

OUTDOOR AMERICA™

PUBLISHED BY THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

2026 ISSUE 3

**We Need a More Enduring Consensus
to Restore the Unprecedented
Rollback of Conservation Laws**

INSIDE:

*How Izaak Walton League v.
Butz Shaped Forest Policy*

*Recreational Shooting
Sports as a Pathway to
Hunting*

*National Awards and
Convention Summary*

First Annual Nitrate Pollution Awareness Week Reaches a Broad Audience

By SAM PUCKETT, Clean Water Program Director

Between July 26 and August 1, 2026, thousands of community members, clean water advocates and public health supporters across the country joined the Izaak Walton League of America for Nitrate Pollution Awareness Week. The nationwide effort mobilized volunteers to uncover hidden contamination, expand community education, and advocate for stronger water protection policies.



Targeting the threat

Nitrate is an invisible, odorless compound of nitrogen and oxygen—primarily entering waterways through over-applied synthetic fertilizers, manure runoff and urban sewage. Beyond fueling toxic algal blooms that choke aquatic life, elevated nitrate levels in drinking water pose significant health risks, including increased rates of colorectal and bladder cancers, thyroid disease and birth defects.

Highlights and results

- **Community science in action:** Volunteers used Nitrate Watch test strips to sample local creeks, rivers, lakes and tap water, logging over 200 new readings directly to the public Clean Water Hub database.
- **Expert webinar series:** Attendees tuned into four expert led panels covering the health risks of nitrate exposure, agricultural solutions like cover crops and the downstream ecosystem impacts fueling hypoxic dead zones.
- **Grassroots advocacy:** Participants submitted 83 reported advocacy actions, including op-eds, shared campaign graphics across social platforms, and contacted local, state and federal lawmakers to demand dedicated funding for agricultural conservation.

To review the aggregated data map or access ongoing educational resources, visit the Izaak Walton League webpage at iwla.org/nitrateawareness.

Special thanks to our sponsors who made this event possible!

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Impact and Reach:

-  4 Expert-led webinars
-  384 Webinar Attendees
-  >135 Social Media Posts
-  >780 Social Media Post Shares
-  9 Media Hits
-  1079 Action-based raffle entries
-  83 Reported Advocacy Actions

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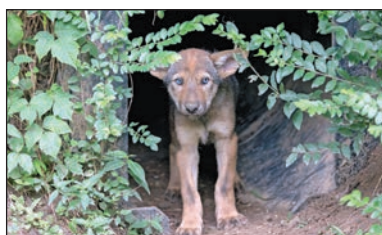
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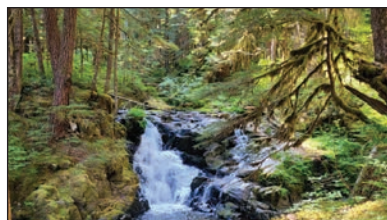
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ABOUT THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA ►

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is a national conservation organization headquartered in Gaithersburg, MD. Our more than 40,000 members protect and enjoy America's soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife. For membership information, call (800) IKE-LINE (453-5463) or visit our website at www.iwla.org.

National Convention Underscores the Need for Persistence and Cooperation

SCOTT MEYER | National President

This issue highlights the people, ideas and achievements celebrated at our convention in Minneapolis. It was a pleasure to meet so many of you and present awards recognizing the important work underway across the League. Please continue documenting the accomplishments of your outstanding volunteers and programs, so you can nominate them for recognition next year at our convention in Virginia.

At the convention, we heard compelling speakers and held important discussions about the future of conservation. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued an executive order to help protect the Boundary Waters, an excellent first step. However, lasting protection requires action from the Minnesota Legislature and, more importantly, the U.S. Congress. The League has a long history of helping establish and protect the Boundary Waters, and we will continue that work. Even if you do not live in Minnesota or plan to visit, this issue matters because if we fail to protect this pristine landscape, other treasured places could face the same fate.

That broader risk is already visible in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposal to rescind roadless-area protections for more than 44 million acres of public

lands. I hope you submitted comments to the agency. This is not a state-specific issue as it could affect current roadless areas, water supplies, old-growth forests and wildlife habitat across 39 states. Colorado and Idaho are the only two states with state level roadless rule protections, but most affected states do not.

We also heard extensive discussion at the convention about data centers, and governments are beginning to respond. Some states, and many local jurisdictions have paused data center development for six months to a year while they evaluate the effects of hyperscale facilities. As I emphasized at the convention, the goal is not to stop every project. We need to understand the environmental and community impacts of data centers, identify effective mitigation strategies and put enforceable protections in place from the start. Developers can use available technologies and practices to reduce many impacts, but public officials and residents need enough information to require those safeguards during the approval process. Because developers have strong incentives to control costs, essential protections should be established through clear public



requirements rather than left to voluntary action.

At the convention, I announced the formation of a president's committee to help decision-makers and the public understand the major issues surrounding data centers and the available mitigation strategies. This is not a resource committee or a standing committee; it is a focused effort to gather reliable information and distribute practical guidance on this important topic.

In the months ahead, I hope you will stay informed, speak up and share what you learn in your own communities. Protecting the places we value, and shaping responsible development, will require the same persistence and cooperation we celebrated in Minneapolis.

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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.

This Outdoor America Is Worth Saving

JARED MOTT | Executive Director

By the time these words find you, fall will be in full swing all across the country. It's the best time of year to be outside, enjoying cool temperatures and eye-popping foliage, casting a line to fish moving back up into the shallows, voracious in their preparation for the coming cold, and anticipating the season's first cold front that might put a buck on his feet in daylight or send the first mallards down from the north. These are the rituals that tie so many of us to the League's mission; I would not be here if I didn't think the wetlands and woods I spend so much time in during autumn were worth saving.

As big a tent as the League is, outdoor recreation, in some form or another, is undoubtedly what brings many of us through the doors to our first chapter meeting or piques our interest in collecting a water sample. Nearly six in ten of the League's chapters offer some sort of shooting sports facilities. Fishing access, whether it be in a pond or stream, is often cited as a reason for new members to join as well. Whether we shoot to tune up for grouse and duck season or we collect macroinvertebrates because we want to know what the fish in our

favorite stream are living on, the line from outdoor recreation to conservation is a pretty straight one. It drove Will Dilg to call for the creation of a fish and wildlife refuge on the Upper Mississippi and generations of Ikes who came after to stand up for Outdoor America from the Chesapeake Bay to the shadow of Grand Teton.

There's an authenticity inherent in all of the conservation work we do.

So while there is plenty to do, wild places to defend and waters to protect, take some time this fall to nurture your connections to that work. Better yet, take someone with you. Or go with someone new! Laugh at your buddy for missing a straightaway on the trap field, see if you can wipe the grin off your face watching your nephew set the hook on a largemouth sucking down a jitterbug between fallen maple leaves dotting the surface, or cuss under your breath at a wise (or maybe just lucky!) old buck that skirts just out of range until he gets downwind. I guarantee that I will do all three before you read my next column



and it's vital to the important work that we do together to maintain these connections.

Maybe you don't climb trees to hunt deer with a bow and sharp stick, but even for the "non-consumptive" enjoyer of nature, these months are still top tier recreating time. My wife doesn't hunt and rarely fishes but buys a National Parks pass every year just for fall hiking in the Blue Ridge; any other park she visits that year is a bonus. Autumn is when apples are ready for picking and campfires are their most alluring. All the research documenting how critical nature is for our mental health only reinforces my point here: just go. Yes, we need you to submit your comments to the Federal Register and speak up for smart salting practices at your town council meeting and respond to the latest action alert

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telling Congress to pass a Farm Bill that builds soil health and...there's always another and.

There's an authenticity inherent in all of the conservation work we do. When we speak about the need to protect clean water, you can almost smell the sweaty waders our volunteers have pulled off after throwing a kick net in the trunk. When we talk about saving the Boundary Waters, you can almost smell the campfire smoke. My wife often makes fun of me when I return from the woods; says I smell like "earth." Wear that sweat and smoke and dirt with pride because that's what will give us the passion to collectively say, "This. This Outdoor America is worth saving." Just. Go.

Welcome New Staff to Izaak Walton League Headquarters

Megan Etzwiler, Office Manager

Megan oversees daily administrative and operational functions at headquarters and serves as the central hub for financial and organizational inquiries. She also supports organization-wide initiatives and provides administrative support to the Executive Director. In her free time, she enjoys live music, fishing, photography and helping with her daughter's sports teams.

Kate Miller, Conservation Director

Kate Miller directs policy and government relations for the League. Before joining the national staff, she served as director of government affairs for Trout Unlimited, where she spent 20 years developing strategies to advance policy, support projects and empower grassroots engagement in pursuit of TU's mission. Kate earned a law degree at Tulane University and a B.A. in Politics and Media from Mount Holyoke College.

Danielle Prete, Membership Manager

Danielle serves as the Membership Manager, supporting chapters and individual members with membership issues, including dues and billing. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her family, volunteering in her community, attending concerts and watching sporting events.

Amy Swanson, Operations Coordinator

Amy supports daily office operations, member services, administrative functions, mail processing and donation management. A lifelong advocate for music and community service, Amy helps oversee a music scholarship program in her hometown established to honor a beloved high school music director. She is also passionate about animal welfare, enjoys singing and loves time with her cat, Tigger.

National Staff Tour of Arlington-Fairfax Chapter Includes an Afternoon of Trap Shooting

In August, the League's national headquarters staff toured Virginia's Arlington-Fairfax Chapter, founded in 1936. It is the Izaak Walton League's largest chapter in terms of membership.

In addition to a more than 100 acres of forest land, hiking trails and a fishing pond, the Chapter has indoor and outdoor archery ranges, shotgun and rifle ranges and a state-of-the-art 10-meter range for air rifle. Over the past decade, two Olympians have emerged from the students who



honed their air rifle skills at Arlington-Fairfax.

Chapter President Pam Meara and Education and Training Director John Seaberg were among the Arlington-Fairfax members who briefed the national staff on the Chapter history, facilities and safety protocols for shooting sports. Staff spent the afternoon at the

trap range where they soaked up expert tips from Chapter volunteers. The League staff represented a mix of first-timers and experienced hunters.

Rollback of Conservation Laws Calls for Restoration of Protections and Reimagining How We Steward Outdoor America

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

All of us who care about clean drinking water, thriving wild landscapes and a healthy planet have our hands full. The Trump administration rollbacks to the nation's bedrock conservation policies and laws are broad, deep and without precedent in American history.

Many of these essential environment policies have been shaped and supported by the Izaak Walton League over the past 104 years and are reflected in the League's conservation policies, determined by a bottom-up resolution process. (The League's most recent resolutions were approved by delegates in July at the 2026 convention in Bloomington, Minnesota—see page 28).

The League created the template for modern advocacy with its successful campaign to preserve a vast swath of wetlands in the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1924. Over that time, the U.S. has seen a natural push and pull over conservation priorities. For the most part, however, lawmakers have maintained conservation of natural resources as a national priority.

Given their scope and depth, the latest rollbacks are different. Char Miller, who teaches environmental history at Pomona College, describes them as an “unprecedented, deliberate and brutal assault on more than a century of environmental initiatives.” Particularly harmful is the damage caused by layoffs, funding cuts and chaos visited upon the staff at federal agencies that manage outdoor America.

