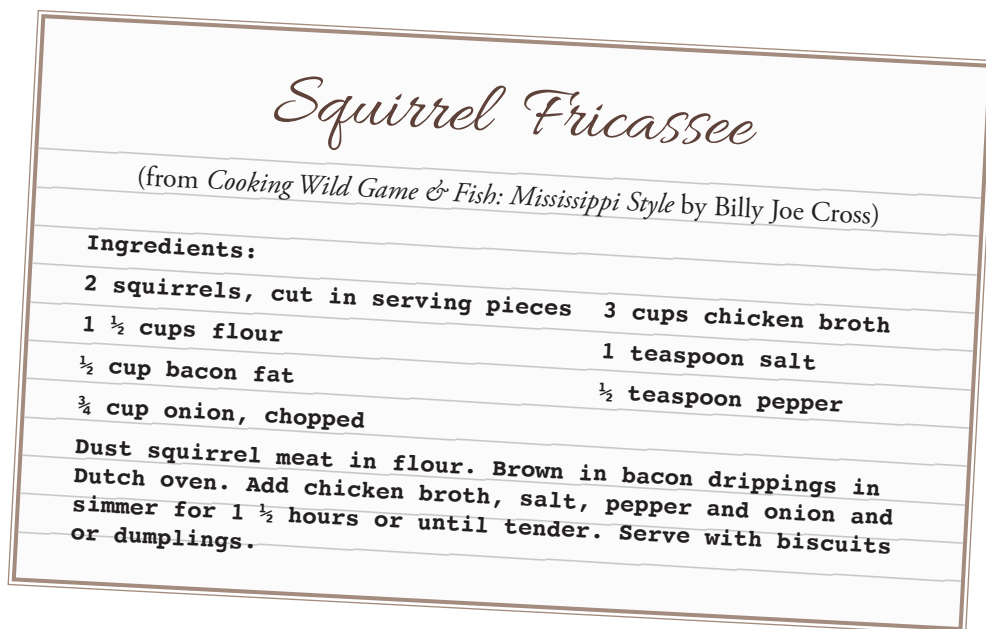
If we want to protect our hunting heritage and continue to fund conservation, we need to add more hunters to the mix. The R3 initiative—Recruit, Retain and Reactivate—encourages hunters to invite others into the field, mentor newcomers and help bring back those who've drifted away.

That could be as simple as asking a coworker or neighbor to join you, showing them where to hunt, lending gear, walking them through license purchases or taking an old hunting buddy out for another season. And when it comes to welcoming new or returning hunters, few experiences are better than a small-game hunt.

Whitetail deer are the most popular and economically important game species in North America, but they're not always the best entry point for beginners. Deer hunting demands long hours, cold mornings and patience in a treestand—factors that can discourage new hunters.

Duck and goose hunts are notoriously uncomfortable, with best results coming on very cold and windy days as well as requiring investment in at least some specialized equipment like decoys and chest waders, though boats are often necessary as well. Spring mornings in the turkey woods are some of my very favorite days of the year. But trying to bag a wary gobbler—that has vision like a hawk and hearing like an owl—is a recipe for disappointment. Small-game hunting, on the other hand, offers an inviting, accessible introduction to the sport. Here's why:

- **It's relaxed and social.** Small-game hunts don't require scent control or full camouflage. A new hunter doesn't have to sit motionless for hours, can move around, talk, and hunt at reasonable hours. Squirrel, rabbit and dove hunting generally offer a laid-back atmosphere.
- **Opportunities are abundant.** While some big-game tags take years to draw, small-game hunting typically requires only a license and hunter safety card. Public lands that are crowded during deer season often have room to spare for rabbit or squirrel hunting, and landowners are generally more open to granting access for small game.
- **Minimal gear is needed.** A coat, boots, a license and a simple firearm are enough. Outfitting a newcomer for small game is affordable and often possible with spare gear



you already own. Unlike elk or high-mountain hunts, there's no need for expensive optics or technical equipment.

- **Meat care is simple.** Processing a deer can intimidate beginners, but cleaning a rabbit or squirrel takes just minutes with a sharp knife. Small-game meat is easy to cook, versatile in recipes and doesn't require a butcher or costly processing fees.

