

Strengthening the Consideration of Cumulative Impacts of Environmental Laws

The conservation of land, water, wildlife, and outdoor recreation depends on understanding and addressing the combined, incremental, and compounding effects of human activities over time and across connected landscapes and watersheds.

Many of the most serious environmental harms arise not from a single project or decision, but from the cumulative impacts of multiple actions, permits, land-use changes, and regulatory approvals that individually may appear minor but collectively overwhelm ecological systems.

Environmental laws—including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act—recognize the importance of cumulative impacts, yet cumulative impact analysis is too often applied inconsistently, narrowly scoped, or in ways that fail to meaningfully inform decision-making at the scale where harm actually occurs.

The segmentation of projects, the reliance on project-by-project review, and the use of limited spatial or temporal boundaries have contributed to watershed degradation, loss of wetlands and habitat, declining water quality, and reduced opportunities for fishing, hunting, and outdoor recreation.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Izaak Walton League of America assembled in Convention in Bloomington, MN, July 18, 2026, supports stronger, clearer, and more effective consideration of cumulative impacts in federal, state, and local environmental decision-making, consistent with the intent and existing authority of environmental law; the League also:

- supports improvements to statutes, regulations, guidance, and administrative practices that ensure cumulative impact analysis is meaningful, enforceable, and aligned with how environmental harm actually occurs, including approaches that:
 - assess impacts at the watershed, landscape, or ecosystem scale where cumulative effects manifest;
 - prevent the artificial segmentation of projects or actions to avoid environmental review or minimize the appearance of harm;
 - account for existing conditions, long-term trends, and changing baselines, including climate- and hydrology-related stressors; and
 - improve public transparency, data availability, and access to information used in cumulative impact evaluations.
- supports the clarification and, where necessary, strengthening of federal, state and local authorities to ensure that cumulative impacts are appropriately considered at key decision points, including permitting, programmatic approvals, and environmental review processes; and

- supports permit reform elevating the role of all potential cumulative impact analysis in policy, rulemaking, and decision-making and decreases permitting time while providing adequate opportunity for public comment; and
- supports education and outreach to policymakers and the public on the importance of addressing cumulative impacts as a practical and necessary tool to protect clean water, healthy ecosystems, and the outdoor traditions central to the League's mission.

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