As a result, Miller told me, Congress and the administration have “destroyed generations of congressionally mandated guardrails and judicially confirmed legal rules.”

Starving programs and agencies of funding—like the federal cuts to science funding—represents career setbacks or endings for many staff who have spent their lives managing the nation's natural resources for the benefit of the American people. (See Miller's history of the landmark court case, *West Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League v. Butz* on page 18.)



The Trump administration rollbacks are broad, deep and without precedent in American history.

A full description of the rollbacks so far during this administration would be lengthy. Here are just a few examples.

Repealing the Endangerment Finding

In February, the Trump administration repealed the 2009 Endangerment Finding, in which the EPA Administrator found that emissions from motor vehicles “contribute to the greenhouse gas pollution that threatens public health and welfare.”

The Finding provided the scientific rationale for regulating greenhouse gases, initially from cars and trucks and also emissions from power plants and oil and gas facilities. The Trump administration called the repeal “the single largest deregulatory action in American history.”

These actions reject the goals of mitigating, reducing or even recognizing the threat of climate change, even in this year of climate-related disasters around the world.

Undermining NEPA, Bill of Rights for the environment

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all federal agencies to evaluate the environmental impact of certain federal actions by assessing their environmental impact. The law also requires consideration of potential alternatives to the proposed action. This affects permitting for infrastructure, energy development, forest management and other projects. Signed into law by President Nixon in 1970, NEPA also requires the government to invite the public to review and comment on proposed actions.

On January 6, 2026, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), which is part of the executive branch, published a final rule that rescinded all CEQ regulations implementing NEPA. And on February 24, the Department of Interior published a final rule that rescinds more than 80 percent of that agency's prior NEPA regulations. One result of the changes is that the cumulative effects of greenhouse gases and climate change will not be considered as a potential environmental impact. Stopping short of killing the law, these recent changes seek to reduce NEPA to a toothless, optional process.

The NEPA reviews—according to critics—cause costly delays. But the process is designed to ensure transparency, consider alternatives and prevent potential environmental harms that could far outweigh the costs of the NEPA process. And in the U.S. we're not good at calculating a complete and accurate dollar value for healthy woods, waters and wildlife.

The full impact

Other areas affected by the administration's rollbacks include the Endangered Species Act, PFAS safeguards for drinking water, the Roadless Rule, the size of existing national monuments, the Bureau of Land Management Public Lands Rule and the downsizing and politicization of federal agencies.

I reached out to law professor and historian John Leshy to put the rollbacks in perspective. Focusing on the scale of the attacks on public lands, he agreed "there is no precedent in U.S. history." He cited opening up tens of millions of acres of public land to drilling, mining and logging as some of the most egregious setbacks. Leshy is emeritus professor at the University of California and author of the book *"Our Common Ground: A History of America's Public Lands."*

Most alarming, he said, was "hollowing out the National Park Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service, who manage these lands, by slashing their budgets and staff and expertise, done with the aim of making management so bad as to undermine public support for keeping these lands in national ownership."

He said this deliberate unraveling of regulations, laws and budgets will not easily be reversed by a different administration or in the courts.

"It's not like a light switch you can turn back on. It is therefore more imperative than ever for people who care about our public lands to make their voices heard and engage in the political process that ultimately will determine how much and how well we will safeguard these national treasures for future generations."

The objective of the rollbacks, Leshy says, is to undermine confidence in the management of our shared federal lands to the point where the public concludes these treasures would be better off if they were sold to private interests or given to the states.

Toward a more enduring consensus

While certain states, like Texas, have embraced some of the Trump rollbacks, other states are taking steps to ensure that environmental safeguards remain in place. Some executive branch actions will be stalled in courts.

Meanwhile, polls like the Colorado College voter survey find that support for protecting public lands is steady or even growing across the political spectrum. And some issues, like the lack of transparency around the rapid spread of data centers, are now attracting bipartisan ire.

In any case, the environmental rollbacks will require years to repair and return to a path toward clean water, climate mitigation, smarter energy and better land and wildlife conservation. Restoring common sense may require new strategies, channels and partnerships to reach a more enduring consensus about our broadly shared goal—a healthy outdoor America for future generations.

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The Endangered Species Act Is in Danger

By LISA BALLARD

You might never see an American pika, which lives at elevations above 8,000 feet. But the small rodent plays a big role as a keystone species in its habitat.

One word can make a big difference. In July 2026, the federal government finalized a major change to the Endangered Species Act, removing the regulatory definition of the word, “harm.” Prior to this change, the ESA prohibited significant habitat changes when endangered or threatened species were present. It now permits those intrusions into species habitat if the perceived economic costs outweigh the conservation benefit—or if there’s a national security consideration.

The killing or injuring of listed animals is still not allowed, but now there’s a greater priority given to economic development, and future threatened species will no longer receive the same automatic

baseline protections that endangered species do. Each situation concerning threatened species will be reviewed on case-by-case basis.

Why the law was created

During the mid-1800s, passenger pigeons were so plentiful east of the Rocky Mountains that flocks blocked out the sun for hours as they flew overhead. In just a handful of decades, the passenger pigeon went from ubiquitous to extinct, a startling lesson about why we need to pay attention to declining wildlife populations.

The passenger pigeon disappeared for two reasons. The first was loss of habitat when much of the

Eastern forests were cleared for the timber and to make room for agriculture and urban expansion. Second, these tasty gamebirds were over-hunted in an era when there were no regulations to manage them, even as their numbers dropped.

Nowadays in the United States, when a plant or animal—terrestrial or aquatic—has such a small population that it is likely to become extinct, it's legally classified as endangered, which gives it a chance for recovery under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Congress passed the ESA in 1973, providing protections and a recovery plan for plants and animals whose populations were on the brink of extinction or heading that way. The ESA is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) within the country's landmass and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in coastal waters. Other government agencies must abide by the ESA and collaborate with the USFWS or NOAA. For example, when the Environmental Protection Agency is asked to approve a pesticide, it must consult with the USFWS to ensure the pesticide won't impact an endangered species.

Prior to the most recent update this summer to the ESA made it illegal to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct” related to any species listed by the federal government under this law. It required the federal government to designate and safeguard habitat that listed species need to breed, feed, migrate and survive the winter, so their populations would have their best chance of recovery. It also restricted selling or trading listed species.

We often use the terms “endangered” and “threatened” interchangeable, but they mean different things under the ESA. The easiest way to keep them straight is to equate “endangered” with the word “danger,” as in danger of extinction right now. “Threatened” means declining quickly and likely to become endangered if we don't do

something about it. If a species were endangered, historically, its protections were mandatory and strict under the ESA. If a species were threatened, its protections had more flexibility and were customized to the situation. Some threatened plants and animals were guarded almost as rigorously as endangered species, while others had more lenient, localized restrictions.

Individual states have their own endangered and threatened species lists, which sometimes mirror the federal government's and sometimes don't. Conservation laws and their enforcement vary widely from state to state based on political

priorities, public sentiment, commercial pressures, funding and wildlife management resources. While each state technically serves as the steward of their resident species, the federal government overrides a state once a plant or animal is listed under the ESA, especially if the struggling population crosses state borders.

Recent changes to the law allow intrusions into endangered species' habitat if the perceived economic costs outweigh the conservation benefits.

Why should we care?

People are part of the web of life. We take pleasure in wildlife watching, hunting and fishing, which provide local economic benefits. But most importantly, we depend upon plants and animals to grow crops, provide food and medicines. The cures for many things that ail us have been discovered by studying an obscure species. After all, a fungus gave us the anti-biotic penicillin, and Taxol, derived from yew trees, is used to treat ovarian cancer. More than a quarter of all prescriptions written annually in the U.S. contain chemicals discovered in plants and animals. However, if an organism becomes extinct, we'll never learn its potential for life-saving secrets.

One example that has received attention is native pollinators, many of which are critical to growing the crops we eat. According to the USFWS, pollinators have declined over 50 percent, some up to 90 percent, since the 1970s. There are many reasons, including fewer and less-connected places to feed and breed, and competition from invasive species. Pollinators also suffer from disease, pesticides and climate change—which causes weather-related

extremes like prolonged drought, severe flooding and shorter wildfire cycles. The larvae of many of these insects have the added challenge of a narrow range of plants they can eat, such as monarch caterpillars which are beholden to milkweed. And some flowering plants now bloom earlier. If the blooms fade before the pollinators arrive, the insects starve, and the plants don't get pollinated. The domino effect in this case could directly impact our food sources.

EPA lists more than 1,300 endangered or threatened species in the United States today, many of which most of us have never heard of. "It is that range of biodiversity that we must care for—the whole thing—rather than just one or two stars," said naturalist Sir David Attenborough. The web of life as we know it depends on all of it.

Many species have become extinct over the millennia, yet other plants and animals, including humans, are still around, so it's easy to wonder why we should save, say, the endangered American pika, which lives in the alpine zone above 8,000 feet. While you might never see a pika, it's a keystone species in its habitat. This five-ounce rodent has a big impact on its high-elevation habitat. Its foraging, tunnelling and food stashes nourish the soil and spread seeds. Raptors, martens, bobcats, fox and coyotes depend on pikas as a food source. Were pikas to die out, the alpine ecosystems where they live would be stressed perhaps to the brink of collapse.

The problem is, pikas have evolved to thrive in the cold with a high resting body temperature (104 degrees), thick fur and the inability to sweat. When exposed to temperatures in the mid-70s or warmer—an increasingly common occurrence in alpine environs—they succumb to the heat. While other mountain mammals, like marmots, bighorn sheep and elk, can move higher as average temperatures warm up, pikas have already topped out, and without them, as other animals move higher, they'll find it harder to live in the degraded habitat. In short, even the plight of the pika has a domino effect.

What species have been saved?

There have been many success stories in our efforts to save species, which even predates the Endangered

Species Act. A century ago, there were perhaps 100 wild bison remaining in the U.S. Today, they number in the tens of thousands, with domestic herds adding hundreds of thousands to the total.

Bald eagles numbered only about 400 nesting pairs by the late 1970s due to the pesticide DDT, which weakened birds' eggshells. By 2007, bald eagles and other raptors, including osprey and peregrine falcons, had recovered to the point where they could be delisted.

The American alligator was once hunted nearly to extinction for their hides, but a ban on the interstate trade of alligator skins in combination with habitat enhancement allowed alligators to recover.

Among the most well-known back-from-the-brink stories is the gray wolf. And the wood stork is one of the most recent success stories. Wood storks were delisted in the southeastern United States last winter, after years of wetland restoration efforts.

It's important to note that due to confirmed extinctions, USFWS has removed 44 species from the endangered list since 2021—mainly small fish, freshwater mussels, birds and regional plants.

The impact of saving endangered animals and plants goes beyond the individual species. When one plant or animal disappears, it affects other living things that share that habitat. Each member of an ecosystem contributes to the system's wellbeing in different ways—by spreading pollen and seeds, enriching the soil, filtering water, absorbing carbon, giving off oxygen or controlling populations of other species. So when a plant or animal disappears, it disrupts this balance.