For all these reasons, small-game hunting is one of the best ways to bring new hunters into the fold—and one of the most effective ways to keep our hunting tradition alive.

One of my favorite ways to eat small game is in a fricassee, which is a hybrid cooking method halfway between a sauté (in which no liquid is added) and a stew (which contains added liquids). Meat is browned in fat and then served in a sauce flavored with the cooking stock.

You can use pretty much any meat in a fricassee; outside of the hunting context, domestic chicken and veal are often used in this preparation.

I usually use squirrel or rabbit and the recipe shown here is a family favorite.

Public lands that are crowded during deer season often have room to spare for rabbit or squirrel hunting



SOIL MATTERS

Dust storm hits close to home; Congress makes a wise investment—but they can't be done yet

By KATE HANSEN, Agriculture Program Director



In May, I was caught in this massive dust storm in Newton County, Indiana where visibility dropped to zero.

As the League's Agriculture Program Director, I think about soil more than the average person. It has never felt more personal than this May, when my spouse and I got stuck driving in a massive dust storm that hit northern Illinois and northwest Indiana.

Our visibility on the road was zero. The ominous weather alert on our phones said, "Pull Aside, Stay Alive!"

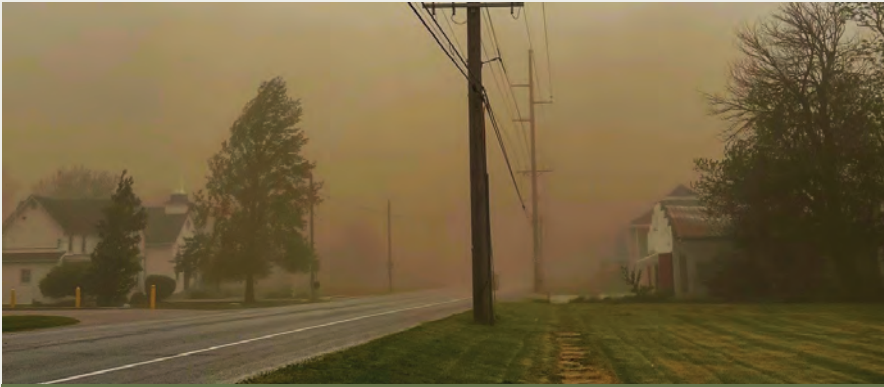
Headlines called the storm rare and apocalyptic, but for those

paying close attention, it wasn't unexpected. Two years ago, near Springfield, Illinois, a similar dust storm caused an 84-car pileup accident, tragically killing eight people. This March, another storm killed eight in western Kansas.

While some soil erosion is expected, modern agricultural practices have accelerated it at staggering rates.

Looking at the big picture, scientists tell us that our soil is eroding so rapidly that we are barreling towards another Dust Bowl. By 2100, we are on track to lose 300 years' worth of topsoil, or in other words, precious resources that took 300 years of earth's natural soil-building processes to create.

It is no coincidence, then, that dust storms persist. These events are attributable to two major factors—strong winds and dry, exposed soils. Most of the exposed



Due to exposed soil, we are barreling toward another Dust Bowl. This photo was taken in Goodland, Indiana during the May dust storm.

soil is in agricultural fields. While some soil erosion is expected, modern agricultural practices have accelerated it at staggering rates. Abusing our soil with intensive tillage, overgrazing and more has led us here.

Saving our soil

To reverse this trend, we look to practices that protect the soil, reduce erosion and bolster its health and water retention. For example, farmers can plant cover crops in the off-season that armor the soil and keep it in place. They can also reduce or eliminate tillage to help the soil maintain its structure. Farmers are beginning to adopt these practices, but to see

real impact, we need many more to do so.

After extensive advocacy by the League and partners, Congress made a generational investment in conservation programs.

For years, the Izaak Walton League has advocated for wider adoption of soil health practices across the country. Scaling up soil health practices would not only help prevent future dust storms, but also improve drinking water quality for millions, help mitigate climate change and reduce reliance on agricultural chemicals. To see real change, we need policies and programs that will scale up conservation on the ground across tens of millions of acres.