Scientists have defined five mass extinctions over the history of the earth that have changed life on our planet. A number of scientists believe that we are in the midst of a sixth mass extinction.

Lisa Ballard is an Ike from Red Lodge, Montana, and a long-time contributor to Outdoor America. An award-winning writer and photographer, she is dedicated to getting people of all ages outdoors and passionate about conserving wildlife for future generations.
www.LisaBallardOutdoors.com.

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How Recreational Shooting Builds Hunters

By ANDREW MCKEAN

In the dimly lit basement of the Glasgow (Montana) Middle School, the sound of basketballs bouncing on the hardwood above is matched by the whisp of arrows leaving bowstrings, and the solid thunk of fiberglass shafts hitting bullseye targets at the other end of the room.

This is the new frontier for hunting, 4th and 5th graders flinging arrows as part of their school's PE classes. Across the country an astonishing 1.2 million students have made archery relevant, as they compete at local, then state and even national competitions in the National Archery in the Schools program.

Add a half-million 4-H members who participate in shooting sports program and another 60,000 scholastic clay-target-shooting shotgunners, and there are more students involved in organized shooting than there are American hunters over age 65.

That's an important demarcation, because many demographers have watched with concern as America's hunting community has aged every year. Those older hunters haven't been replaced by newcomers, and if you extend the timeline out generations, it's easy to conclude that hunting is imperiled in America.

Periodic spikes in participation and R3

In the real world, it's not that dire. The idea that we might run out of hunters is countered by periodic spikes in participation (think the Covid pandemic, or the rise in female archery hunters with each installment of *The Hunger Games* movie franchise).



Many Izaak Walton League chapters provide instruction for various shooting sports including shotgun, air rifle and archery.

This declining participation is worrisome for wildlife managers, who rely on citizen hunters to control populations of deer, waterfowl and other huntable game species.

But the long-term decline is real. A 2026 survey conducted by Southwick Associates for the National Shooting Sports Foundation found that fully 25 percent of last year's hunters will not hunt this year.

Reasons cited for dropping out of hunting include participation in other outdoor activities that require less gear and hassle, the lack of interest in hunting from friends and family and health issues. Other headwinds for incumbent hunters include distance to their hunting area, decreasing access and lack of game to hunt.

This declining participation is worrisome for wildlife managers, who rely on citizen hunters to control populations of deer, waterfowl and other huntable game species. Because hunters fund most wildlife management in America through a tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery tackle that is returned to fish-and-game agencies, declines in participation result in declines in conservation

revenue at the very time wildlife agencies are tasked with increasing workloads.

But to adherents of the national R3 movement, which aims to recruit new hunters, retain existing hunters and reactivate lapsed hunters, recreational shooting is an important catalyst for prospective hunters. It's a way to retain existing hunters by providing an activity that contains many elements of hunting without the all-or-nothing outcome that defines the experience for many hunters. It's a hook to recruit new hunters in the ways and means of firearms and archery gear. And it's an effective tool to reactivate hunters who find, through target shooting, a way to enjoy that deer rifle in the off-season.

Rise of the range

A century ago, every town in America had a public shooting range nearby. Generally these facilities were built and managed by local rod-and-gun clubs, and many chapters of the Izaak Walton League had their origins in developing these shooting ranges. But as Americans gravitated to cities, and as neighbors of shooting ranges complained about the noise and lead, the local gun club went the way of the grange hall. If they were replaced at all, it was by members-only clubs or commercial ranges.

That's not to say that recreational shooting waned. If anything, it has skyrocketed. The percentage of those gun-and-ammo taxes contributed by shooters has doubled in the past decade. Last year about 70 percent of the balance of the federal Pittman-Robertson fund came from owners of self-defense handguns, AR shooters, rimfire plinkers and clay-target shotgunners; less than a quarter of funds came from traditional hunters.

As conservation funding has shifted, public policy has similarly evolved. The 2019 "Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act" gave state fish-and-game agencies the flexibility to use federal excise taxes for R3 purposes, including construction of public shooting ranges.

The result has been a recent and ongoing building boom of community shooting ranges. With more places to shoot safely and effectively, the number of recreational shooters has increased among all age

groups, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation. No demographic has grown as fast or as steadily as those shooters under age 24, a rise fueled largely by organized scholastic shooting programs.

Connecting shooting to hunting

It's one thing to become proficient drilling archery bullseye targets. It's quite another to hone the skills, patience and understanding of animal behavior to drive an arrow through a wild whitetail. But a few non-profit programs are bridging the gap between shooting and hunting, starting by normalizing the idea that guns are lethal but highly effective in the

right hands, and are downright fun to shoot in competitions.

Pass It On – Outdoor Mentors, which started in suburban Kansas as a project of Big Brothers Big Sisters, has since grown to a dozen

states. The non-profit partners with high school and collegiate trap teams and 4-H shooting programs to build a foundation in gun handling and safety. But the group has successfully converted youth shooters into successful hunters by pairing kids from shooting-skills programs with experienced mentors for hands-on field hunts.

The organization further partners with landowners to provide access and opportunities to harvest animals. Hunts range from upland birds and waterfowl to turkeys and white-tailed deer.

"I believe our hunting and fishing traditions only survive if we're willing to invest in the next generation," says Bobby Cole, a program coordinator for the Outdoor Mentors team. "The shooting sports is a natural gateway into a lifetime of hunting, with a caring mentor showing the way."

By providing fellowship, access, competition, and training, recreational shooting appears to be an effective onramp to deliver youngsters to the field. Whether this next generation of hunters sticks with it over the long-term is an open, essential, question.

Andrew McKean is a long-time outdoor writer, editor and hunter educator. He is the Hunting and Conservation Editor for Outdoor Life and lives in eastern Montana.

Scholastic shooting programs are helping fill the pipeline for our next generation of hunters and citizen wildlife managers.

A photograph of a vast field of purple flowers, likely Monarda, with some yellow flowers in the foreground. The field stretches towards a distant, hazy horizon under a sky with soft, orange-tinted clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

A Dream of Fields: The Delaney Prairie

By MIKE DELANEY



In 1988 my wife and I decided to look for a getaway near water close to our home in Des Moines. We bought 30 acres including land on the North Raccoon River bottom, sand bars and flood plain. All but the river bottom and one acre of row crop was woodland. We built a cabin on the hillside. Later we added another 30 acres including 20 acres of row crop ground.

The row crops had been planted right up to the riverbank, which meant there was no buffer to capture or slow down water coming off the fields. Five-foot deep gullies were cut into the bank where surface water runoff poured into the river.

We wanted to plant prairie species. To qualify for the USDA Conservation Reserve Program which provides incentives for soil conservation, we contracted with a neighbor to plant corn and beans for three years. We got a CRP contract and planted seeds for native prairie species from a local supplier. We added additional seed we collected from remnants of the historic native prairies in the region.

We learned about prairie restoration by participating in prairie walks and attending conferences. We also joined efforts to collect seed for what became the 6,000-acre Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, which was established in 1990 to restore native ecosystems like tallgrass prairie, sedge meadow and oak savanna.

In the fall of 2008, we started with a “clean field.” We bought a 1948 Ford tractor, scratched up the soil to prepare it, planted 17 acres by hand and then drug fencing over the planting to lightly cover the new seed.

We had good germination the next spring. However, there was plenty of Canada thistle, foxtail and other invasive, non-native species. So we bought a mower for the tractor. We mowed the prairie for three years even though it was hard to mow our early flowering prairie plants.

By the third year we had plenty of big blue stem, Canada wild rye, Indian grass and little blue stem. Yellow coneflowers, oxeye daisy, purple prairie clover and goldenrods also emerged. Every year we added more species as we found them in remnant prairies: pale purple coneflowers, whorled milkweed, New England asters, golden alexander and burgamot took hold and spread.

In order to increase our diversity and quality, we propagated and planted butterfly weed (a milkweed species) and even lead plants, a small, slow-growing native with taproots that can reach 15 feet into the earth. These and other deep-rooted plants had held prairie soil intact on land for millennia before it was first plowed up.

Thirty years after we first started experimenting with a few prairie seeds here and there, we now have a prairie with about 60 species of native plants, genetically consistent species native to the five nearby counties of central Iowa.

The stars of the prairie are: compass plants, blazing stars, yellow and pale purple coneflowers, burgamot, butterfly weed, purple prairie clover, prairie indigo, gentians, asters and goldenrods.

Filmed in Iowa, the classic baseball movie *Field of Dreams* gave us the expression, “Build it and they will come.” I don’t think you can bring back baseball players from the past. However, I know you can bring back monarchs, dragonflies, countless beneficial insects, as well as reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds.

Mike Delaney is the Conservation Director for the Iowa Division of the Izaak Walton League. He taught Environmental Sociology at Des Moines Area Community College. After retirement he focused his attention on conservation and water quality in the Raccoon River, which supplies drinking water for central Iowans.

Red Rose Chapter Works on Setting Things Right for the American Chestnut

By DEREK PRITTS

Twenty years ago, it started with a few American chestnut seedlings and more than a few dreams of what the American chestnut tree could become. Now those dreams are blossoming into reality at the Izaak Walton League's **Lancaster Red Rose Chapter** in Pennsylvania.

A few centuries ago, the forests of the Appalachian Mountains from Maine to Georgia held about three billion American chestnut trees, *Castanea dentata*. The American chestnut was a keystone species, a vital source of rot-resistant timber and a major food source for wildlife and humans.

Then an Asian parasitic fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) that came to be known as chestnut blight, accidentally introduced in 1904 in New York, wiped out nearly the entire population nationwide within 50 years.

By 2001, word was circulating within the scientific community about the potential development of a blight-tolerant American chestnut at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) in Syracuse, New York.

As a League member at that time, I made a simple pitch to the Lancaster Red Rose Chapter leadership. "Humans created this existential threat to an American species. It's time to set things right."

The Chapter stepped up to help save the vanishing American chestnut.

In the Chapter's first tree grove, a quartet of members put wild-type, indigenous American chestnut seedlings into the ground. The seedlings came from the nuts of heirloom American trees. Although infected with the foreign fungal disease, the strongest surviving American trees were still producing a few precious "gold nuggets" of



Aaron Boll and Derek Pritts apply blight-resistant pollen to the American chestnut trees at Red Rose Chapter.

American chestnuts, native stock *Castanea dentata*.

Richard "Dick" Deibert, now deceased, and I served as the initial team leaders. I put my Penn State degree in Agricultural Sciences to work, and together we moved forward with the American pioneer spirit: Do the work. Dig hard. Plant many so a few survive.

Then wait. Wait for the breakthrough—the day when the American chestnut tree could once again be restored without foreign gene intervention. It would take patience, persistence and no small measure of faith in their trees and their efforts.

Field trial may produce a breakthrough

A potential breakthrough came in 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The Red Rose Chapter was

chosen as one of only a half-dozen sites across the Eastern U.S. to participate in a historic field trial: pollinating its pure American chestnut trees with the first release of blight-tolerant pollen.

That pollen represents more than two decades of painstaking research and planting. While the Red Rose Chapter was putting American chestnut trees into the ground, scientists at SUNY-ESF were working to develop the blight-tolerant pollen that might finally give those trees, and the species itself, a fighting chance.

The end of the rainbow might be right here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Today, newer Chapter members pitch in. Tara and Dale Etzweiler both marveled at the passion that had carried the effort forward for two decades. On a recent evening, as dusk settled over the grove, Dale Etzweiler reflected on what had brought them to that moment. His hope was simple: that the efforts of a few today would one day benefit many in the future.

Carey Specht, the first female board chair of the Red Rose Chapter and a recipient of the Izaak Walton League's Judge John W. Tobin Chapter Volunteer Appreciation Award, found the pollination process both enlightening and deeply meaningful. She was thrilled to have the opportunity to take part.

Climbing down a stepladder to take a break on a hot day in June, Specht sat in the shade and recorded the colossal amount of scientific data being called down by those still working high in the trees.

She dabbed at the perspiration on her face, looked across the grove and quietly mused, "The end of the rainbow might be right here in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania."

K. Derek Pritts has been a League member for more than two decades with a lifelong passion for restoring the American chestnut. Pritts is a retired waterways conservation officer with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. He's a freelance writer, photographer and author of several books.



Chestnut burrs with blight-tolerant chestnuts inside to be harvested in late September or early October.



Red Rose members Derek Pritts and Charlie Bensinger record scientific data in the chestnut grove.



The League's West Virginia Division challenged timber policy in the Monongahela National Forest which led to sweeping changes in the management of national forests.

Squirrel Hunters, Clear-Cuts and Sweeping Transformation of U.S. Forest Policies: Why *Izaak Walton League v. Butz* Matters

By CHAR MILLER

The banner headline on the front page of the Elkins, West Virginia, newspaper for November 8, 1973, could not have been more direct or revelatory: “Maxwell Says Clearcutting Forbidden in National Forest by Organic Act.”¹ Only a few months before, federal judge Robert Maxwell, a former prosecutor in Elkins whom President Lyndon Johnson had elevated to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of the state, had heard arguments in *West Virginia Div. of Izaak Walton League v. Butz* (367 F. Supp. 42).

His decision sent shock waves through Region 9 of the U.S. Forest Service, which encompassed national forests from Minnesota to Pennsylvania and Maine, as well as through the entire national forest

system. More than 50 years later, the Monongahela Controversy reverberates still. It is worth revisiting why the original lawsuit was brought, for in many respects it was the single most important event in the history of the Monongahela National Forest and of the agency that manages it.

At the time of the lawsuit, 784,000 of Monongahela’s 820,000 acres were classified as commercial forest land. The Izaak Walton League’s case, however, focused on three proposed timber sales that covered a mere 1,077 acres—the 428 of which were to be clear-cut, the plaintiffs argued, were in violation of the Organic Act of 1897. The act—the foundation upon which 75 years of federal forest policy had depended—had identified

the objectives by which the national reserves (now national forests) would be managed: “to improve and protect the forest within the boundaries, or for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of waterflows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.”²

Although the Monongahela National Forest was not formally established until April 28, 1920, the Arnold family of Elkins, in Tucker County, offered 7,200 acres, known “Purchase Case No. 1” to the federal government in August 1911; the deed of sale was formally signed four years later, in late November 1915. This and subsequent purchases were conducted under the auspices of the Weeks Act (1911), which allowed the government to purchase land from willing sellers in upland watersheds in the eastern half of the United States; by the 1920s, Weeks Act dollars had had expanded the Monongahela to 150,327 acres.

The management goal in West Virginia and elsewhere, wrote W. W. Ashe, who as secretary of the National Forest Reservation Commission oversaw Weeks Act purchases, was to restore the “dreary waste as has been the fate of much of the fir- and spruce-clad slopes” in the Allegheny Mountains.³ Today, the Monongahela protects 921,000 acres and continues to sustain local and regional watersheds, most notably the headwaters of the Potomac River, the main source of drinking water for Washington, DC, home to the Forest Service’s national headquarters.⁴

But it was not potable water that was the paramount issue in 1973; it was timber. Those arguing against clear-cutting pointed out that the Organic Act only allowed the harvest of “dead, physically mature and large growth trees individually marked for cutting.” Judge Maxwell concluded that the agency’s clear-cutting practices violated this provision of the original legislation, and because that act was an act of Congress, it could only be altered through congressional legislation. “Policies and practices of the U.S. Forest Service to the contrary are an unwarranted intrusion into an exclusive area

of congressional province.” Two years later, the US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals would uphold Judge Maxwell’s decision.⁵

Challenging the Forest Service get-out-the-cut campaign

The Monongahela Controversy was linked to an array of legal challenges to the Forest Service’s postwar get-out-the-cut campaign, a pattern of accelerated harvesting designed to bring large quantities of wood to market in response to the nation’s construction boom.

Backed by scientific research indicating that even-aged management of forests (that is, clear-cutting) would produce a better quality and higher

volume of timber, the agency managed large-acreage sales using this practice on its forests uniformly across the country. Wielding more powerful chainsaws and firing up military surplus bulldozers to build roads deep into the backcountry, loggers on the Monongahela and elsewhere removed billions of board feet every year.

In 1945, loggers cut approximately two billion board feet (2 BBF) on the national forests, in 1960 the total was 9.3 BBF and by the mid-1980s the figure had soared to 18 BBF. Even one of its advocates recognized that clear-cutting left behind “an aura of total devastation.”⁶

Even one of its advocates recognized that clear-cutting left behind “an aura of total devastation.”

The Inter-Mountain
Only Daily Newspaper in Randolph and Seven Bordering Counties
ELKINS, W. VA., 20th, THURSDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 8, 1973
TEN CENTS

**Only Congress Can Change 1897 Law Governing Timber Practices
Maxwell Says Clearcutting Forbidden
In National Forest by Organic Act**

The opinion of Chief Judge Maxwell in the Monongahela National Forest case, which he rendered last week, is the first time a federal court has ruled on the constitutionality of the Organic Act of 1897, which governs the management of national forests. Maxwell's ruling, which is being appealed by the U.S. Forest Service, states that the agency's clear-cutting practices violate the Organic Act's requirement that only "dead, physically mature and large growth trees individually marked for cutting" be harvested.

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West Virginia newspaper heralds the League's clear-cut court victory in 1973 that would affect forest policy for decades.

Squirrel and turkey hunters in West Virginia blow the whistle

Among the first to blow the whistle was a clutch of squirrel and turkey hunters in West Virginia. They were infuriated that intense logging had rendered unusable their traditional hunting grounds on the Monongahela, their commons and the public nature on which they depended.

They were angered that the Forest Service effectively handed over this communal, multi-use resource to single-use timber companies. And they were worried that the federal agency, which had done so much to restore what in the early twentieth century had been a badly burned and cutover landscape on the Allegheny Front Range, was destroying these now healthy, resilient forests.

To seek redress, they first lobbied the West Virginia legislature, and during the 1960s the state body responded with a series of hearings and resolutions to rein in the Forest Service's actions.

The agency cavalierly ignored these cautions, not least because the Monongahela was under federal, not state, management. Agency foresters in West Virginia also took their cue from their chief, Edward Cliff, who met with and subsequently dismissed the pleadings of a delegation of West Virginia hunters, conservationists and politicians.

"I recognized their viewpoint and sympathized with it," he later recalled about the meeting. "But my initial reaction was—what's more important, the personal pleasure of a small handful of people for turkey hunting, or the utilization of this resource for production of jobs and raw material, done under a silvicultural system that, if properly applied, was sound? Personally, I didn't pay as much attention to that protest as perhaps it deserved. I didn't recognize the strength of the opposition that could be developed over this issue. What I didn't realize is how potent they could be in expanding this protest. and their capacity to galvanize public opinion but seemed to never forgive them either."⁷

The transformation resulted in large part because one day in 1964, hunters headed up into the Monongahela National Forest and came down ready to fight for this public land and their common rights in its bounty.

League's lawsuit catches the Forest Service off-guard

Rebuffed, the West Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service. The League is a national conservation organization founded in 1922 that advocates for the protection of natural resources; among its early victories was the 1924 creation of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.⁸

The lawsuit gained considerable public support throughout the Mountain State and the League also was joined by other conservation organizations, including the National Resources Defense Council and the San Francisco-based Sierra Club. This growing coalition ensured that the case would have national implications. Judge Maxwell's decision in support of the legal challenge, and the appeal court's sustaining of it, caught the Forest Service completely off-guard. It was the first time that its expertise had been adjudicated and found wanting.

Judge Maxwell's decision technically only applied to lands in the Fourth Circuit, which encompassed Virginia and West Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina. But its decision effectively, if temporarily, shut down the agency's timber sales program

nationwide. Aware that this might be the result, and in acknowledgment that the Organic Act might be outdated, the court advised that the "the appropriate forum to resolve this complex and controversial issue was not the courts, but Congress."⁹

Result: sweeping transformation in the nation's forest policy

With that, the battle that had erupted on the Monongahela shifted to Capitol Hill, and two legislative initiatives were the result: the Resources Planning Act (1975) and the National Forest Management Act (1976). Together these laws, now 50 years old, required every national forest to

produce a management plan, which would include an environmental impact statement that would consider and weigh ecological and hydrological—as well as social—values. In turn these documents must be vetted by the public; if their goals and actions were in dispute, they must be revised accordingly.

For the agency, which hitherto had determined when and how the national forests would be managed, these new laws signaled the beginning of a more collaborative, open and transparent process, though it would take the Forest Service several years—decades, even—to fully embrace that process.

The controversies did not stop, however. Instead, in West Virginia, as well as in New Hampshire, Texas, Kentucky, Puerto Rico and across the West, individual forest plans ever since have been challenged in public venues and federal courts.¹⁰ These long-running battles are one of the costs of a more democratic process, and from a certain perspective has created a sense of gridlock. Those who hold this position argue that such debates have been antithetical to sound management of the national forests and grasslands, both locally and systemwide.

But the Monongahela and other national forests are public lands and require public scrutiny to ensure that their management adheres to what the citizenry values. That requirement has always been so; indeed, it was a key element of the agency's founding ethos. As affirmed in the Forest Service publication *The Use of the National Forests* (1907): "National Forests are

made for and owned by the people. They should also be managed by the people." Their active engagement was deliberately set up in opposition to those who, like Ed Cliff, appeared to believe otherwise. The national forests were not created "to give officers in charge of them a chance to work out their theories, but to give the people who use them, and those affected by their use, a chance to work out their own best profit."¹¹

The *Izaak Walton League v. Butz* decision compelled the Forest Service to acknowledge that its top-down management of the forests, which dovetailed with its faith in its expertise as well its command-and-control organizational structure, was as outdated as the 1897 Organic Act. From this moment, the agency slowly underwent a vital transformation.

The transformation resulted in large part because one day in 1964, hunters headed up into the Monongahela National Forest and came down ready to fight for this public land and their common rights in its bounty.

Char Miller is the W.M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History at Pomona College, Claremont, Calif. He has written extensively about the U.S. Forest Service, including the forthcoming Regenerating the Land: The People, Politics, and Policies that Created the Eastern National Forests (West Virginia University Press, 2027).