A win in Washington

As a country, we invest in soil health through programs at the Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS)—an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There, programs are available to help farmers, ranchers and landowners implement soil health practices, as well as other conservation practices that improve water quality, create wildlife habitat and more.

The programs are popular but underfunded. There is only enough funding for a fraction of the farmers and ranchers who are willing to adopt practices to improve soil health. For the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), for example, only around half of applicants who apply are accepted. Year over year, tens of thousands of farmers and other landowners who want to improve conservation are turned away.

Encouragingly, this summer, after extensive advocacy by the League and partners, Congress made a generational investment in agriculture conservation that could have a positive impact for years to come. Specifically, lawmakers passed a budget increase to CSP, EQIP, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and the Regional Conservation Partnerships Program (RCPP).

The move boosted the programs' combined budgets by more than 50 percent. The table shows present levels of funding (2019-present) compared to 2026-2031 as directed by Congress.

Emergency Alert

now
National Weather Service: DUST STORM WARNING for this area until 6:45 PM CDT. Be ready for sudden drop to zero visibility. Pull Aside, Stay Alive! When visibility drops, pull far off the road and put your vehicle in park. Turn the lights off and keep your foot off the brake. Infants, the elderly and those with respiratory issues urged to take precautions.

Weather alert on my phone during the storm.

Annual funding for conservation programs, as adjusted July 2025 (millions \$)				
	CSP	EQIP	ACEP	RCPP
<i>Present</i>	1,000	2,025	450	300
2026	1,300	2,655	625	425
2027	1,325	2,855	650	450
2028	1,350	3,255	675	450
2029	1,375	3,255	700	450
2030	1,375	3,255	700	450
2031	1,375	3,255	700	450

Ultimately, these funding boosts mean more beneficial practices on agricultural land across the country. More practices like cover crops, reduced or no-tillage and rotational grazing will directly result in improved soil health—and decreased conditions for dust storms.

More work remains

This summer’s investment by Congress is something to celebrate. Still, there is plenty of work that must be done to move the needle on soil health nationwide. On one very important task, our lawmakers are woefully behind schedule.

The most important legislation that drives conservation on agricultural lands is the Farm Bill—a package passed by Congress roughly every five years. If you have read this column in the past, you are familiar with our sustained efforts to encourage Congress to pass a new one with strong conservation elements. They have yet to do so. In addition to funding and making improvements to existing

conservation programs, the Farm Bill can also establish new, innovative approaches.

Right now, lawmakers are seriously considering a proposal—originally crafted by the League—to establish a State and Tribal Soil Health Grant Program. If passed into law, it would direct resources to states and Tribes to deploy soil health projects that are best fit for their individual region and needs. Eligible functions of the program would include technical assistance to producers as they learn new practices, financial assistance to help them start and resources for on-farm research, education, outreach and monitoring.

These investments would be worthwhile and benefit us all. However, Congress is nearly two years behind on its duty to pass a Farm Bill. In recent months, some leaders have signaled interest in passing one. However, political strains in Congress make its prospects this year, or even next, uncertain.

Not passing a Farm Bill soon will impact our soil and the likelihood of more dust storms

in the future. Its impacts will also stretch far wider—hindering farm-to-school initiatives, rural development programs, renewable energy incentives and support for local food systems.

No matter the debates in Washington, the risks of neglecting our soil are here. My neighbors and I have experienced them firsthand in the dust storm. There will certainly be more.

A Farm Bill won’t solve our problems overnight. But it does represent our nation’s largest, most comprehensive investment in conservation practices on agricultural lands. The powers that be are behind on that obligation. Our lawmakers should focus on passing a bipartisan Farm Bill that prioritizes common-sense conservation now.

To stay up to date with soil health and Farm Bill news, be sure to sign up for our Soil Matters e-newsletter at iwla.org.



CLEAN WATER CORNER

Meet a Monitor: Lauren Eaton, Friends of the Rouge

By ABBY HILEMAN, Salt Watch Coordinator

The health of our local waterways relies on dedicated individuals who turn their passion into action. The Izaak Walton League is proud to shine a spotlight on some of these clean water heroes, like Lauren Eaton. Eaton is Monitoring Manager at Friends of the Rouge (therouge.org), which is an environmental non-profit working tirelessly to restore, protect and enhance the Rouge River watershed in southeastern Michigan.