¹ Gillian Mace Berman and Melissa Conley-Spencer, *Monongahela National Forest, 1915–1990* (West Virginia University Public History Program, 1992), 148; *The Elkins Inter-Mountain*, November 8, 1973, 1, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/greatestgood/images/gallery/logging/photo8.jpg>.

² Quoted in *West Virginia Div. of Izaak Walton League, Inc. v. Butz*, 367 F. Supp. 422 (N.D.W. Va. 1973), <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/367/422/1425532/>.

³ W. W. Ashe, "The Creation of the Eastern National Forests," *American Forests*, September 1922, 523.

⁴ Christopher Johnson and David Govatski, *Forests for the People: The Story of America's Eastern National Forests* (Island Press, 2013), 187–206.

⁵ *The Elkins Inter-Mountain*, November 8, 1973, 1.

⁶ Kathryn Newfont, *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 130–138.

⁷ Edward P. Cliff, Ronald B. Hartzer, and David A. Clary, *Half a Century in Forest Conservation: A Biography and Oral History of Edward P. Cliff* (USDA Forest Service, 1981); Newfont, *Blue Ridge Commons*, 135.

⁸ Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy* (Little, Brown, 1981), 159–172.

⁹ *West Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, Inc. v. Butz*, No. 74–1387 (4th Cir. August 21,

1975), <http://elr.info/sites/default/files/litigation/5.20573.htm>.

¹⁰ In West Virginia, for example, activists pursued initiatives to expand wilderness designations in the Monongahela National Forest, hoping to make it the regional hub of wildlands—a "wilderness corridor"—connecting the George Washington National Forest, and state parks in Pennsylvania and Maryland. R. F. Mueller, "Central Appalachian Wilderness in Perspective," *Wild Earth* 2, no. 3 (1992): 56–60, <http://asecular.com/forests/vfw/monon.htm>.

¹¹ *The Use of the National Forests* (USDA Forest Service, 1907), 25–26.

WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION HELPED SHAPE U.S. FORESTRY POLICY

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

Concerned about extensive, indiscriminate clear cutting in the Monongahela National Forest in the 1960s, the West Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League helped create the West Virginia Forest Management Commission to assess that problem. After analyzing forest management practices in the Monongahela, the Commission issued a report with 15 recommendations, which the League accepted.

However the Forest Service did not accept two of the key recommendations that advocated for selective rather than wholesale clear-cutting of timber.

The national office of the Izaak Walton League also issued recommendations. Leaders called for a multiple-use approach in national forests in recognition of forest

use for recreation and wildlife habitat. The League called for greater public participation in forest management decisions and a moratorium on timber sales in one district "until public involvement and analysis of the proposed master plan takes place."

These circumstances led to the West Virginia Division's decision finally to sue the Forest Service in what would turn out to be a landmark, far-reaching case decided in November 1973, *West Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League v. Butz* (Earl Butz was USDA secretary at the time).

The decision prompted Congress to address the need for forest planning and management in two separate laws, the Resources Planning Act (1975) and the National Forest Management Act (1976).

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OUTDOOR AMERICA

FEBRUARY, 1970

Walton Officials Tour Clearcut Timber Area

"...It has taken West Virginians a Century to realize that their state is as beautiful as most others and, thank Heaven, the average Mountaineer is beginning to be a bit sensitive about the loss of our state's natural Beauty ..." Grover C. "Zip" Little, National IWL vice president.

by Ted Pankowski
IWL Associate Conservation Director

Washington—National and regional staff leaders of the Izaak Walton League toured the Monongahela National Forest recently in an effort to resolve the growing controversy in West Virginia over "clearcutting" of timber.

The two-day itinerary was conducted by Monongahela Supervisor F. A. "Tony" Dorrell and his staff. The tour centered on the 156,000-acre Gauley Ranger District, particularly the Cranberry River Backcountry, a de facto wilderness. West Virginia Mountaineers, the Richwood Chamber of Commerce and local labor groups have charged the Forest Service with planning to overcut the area.



Left: The boardwalk through the well-known Cranberry Glades...an area of great botanical interest near Richwood, W. Va. A popular vacation region, it is also used by area colleges for field trips with botany and ecology students. More needs to be done in the Gauley Ranger District toward increasing such opportunities, and in recreation and wildlife management. Right: The scenic Hill Creek Falls in the Gauley Ranger District. Extensive clearcutting in the adjacent Cranberry backcountry would diminish the attractiveness of natural wonders as this through the Gauley region.

LEAGUE RESOLUTION

The issue in West Virginia, for the long run, is whether the technique will work there because of climate, soil conditions and other factors, and more immediately, the size, location and shape of the clearcuts. Lawrence

1900's, and with recovery now an accomplished fact, some feel that clearcutting will repeat past history, albeit inadvertently.

To back up these claims, those who opposed clearcutting under any circumstances cite the Timber Supply Act in Congress and the Administra-

would re-establish good faith.

3.) Timber production has been overemphasized in the master plan. Other values such as recreation, esthetics and wildlife need much more attention in the plan and in its implementation. Citizens of West Vir-

Concerned about extensive clear cutting, League leaders toured the Monongahela National Forest in 1970 and recommended greater public input and a moratorium on timber sales.

2026 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 \$
3-D Archery Project	St. Joseph County Chapter, Indiana	6,000
Apiary Enhancement	Hamilton Chapter, Ohio	7,000
Archery Range	Grand Island Chapter, Nebraska	1,000
Catfish Spawn	Winchester Chapter, Virginia	1,660
Community Conservation Movie Night	Hamilton Chapter, Ohio	900
Conservation Scholarship	National Office, Maryland	5,000
Cooling System	Miami Chapter, Indiana	2,500
Fish Removal and Stocking	Griffith Chapter, Indiana	3,600
Fishing Pond Enhancement	Wayne County Chapter, Ohio	2,000
Garden Compost Factory Education Tool	Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter, Maryland	7,300
Goose Workshop	Illinois Division	5,100
Heating and Air Conditioning Update	Three Rivers Chapter, Iowa	2,500
Jasper County Fishing Club Fly Fishing	Emerson Hough Chapter, Iowa	2,100
Kids' Fishing Derby	Winchester Chapter, Virginia	2,000
Kids' Outdoor Expo Enhancement	Des Moines Chapter, Iowa	8,000
LED Lighting Conservation	Medina Chapter, Ohio	2,000
Little Ikes	Decatur Chapter, Illinois	4,000
Medicinal Native Plant Interpretive Trail	Cincinnati Chapter, Ohio	6,700
Outdoor Education and Gardens	Des Plaines Chapter, Illinois	900
National Shooting Sports Month Grants	National Office, Maryland	2,500
Pond Aerator	Hamilton Chapter, Ohio	2,500
Pond Maintenance and Fish Restocking	Wabash Chapter, Indiana	5,500
Pond Sustainability	Mount Healthy Chapter, Ohio	2,360
Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch Test Kits	National Office, Maryland	18,250
Scouts to Summer Camp	Berkeley County Chapter, West Virginia	788
Solar Aerator Fountain	Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter, Va.	2,500
South Dakota Wildlife Federal Youth Camp	Sioux Falls Chapter, South Dakota	800
Stream Testing Materials Resupply	Mt. Airy Chapter, Maryland	2,900
Trap Machine 5 Stand Course Improvements	Wildlife Achievement Chapter, Maryland	3,200
Trap Range Improvements	Anamosa Chapter, Iowa	6,500
Trap Range Improvements	Michigan City Chapter #7, Indiana	7,330
Trap Range Improvements Lights	York Chapter #67, Pennsylvania	2,000
Trap Range Improvements Voice System	York Chapter #67, Pennsylvania	3,500
Youth Archery Range	Harford County Chapter, Maryland	5,280
Youth Conservation Camp	West Virginia Division	2,400
Youth Convention	National Office, Maryland	2,500
Youth Fishing Contest	Geneseo Chapter, Illinois	1,600
Youth & Member Archery Program, #2	Berkeley County Chapter, West Virginia	2,600
Youth & Member Fishing Tournament	Berkeley County Chapter, West Virginia	1,000
For more information, visit iwla-endowment.org		TOTAL GRANTS 146,268

Your Endowment in Action



Aside from catching fish, the only thing that made Steve happier was helping younger people catch fish.



Steve Labs describes the fish that got away.

Youth Fishing Fund Established in Memory of Steve Labs

By PAMELA MEARA, President, Izaak Walton League of America Endowment

In July 2026, the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment established the Steve Labs Memorial Youth Fishing Fund to honor Labs who was an officer and director of the Endowment for 10 years. He also served as national director for the Wisconsin Division and as president of the Brown County Chapter.

Steve's passion for fishing was well known to League members and non-members alike. He introduced innumerable young people to fishing and to the great outdoors. Given his lifelong dedication to youth engagement, we felt a grant supporting his commitment was important.

This grant supports youth fishing events, education, mentoring and access to fishing experiences. We want to ensure that Steve's legacy

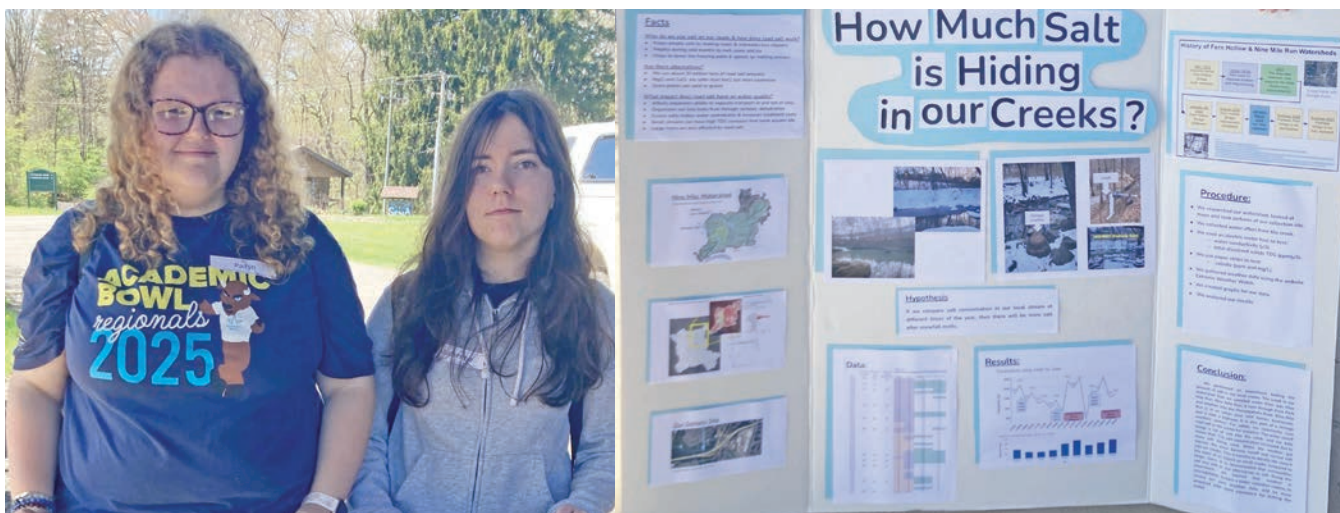
will continue in a way that reflects his passion for fishing and supporting youth involvement.