From lakeside childhood to river advocate

Eaton's journey began with a deep connection to water, growing up on Lake Saint Clair in a Detroit suburb. Her childhood was filled with the lake's presence, fostering a deep fascination with aquatic life, especially fish. Initially aspiring to be a marine biologist, her focus shifted to freshwater environments, leading her to discover her true calling.

After graduate studies, Eaton spent eight years at a federal laboratory doing large lake research—looking at larval fish, zooplankton, chlorophyll and food web-based analysis on the larger lakes. Wanting to apply her expertise in her local community, she joined the Friends of the Rouge (FOTR) team as the Monitoring Manager.

A symbol of resilience

The Rouge River is one of the nation's most urbanized watersheds and holds a significant place in environmental history. It was one of the waterways that infamously caught fire in 1969 due to severe pollution (the Cuyahoga River in Ohio is another example). These events became powerful symbols, highlighting the need for environmental protection. Combined with 50 years of advocacy work by the

Eaton sums up her call to action:
"Everyone can't do everything,
but everyone can do something."



Lauren Eaton assesses water quality on the Rouge River in Michigan.

Izaak Walton League, these publicized examples of extreme pollution ultimately paved the way for the passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972.

While the Rouge River has seen remarkable improvements over recent decades with people enjoying paddling on its waters, the journey toward complete restoration continues.

Reconnecting communities with their river

Part of Eaton's interest in monitoring is connecting people with the river. She observes that despite

the river flowing through backyards, parks and near schools, a perception of the river as “dirty” or “dangerous” often creates hesitation for people to interact with it. The Friends of the Rouge aims to change these perceptions, encouraging people to get back on the river, enjoy nature and become active participants in its health.

One powerful way to forge this connection is through monitoring—ensuring the river’s safety, continuing cleanup efforts and transforming the image of “the river on fire.”

“Bug hunts” and participatory science

Every year, Friends of the Rouge hosts “Bug Hunt” events in January, April and September. During these events, as many as 150 volunteers sample 30 to 40 sites across the watershed, meticulously collecting benthic macroinvertebrates and measuring parameters like temperature, chloride, nitrate and habitat characteristics.

Eaton notes, “it’s a really good chance to look at the bugs... and many people come back year after year.” These family-friendly events engage adults and children, fostering a love for nature and science.

In addition to benthic macroinvertebrate and water quality monitoring, FOTR conducts an annual frog and toad survey. Volunteers listen for frog calls, which serve as valuable indicators of habitat health and wetland presence. Eaton says, “The Rouge is very urbanized. We’ve lost many, many, many of our wetlands and green spaces. And so that project is an effort to just get people outside, get people engaging with the nature around them and hopefully they will become stewards of the land and the river. [The frog and toad survey] also helps us track habitat quality and to then try to advocate or get some focus on areas that may be losing habitat.”



Volunteers identify aquatic macro-invertebrates which indicate the health of a waterway.

FOTR also conducts an annual fish survey, monitoring fish populations. As water quality improves, so do bug (benthic macroinvertebrate) populations, leading to healthier and more diverse fish communities, with some species expanding and increasing their populations. “Fish are always kind of the charismatic megafauna that everybody wants to see,” she says.

Leading by example

Eaton actively seeks ways to reduce her own environmental impact. She engages in composting, recycling, planting native plants and conserving habitats. “And it sometimes feels like a lonely battle or something. But then for me, I work with a group of people who are all so committed to doing this work and, you know, protecting our river, protecting our environment. So, it’s great to surround yourself with people who you know are also concerned with the water, concerned with the air, concerned with the wildlife.”

Take the leap!

For those considering stream monitoring, Eaton suggests looking to local organizations. She believes that “the biggest hurdle is always just getting started. Just taking the leap.” Getting involved doesn’t

require extensive time or expert knowledge. She emphasizes that “Every piece of information feeds into the larger body of knowledge, so the data that is collected is useful and valuable.”

“There are a lot of ways that you can get out in our community and become a steward of the watershed, which is our ultimate goal. We would love to come out and see you and there are so many wonderful organizations similar to ours, watershed councils, watershed groups in Southeast Michigan and throughout the country, so you know there’s a lot of opportunities to get out and get involved...”

Eaton sums up her call to action: “Everyone can’t do everything, but everyone can do something.”

It can feel overwhelming sometimes to get involved because there are so many different issues. Her advice: “Just pick whatever tickles your fancy and go with that.” And if you happen to “want to get out with your kids and look at some bugs, come out for our Friends with the Rouge Bug Hunt. We would love to see you.”

UNCOVERING A HIDDEN THREAT: CHLORIDE POLLUTION

Through their “Bug Hunt” programs, FOTR volunteers and staff discovered consistently high levels of chloride throughout the year, not just during winter testing. While surface water quality standards for chloride were established in Michigan in 2019, widespread knowledge about chloride concentrations was lacking. This observation, coupled with FOTR’s strong relationship with state regulatory authorities like the Michigan Department of Great Lakes and Environment (EGLE), spurred a crucial project.

FOTR worked to gain more widespread understanding of chloride concentrations and support EGLE’s ongoing assessment of chloride impairment in the Rouge River. A key part of this project involved comparing various sampling methods to determine the accuracy and reliability of chloride strips used in Salt Watch kits.

From January to June 2024, FOTR staff followed a quality assurance project plan (QAPP) approved by EGLE, sampling at 39 sites. Alarming, at 35 of these sites, chloride levels exceeded surface water quality standards, posing a threat to aquatic life. This project not only filled a data gap but also confirmed the reliability of the test strips, showing an almost one-to-one relationship with results from approved laboratories. These findings allow groups like EGLE to pinpoint pollution sources and

implement reduction strategies near the affected areas, turning data into tangible actions.

“Salt, particularly in urban areas, is just so ubiquitous we find it in so many different streams and we found that it is directly related to a lot of the impervious surfaces, the cement and pavement, in the roads” says Eaton. “It really negatively affects the fish, the bugs and the frogs that live in the water. It’s important to think about that because [salt is] all over, and there are ways that communities, municipalities, and states can lower the amount of salt that is being used or to come up with different ways to apply salt.

“The data from the test strips is really invaluable to groups particularly concerned about [road salt and] water quality and it provides accurate and reliable data comparable to the statewide standard.”

Based on these findings, FOTR recommended the chloride test strips to the Michigan Clean Water Core, a statewide volunteer monitoring program. The ease of use, minimal training requirements, and free Salt Watch kits make integrating chloride monitoring into existing programs straightforward. Visit [Saltwatch.org](https://saltwatch.org).

SAVE THE DATE



HUNT • SHOOT • FISH

On the fourth Saturday of every September, **NHF Day** recognizes generations of sportsmen and women for their contributions to the conservation of our nation's rich sporting heritage and natural resources.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025

LEARN MORE ABOUT NHF DAY AND UPCOMING EVENTS AT
NHFDAY.ORG



SCAN THE CODE TO TAKE THE PLEDGE





LAST LOOK

Leave the Leaves

Burden or a blessing? Instead of removal, consider the benefits of leaving them.

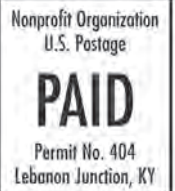
Dry leaves can be mowed into a lawn to replenish nutrients. Left on the ground, they can provide essential habitat for pollinators, fireflies, frogs and other critters.

Set aside a natural area where some leaves can remain for wildlife. Put a layer in gardens for nutrients and weed control. And appreciate all the hard work and benefits they provided for us all summer long.

— MR



THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA
707 CONSERVATION LANE | GAITHERSBURG, MD 20878



Did you know



1 teaspoon of salt can permanently pollute **5 gallons of water.**



Road salt keeps us safe on roads and sidewalks, but it can also pose a threat to fish and wildlife as well as human health.

Salt Watch is helping volunteers and communities become smarter salters.

This national community science project...

- Provides **free** water testing kits to identify chloride pollution
- Compiles volunteer data from across the country
- Educates the public on responsible salt application
- Helps volunteers advocate for smart salting practices in their communities



Get involved! Join the Salt Watch.

Learn what it means to “salt smart” and request your free Salt Watch test kit at ***www.saltwatch.org***