We invite you to join us in celebrating Steve Labs by making a gift to the Endowment providing support for this fund. Together we can turn Steve's passion into opportunity for young people and create a lasting tribute.

Donations to the Endowment can include a specific contribution earmarked to the Steve Labs Memorial Youth Fishing Fund online at www.iwla-endowment.org or by mail sent to Izaak Walton League of America Endowment, P.O. Box 189, Stephenson, VA 22656-0189.

Meet a MONITOR

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION



The high school students shared their research at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa.

Paityn and Mackenzie Take on Salt Pollution in Pittsburgh

By **ABBY HILEMAN**,
Salt Watch Coordinator

The Izaak Walton League of America has been working to conserve habitats for future generations since 1922. Over a century later, a new generation of conservationists is stepping up to lead the way.

We are excited to introduce two inspiring high school students from the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf: Paityn and Mackenzie. As rising seniors, this past schoolyear they took their passion for nature out of the classroom and straight into their local watershed. In collaboration with Creek Connections (a Salt Watch Partner) through Allegheny College, Paityn and Mackenzie were able to monitor a local stream in the community for road salt runoff pollution and other contaminants this past winter.

Using the League's Salt Watch program, Paityn and Mackenzie spent their winter tracking a pollutant that is often completely invisible: road salt. They recently shared their findings at the regional Creek Connections

Meet a MONITOR

Symposium at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa. We sat down with them to talk about their data, their love for nature and what they learned along the way.

From the classroom to the banks of a local stream

For Paityn and Mackenzie, the environment is personal. Both students share a deep appreciation for the outdoors, though they connect with it in different ways. Mackenzie finds her peace while hiking through western Pennsylvania's trails. Paityn, on the other hand, writes poetry outside, finding that her absolute best ideas come to her when she is sitting quietly in the woods. Driven by a desire to solve environmental problems, the two students teamed up for a winter water monitoring study.

Their testing site sat right in the valley of the Nine Mile Run Watershed, a historic urban waterway located in the East End of Pittsburgh, Pa. Positioned adjacent to the busy parkway, the site was perfect for monitoring the streams passing under high-traffic bridges that have recently undergone, or are actively undergoing, significant construction. This monitoring location captures a unique intersection of environmental history and modern urban stress. For decades, the watershed was heavily polluted by industrial steel waste. However, it achieved national fame in 2006 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed what was, at the time, the largest urban stream ecosystem restoration in the United States.

Today, the Nine Mile Run Watershed is actively managed by Upstream Pittsburgh, but it still faces intense infrastructure challenges. As a highly urbanized watershed, it is constantly impacted by excessive stormwater runoff and combined sewer overflows. Oversight and coordination of the watershed is also both complex and challenging, as the watershed extends across multiple municipalities. Furthermore, because Pittsburgh is famous for its steep hills, local roads are often heavily salted during the winter to keep drivers and pedestrians safe.

This necessary safety measure creates an additional environmental hurdle, causing massive amounts of salt to run off into the nearby streams and alter the very water quality being tested by the students.

Throughout January, their teacher, Julie Ann Mountain, collected water samples every two to three days for testing. Back in the classroom, Paityn and Mackenzie performed chemical testing using Salt Watch test strips. Because salt and other contaminants dissolve completely and cannot be seen with the naked eye, the chemistry felt abstract at first since the water didn't look polluted. However,

as the weeks went on, the data began to tell a different story.

The winter brought a harsh, extended deep freeze, which trapped the road salt in place within the ice and snow. During this cold stretch, the creek's salt levels leveled off. But once the weather finally warmed up and

the snow began to melt, the students caught the exact moment a massive spike of salty runoff flushed directly from the local roadways into the creek.

Testing the water and witnessing that chemical spike firsthand was shocking to the students. It bridged the gap between seeing salting practices on the road and sidewalks and understanding the hidden chemical consequences within the water.

Julie Ann Mountain says there's more. "When you go out and actually do the monitoring, you are becoming a leader. You become a person who is actively contributing to the world rather than just receiving."

Spreading awareness, inspiring future leaders

The students quickly realized that salt pollution has a massive, cascading effect. Mackenzie explained that excessive salt can dehydrate wildlife that rely on healthy freshwater streams. Paityn also pointed out that the danger extends to humans, too, since many communities pull their drinking water directly from local streams and salt isn't often removed by water utilities due to expense and lack of infrastructure.

**"When you go out and actually do the monitoring, you are becoming a leader."
— Science teacher
Julie Ann Mountain**

To combat this lack of public awareness, Paityn and Mackenzie decided to share their data at the Creek Connections Symposium at Allegheny College. For the Symposium, they built a large project display board and later placed it right outside their high school classroom to share with their peers. They also brought the data home to discuss with parents and friends.

A snowball effect of local environmental knowledge

Many people were genuinely surprised to learn that road salt acts as a persistent environmental pollutant. And even for Mackenzie and Paityn, they expected to see high levels of salt in the water but were still surprised at the results from their water testing. For Paityn, this outreach is the best part of community science. She describes it as a “snowball effect” of knowledge—learning something meaningful, teaching someone else and watching the community’s environmental awareness grow.

When asked what advice they would give to other students considering water monitoring,

both students emphasized passion and enjoyment. Paityn urged future monitors to stay on top of their data, gather the necessary equipment and put their whole heart into the work. Mackenzie echoed the sentiment perfectly, noting that the most important thing is simply to have fun while making a difference.

Why this work matters

Paityn and Mackenzie’s winter project highlights exactly why community science is so critical. Road salt dissolves completely into water, making it a hidden threat to our ecosystems and drinking water

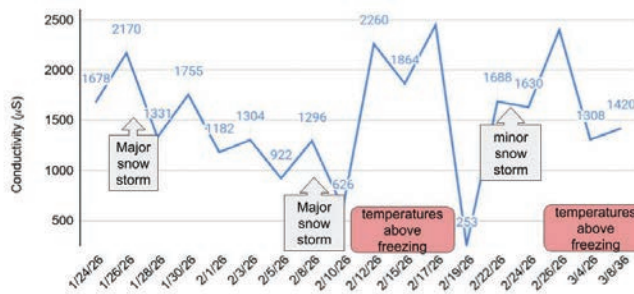
infrastructure. Because local water utilities cannot easily filter salt out of our water, monitoring local streams gives us the vital data we need to advocate for smarter salting practices.

As their science teacher perfectly noted, complex environmental issues don’t have a simple, single fix. It takes local partnerships—and dedicated volunteers like Paityn and Mackenzie—to look at the bigger picture and protect our shared waters.

The most important thing is simply to have fun while making a difference.

Results:

Conductivity using meter vs. Date



Salinity measured with strips vs. Date



Students measured salt concentration using a conductivity meter and Salt Watch test strips. Electrical conductivity in water increases with the higher concentrations of dissolved salt.

LEARN MORE

Head over to iwla.org/salt-watch to request your free test kit and join our nationwide community of water monitors!

Convention Draws a Crowd Including Members of Congress and Conservation Experts

The Izaak Walton League's 2026 national convention in Bloomington, Minn. drew a crowd of more than 300 members, guests and volunteers, and a well-attended Youth Convention.

Wildfire smoke from Canada and the Superior National Forest curtailed some of the Youth Convention's outdoor activities but speakers and exhibits indoors provided a springboard for compelling conversations about national policies, advocacy and the role of volunteers in conserving outdoor America.

The wildfire smoke came from Canada and from the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota, which faces a serious threat of mining pollution.

Representative Betty McCollum and Senator Tina Smith

In her keynote address to the convention, U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) noted that while we can't prevent all wildfires, "we can prevent mining disasters. Nature does not have a way to recover from sulfide mining." She urged the audience to support congressional action to permanently protect the Boundary Waters watershed from the proposed mining.

Citing the League's success in convincing Congress to protect the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in 1924, McCollum said "We need more organizations that bring us together. I'm counting on your help. Without you, it won't happen."

In a video shown, U.S. Senator Tina Smith (D-Minn.) also thanked the League for "working to preserve our natural wonders," including the Boundary Waters. She recently applauded efforts by the state to prevent the sulfide mine, commenting, "We are a mining state, but not this mine in this place."



Rep. Betty McCollum urged League members to advocate for protections of national treasures like the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Resolutions approved by delegates

Delegates approved two resolutions: one that updates the League's conservation policies related to agriculture to better reflect current federal programs, and another that supports more effective consideration of the cumulative impacts of environmental decision making that is meaningful, enforceable and aligned with how harms actually occur.

The full text is available at iwla.org/event/2026-national-convention.

League leaders

Speaking to the convention, National President Scott Meyer described the work needed to manage the tsunami of data centers spreading across the U.S. Due to the volume of water and land they consume, we need better planning, transparency and oversight of their siting and operations, Meyer said. He has formed a committee to focus on that.

Executive Director Jared Mott, describing himself as a duck hunter from the Lower Mississippi, reminded the audience that it was threats to the Upper Mississippi that first galvanized the League, and we know how to take on challenges and win policy battles. "We have been here before," he said.

The League serves as a force for clean water through its policy work and volunteer water monitors. The data they collect provides real information and a narrative about water quality specific to local communities. "We can't just tell Americans to drink less water," Mott said. And with the data collection about nitrate pollution, through Nitrate Watch, the League has "grabbed that tiger by the tail," he said.

Public lands forum

A robust panel about what is needed for the nation's public lands featured several insiders: Mike Dombeck, former U.S. Forest Service Chief and BLM Director;

Becky Rom, National Chair for the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters; and Joe Duggan, a 40-year veteran of Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever. The panel was moderated by Griff Pugh, one of the Green Crew founders and host of the Young Ikes podcast.

Reflecting on the sweeping staff and budget cuts over the past year at the U.S. Forest Service, as well as shuttered research stations and the proposal to move headquarters to Salt Lake City, Dombeck described the impact to the agency is “death by a thousand cuts.” But, he said, there will be an “opportunity to put the puzzle back together” with the best science and technology. The partnerships we’ll need in the future are the new generations, and groups like the Green Crew, he said.

Becky Rom argued that the way forward requires us to think outside the box, “to find a way to make protections of public lands more durable and work better.” One way to do that is by making the economic argument for places like the Boundary Waters, which attracts roughly 150,000 visitors. A 2018 Harvard University study found that the region could add 4,500 more jobs and as much as \$900 million in personal income over the next two decades if the sulfide mine were banned. “This is an economy that can last forever if you let it,” Rom said.

Commenting on the conflagration of wildfires in North America, she pushed for policies that reflect

reality. “You can’t separate climate and forestry.”

Wildfires have played a role in forest ecosystems for millennia, she noted, and the fire-suppression regime dating back to the 1800s has not served us well.

Joe Duggan described the conservation rollbacks by the Trump administration as unprecedented. “We can’t put up with it.” Still, he said, “I have faith in America. It’s the values we have as Americans that give me hope.” Duggan also emphasized the importance of talking about clear economic benefits of conservation. The convention featured a separate session about conservation and food with Minnesota farmer Carmen Fernholz. He spoke about the benefits of smaller farms for their local communities and keeping people on the land. Read more in *Soil Matters*, page 38.

National Elections

At the convention, League delegates elected national officers, producing the following office holders:

- Scott Meyer, President (Iowa)
- Jim Storer, Vice President (Ohio)
- Craig Enneking, Treasurer (Iowa)
- James Meek, Secretary (Iowa)

Delegates also re-elected three Executive Board members:

- Mike Fuge (Wisconsin)
- Rick Graham (Ohio)
- Bill Kelly (Idaho)

Board members for the Endowment

All League members are also automatically members of the Izaak Walton League of America Endowment, which is a separate organization.

The convention elected three new board members for the Endowment:

- Bill Iltzsche (Indiana)
- Shawn Gallagher (Ohio)
- Charlotte Johnson (Iowa)

National Awards

National awards were presented to individual members, chapters and divisions. Details about the award winners appear beginning on page 30.



In addition to a giant loon, the convention featured an innovation hall, youth convention, art exhibit and the perennial favorite parade of states hosted by the League’s state divisions.

NATIONAL ★ AWARDS ★ 2025



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 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 2025.**

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.

Leslie Monostory (New York):

Les is the president of the New York Division, founder of the Central New York Chapter and a League Life member for over four decades. His commitment to the League's mission and his years of engagement in numerous

initiatives have been hugely impactful in his region. His 32-year professional career as an environmental planner allowed him to inform the public, particularly young people, through nature-related programming, especially his Chapter's Project Watershed that trained high school teachers about stream biology and water monitoring techniques. He worked tirelessly to pass legislation that would require the New York Department of Environmental Conservation to recognize legitimate citizen-science programs for water quality data collection.

Dale Braun (Iowa):

Dale is recognized posthumously for his unwavering dedication, vision and leadership. In his short three decades as a League member, he served in multiple leadership roles as the president of the Linn County Chapter and the

Iowa Division, as a national director and chairman of the Executive Board. He also led the Resolutions Committee. He was one of the League's most ardent clean water champions. Whether it was Clean Water Act rollbacks, nitrogen fertilizer spills in waterways or dredging issues on the upper Mississippi River, his lifelong plan—although cut short—was to make the water a little bit cleaner for the next generation.

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.

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. Jodi continued to rise in the League leadership while providing expertise in communications, management and legal matters as a Wisconsin Division national director. Jodi served on the national Executive Board, including as chair, and then led the organization as national president.

Hall of Fame Award

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

Patrice Kistner (South Dakota):

For over two decades Pat served the League locally at the McCook Chapter and at the state- and national-levels including once as a regional governor. As a national director, she served on multiple

national-level resources and standing committees.

Michael Masters, Jr. (West Virginia):

For the past three decades Michael served at various leadership roles including Berkeley County Chapter president and currently as the West Virginia Division president

and national director. He has long dedicated his work to protecting natural resources and promoting responsible outdoor recreation.

**Luann Noll (Illinois):**

A national director, member of several Illinois chapters and an Illinois Division officer, Luann has been active in the League 1972. She's best known for her promotional and organizational work for the division's Giant

Goose Education Workshop, the "Kids In The Woods" chapter program and the League's 100th anniversary celebration held in Peoria in 2022.

**Dr. William B. Gordon (Maryland):**

Bill served in various leadership roles including Bethesda Chevy-Chase Chapter president, board of governors' member, Maryland Division executive secretary, national director and regional

governor. He worked closely with EPA and various local League chapters to form Environmental Stewardship Plans for safe and environmentally responsible shooting range operations. He also helped establish the Izaak Walton Cottage Chapter in England.

**Dorothy Harrington (Minnesota):**

Dorothy, a League member for over 70 years, supported and partnered with her late husband Fay's work to establish Deep Portage Conservation Reserve next to Deep Lake near

Hackensack, Minnesota. Now with the creation of the Resources Heritage Center, 5,000 annual visitors from over 70 schools, benefit from their vision to protect the land, water and wildlife.

Conservation Award

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

**Barbara Hanson (Minnesota):**

For two decades Barb served on Friends of the Minnesota Valley Board supporting watershed education, habitat restoration, volunteer engagement and citizen initiatives. She shared her

organizational expertise working statewide with League chapters and their advocacy projects, as well as with the regional Upper Mississippi River Initiative.

**Matthew J. Norton (Minnesota):**

As a League member and the policy and science director for the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, Matt, shares his expertise and guidance with the Minnesota Division on this issue. Through

his job, he helped guide the conservation strategy through some significant legal and policy battles affecting this natural wonder located on our northern border.

**Jamie Buteyn (South Dakota):**

A retired law enforcement officer and an avid upland gamebird hunter, Jamie is a hunter education instructor, who has incorporated wildlife habitat and conservation as a regular part of

his course presentations at the Sioux Falls Chapter. As a conservation showcase on his property, he planted over 250 trees in shelterbelts and multiple three-acre food plots as habitat for wildlife to thrive on.

**Robert Pitner (Virginia):**

At Virginia's Roanoke Valley Chapter—next year's national convention host—Robert's local conservation work spanned over 40 years. That work included his family's addition of land to the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy

and the Chapter's acquisition of their 226-acre conservation grounds in Roanoke County—complete with streams, pond, hiking trails, managed timberlands and recreational shooting range.

Outdoor Ethics Award

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

**Wendy Reigel (Indiana):**

A Porter County Chapter member, Wendy is recognized for her work to inform citizens about the ethical use of our natural resources and foster a better understanding of the damaging impact of data centers in terms of

water and air quality, noise and light pollution and harms to public natural areas.

Save Our Streams Award

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



Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter (Maryland):

When one enters this chapter's Poolesville, Maryland grounds, they are greeted with a "Conservation Is Our Mission" sign. No doubt that this chapter is also fully invested in the League's Clean Water Program with their extensive stream monitoring efforts on waterways located throughout upper Montgomery County, Maryland.

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.



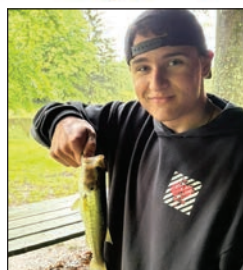
Griffith Pugh (Minnesota):

While he was previously recognized with the Outdoor America's Future Award, Griffith is currently the vice president of this Minnesota Valley Chapter. He was a founding member of this Chapter's Scouting Green

Crew and is active in the Minnesota Division. He played key support and often lead roles in the chapter's on-the-ground conservation projects and is best known as a communication innovator with his podcast "The Young Ike." He's now recognized as an "up and coming" future League leader.

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.



Jayden Haywood (Ohio):

Jayden is best known as the previous president of the National Youth Convention Chapter and an active member back home of the Medina Chapter. He's involved in sports at school, is a local Earth Day ambassador,

promotes the League's conservation message to other youth and at the county fair, and volunteers at a camp for terminally ill children. Jayden's many life experiences and message to other young people to "reach out and not to give up on life" have been published and broadcasted worldwide on social media.



Hannah Barisonzi (Minnesota):

Hannah is founder and co-president of the nationally recognized Green Crew at the Minnesota Valley Chapter, a Scouting America unit. At this youth-led conservation engine,

Hannah has clocked hundreds of service hours on water monitoring, tree planting and trail and habitat restoration. She has conducted many Leave No Trace training sessions. Hannah was a keynote speaker at the 2026 national convention banquet.

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.



Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters (Minnesota):

Formed in 2013 by the

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, the Campaign is recognized for their tireless efforts to educate the public and protect this natural wonder on the U.S.-Canadian border that has been under the threat of mining pollution in recent years.



education, outdoor stewardship and recreation agency, the Three Rivers Park District manages 27,000 acres, conducting fisheries and wildlife habitat restoration and ecosystem protection across the Mississippi, Minnesota and Crow River watersheds.



Three Rivers Park District (Minnesota):

As one of the state's premier conservation

Minnesota Coalition of Residential Environmental Learning Centers (CRELC):

CRELC coordinates efforts of six local centers that provide opportunities for all "to experience nature directly, understand ecological systems

and develop a sense of responsibility toward land, water and wildlife." It is comprised of the Audubon Center of the North Woods, Deep Portage Conservation Reserve, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, Laurentian Environmental Learning Center, Long Lake Conservation Center, and Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center.



Nancy Schuldt (Minnesota):

As the former Fond du Lac Band Water Project Coordinator for the Lake Superior Chippewa tribe, a sovereign Ojibwe Native American nation, Nancy has earned recognition for her outstanding work to protect and manage Minnesota's waters.



James Wisker (Minnesota):

For his efforts to develop balanced urban ecology policy for connecting land, water and people, this award goes to James for his ongoing work at the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, one of the state's largest urban watersheds.



Seneca Valley Trout Unlimited (Maryland):

This local TU Chapter has coordinated ongoing educational events at the Rockville Chapter and conducted many watershed protection efforts and fisheries habitat work in central Maryland.



Carmen and Sally Fernholz (Minnesota):

From the A-Frame Farm located in Madison, Minnesota, the Fernholz family has long promoted productive organic farming, sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship and soil health. Carmen helped to establish the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, a partnership between the University of Minnesota and public stakeholders. Carman was a keynote speaker at the League's 2026 national convention

Shooting Sports Award

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



Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter Rifle and Pistol Committee (Maryland):

This League Chapter manages and maintains their shooting range with a volunteer group of dedicated and skilled recreational shooters. The chapter hosts a variety of competitions and educational events—including for Scouting merit badges—as well as fun shoots and hunter sight-in-days as a benefit to members and others in the community.



Duval Crist (Maryland):

An active member of the Rockville Chapter, Duval oversees the Chapter's ranges as the chair of their Range Safety Committee and maintains the ranges for compliance inspection by the county government. His committee conducts safety, use and procedure orientation, and he restored the Chapter's firearms training classes with certified NRA instructors.



Jeff Rawlinson (Nebraska):

As a longtime member of the Lincoln Chapter, Jeff, an avid hunter and shooter, worked for the state fish and wildlife agency as outdoor education coordinator. He worked on creating and passage of statewide

shooting range protection laws and advocating for the R3 Initiative—the recruitment, reactivation and retention of participants. He also brought his knowledge to be part of the Chapter's Range Safety Committee.



Todd Taylor (South Dakota):

From the Sioux Falls Chapter, Todd, is a knowledgeable trap shooting coach who designed and conducts a gun safety and technique course for local homeschooled children and their parents. He has helped to recruit

many new members and supporters of the League.

James Lawton Childs Award

Recognizes chapter accomplishments in conservation.



Berkeley County Chapter (West Virginia):

This Chapter in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia on the banks of the Potomac River, conducts roadside and stream litter clean-up events to protect watersheds and improve water quality and aquatic habitat. The Chapter also advocates responsible hunting and boating and hosts state-sanctioned educational courses open to the public.



Rockville Chapter (Maryland):

This Chapter is known locally for its total

conservation package. Activities have included their nationally recognized American chestnut tree farm, wood duck and bluebird nesting box management, Save Our Streams waterways monitoring, pollinator gardens, Christmas bird counts and adopt-a-highway clean-ups.

Robert C. O'Hair Award

Recognizes outstanding chapter youth programs.



Emerson Hough Chapter (Iowa):

For years, one of the Chapter's priorities has been working with youth and getting them to spend more time outdoors. They founded the Jasper County Youth Fishing Club. The Chapter hosts meetings, educational clinics and sanctioned catch-photo-release fishing tournaments that grew to more than 80 middle and high school participants. Young anglers learn about fisheries biology and habitat, lure making, fly-tying and kayaking.



Fairfield Chapter (Ohio):

Over the course of seven years, the Chapter hosts biannual adopt-a-tree events for local schools, where students learn how to properly plant trees in public parklands. The Chapter organizes gathering places for training, provides lunches and sponsors what-they-learned-about-trees essay writing contests. To date, the youth have planted 2,328 trees in the community valued at well over \$33,000.



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 including stream monitoring for macroinvertebrates, conservation and environmental scholarships, junior air rifle and BB gun training and 4-H awards.

Best Division Newsletter

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

Maryland Waltonian:

This award honors the state division judged to have created outstanding League communications during the past year. The Maryland Division often reports on events and activities from its 12 chapters, as well as information about regional environmental and natural resources topics and legislative issues in the state.

Best Chapter Newsletters

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

Shoot The Breeze:

Published by the award-winning Mount Airy Chapter in Maryland, *Shoot the Breeze* welcomes contributions from members and articles about local conservation and the Chapter's recreational shooting events. The newsletter keeps members informed and plays a large role in member recruitment and retention.

Outdoor Loudoun:

From the Loudoun County Chapter of Virginia, this newsletter features information on activities, educational programs and conservation projects, distributed via email and posted on the Chapter website. bcciwla.org

Best Chapter Website

Based on appearance, originality, timeliness and news coverage.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter (Maryland):

This website is thoughtfully organized and user-friendly—informative, colorful and easy to navigate. Information about the chapter and the entire League covers activities, newsletters, membership, officer contacts and a calendar of events. (bcciwla.org).

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.

Mount Airy Chapter (Maryland):

The Chapter's membership committee promotes "a safe, educational and enjoyable community club that provides something of interest to many." Membership is open and available to all and promoted throughout their community—marketed with web presence and social media. Their newsletter keeps members informed and helps with renewals and retention. With a solid business plan they established at the end of 2024, membership has grown from 201 to more than 350.

John C. Gregory Award

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

Minnesota Division

With a net increase of 64 net new members in 2025.

Membership Achievement Awards

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

Greatest Percent Increase:

Cypress Chapter (Florida) with over 150 percent increase growing from 32 to 80 members.

Greatest Net Gain:

Eugene Chapter (Oregon) added 157 new members to grow their total membership to 825.

Membership Merit Awards

Recognizes membership growth based on chapter size.

50-and-Under Members Class for Percent Increase and Net Gain:

Will Dilg Chapter (Minnesota)

51-to-250 Members Class for Percent Increase and Net Gain:

Cypress Chapter (Florida)

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

Mount Airy Chapter (Maryland)

501-and-Over Members Class for Percent Increase and Net Gain:

Eugene Chapter (Oregon)

110-Percent Awards

These chapters grew by 10 percent or more in 2025.

California

Fullerton

Florida

Cypress
Mangrove

Illinois

Calumet Region

Indiana

Diana
Huntington County

Iowa

Clinton County
Davenport
Ding Darling
Dubuque
Indian Creek
Iowa County

Maquoketa Valley

Oakdale

Sabula

Waterloo

Worth County

Maryland

Mount Airy

Minnesota

Minnesota Valley
New Ulm #79
Will Dilg

Nebraska

Columbus

New York

Rome

North Dakota

St. John #1

Ohio

Buckeye State Youth
Central Ohio
Cincinnati
Headwaters

Oregon

Eugene

Pennsylvania

Franklin County

South Dakota

Rapid City

Wisconsin

Upper Mississippi River

Also

National Youth Convention

Defenders Chapter Achievement Awards

The following chapters received this annual recognition for their 2025 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)	Central New York (New York)	Jack Loso (Minnesota)	Minnesota Valley (Minnesota)	Sportsman's (Maryland)	Wayne County (Ohio)
Austin (Minnesota)	Des Moines (Iowa)	Jacque (Minnesota)	Mountaineer (West Virginia)	Sunshine (South Dakota)	Wes Libby- Northern Lakes (Minnesota)
Berkeley County (West Virginia)	Dwight Lydell (Michigan)	Kampeska (South Dakota)	New London (Minnesota)	Tiffin-Seneca County (Ohio)	West Central (Iowa)
Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Maryland)	Elgin (Illinois)	Lincoln (Nebraska)	New Ulm #79 (Minnesota)	W.J. McCabe (Minnesota)	Wildlife Achievement (Maryland)
Bill Cook (Wisconsin)	Frederick #1 (Maryland)	Linn County (Iowa)	Owatonna (Minnesota)	Walter J. Breckenridge (Minnesota)	Will Dilg (Minnesota)
Brown County (Wisconsin)	Fredericksburg- Rappahannock (Virginia)	Lois Green-Sligo (Maryland)	Prairie Woods (Minnesota)	Warren County (Iowa)	York #67 (Pennsylvania)
Bush Lake (Minnesota)	Grand Island (Nebraska)	Loudoun County (Virginia)	Rochester (Minnesota)	Warren County (Virginia)	
Cass County (Minnesota)	Hamilton (Ohio)	McCook Lake (South Dakota)	Rockville (Maryland)		
		Mid-Shore (Maryland)	Sioux Falls (South Dakota)		



SOIL MATTERS

League Events Provide Insights into Regenerative Agriculture, Conservation and Diversification

By KATE HANSEN, Agriculture Program Director

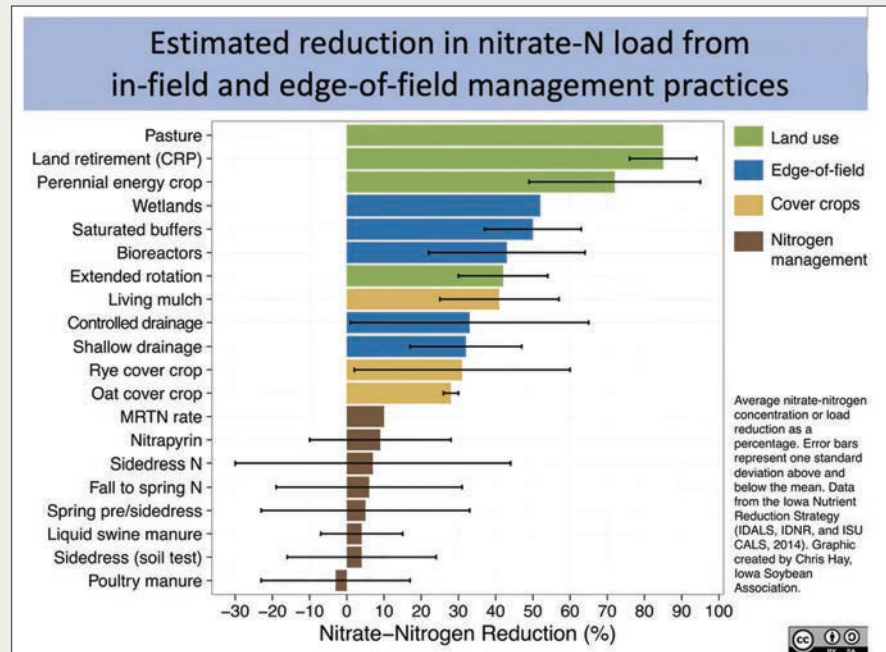
The League's mission to defend soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife is wide-reaching. Yet, changes can be made within our agriculture system that touch every element. Keeping living roots in the soil will reduce its erosion. Buffer strips along a stream will improve water quality downstream. The list goes on.

This summer, two experts shared insights about conservation in agriculture, one from an academic perspective, one from a farmer perspective. Both discussed how best practices on the farm will have positive impacts far beyond, and in particular, highlighted the importance of diversification.

Regenerative solutions

Dr. Matt Liebman is Professor Emeritus and the Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. As part of the League's inaugural Nitrate Pollution Awareness Week, he presented a webinar titled "Regenerative Solutions for Soil Health and Water Quality."

In his remarks, Liebman discussed how the Corn Belt was once mostly prairie. With their deep roots, prairie plants and



Looking at practices that reduce nitrate load in our waterways, this chart shows that pastures and land retirement top the list, with edge-of-field practices like saturated buffers and bioreactors not far behind.

systems enriched the soil, creating the highly productive soils that the region is known for today.

Diverse operations growing small grains and livestock once dotted the landscape. But in recent decades, the region's agriculture has become dominated by corn, soybeans and livestock facilities. Combined, this homogeneity and common management practices are depleting the soils and contributing to water quality issues.

Liebman described the continuing and emerging challenges related to dominant farming systems in the Corn Belt as:

- Soil erosion
- Air and water contamination by nutrients, pesticides, microbial pathogens, fine particulate matter and other substances
- Links between agrichemical exposure, cancers and birth defects

- Loss of wildlife habitat and wildlife populations, including pollinators
- Climate change effects
- High production costs and volatile market prices

Liebman argues that while we know the best management practices that can make an impact (see chart), progress has been too slow. In Iowa, he said, there are roughly 24 million acres of corn and soybeans; 3.9 million acres planted in cover crops; and only 190,600 acres protected by bioreactors, saturated buffers, oxbows and water quality wetlands.

Dr. Liebman identified several strategies to drive more conservation including improved crop genetics and technical innovation. He said “substantial improvements in the environmental sustainability of Midwestern U.S. agriculture are achievable now, without sacrificing food security or farmer livelihoods. We need some changes in policy, we need some new market opportunities, but we can do things that address our water quality problems and soil health without huge changes in what we are doing.”

The webinar was recorded and can be viewed on the League’s YouTube channel, [youtube.com/user/IzaakWaltonLeague](https://www.youtube.com/user/IzaakWaltonLeague).

Keynote on Conservation

Carmen Fernholz began farming in southwest Minnesota in 1972, and shortly after adopted organic practices. He grew his operation over the years and today is in the

process of retiring by transitioning the operation to a younger farmer.

Fernholz described his experiences in a keynote address at the League’s national convention in Bloomington, Minnesota in July.

In the span of his career, Fernholz has prioritized conservation in several ways. He does not use herbicides, pesticides or commercial fertilizers. He plants cover crops and grows a diversified crop rotation. While many of his neighbors grow only corn and soybeans, he also grows a host of small grains: wheat, oats, barley, flax and alfalfa. In other words, he has taken steps that Dr. Liebman would be pleased to see. A diverse rotation has been shown to improve soil health and water quality, with a particularly strong impact in terms of reducing phosphorus. There is also growing evidence to show that diverse crop rotations benefit wildlife.

Fernholz is perhaps best known for leading the way on a new and innovative crop, Kernza. In 2022, Nebraska Public Media called Kernza, “the grain you’ve never heard of that could revolutionize farming.”

While most field crops grown in Minnesota are annuals, Kernza is a perennial wheatgrass. Kernza’s roots will typically stay in the ground for three to four years, growing up to 10 feet deep in the soil. It can be used for baking, beer and other food products.

As a perennial, Kernza requires less soil disruption, which is good for soil health and water quality. Its robust root systems store

carbon and are resilient in the face of drought and floods.

Fernholz focused his remarks on the agriculture system as a whole. He stressed the importance of supporting small- and medium-sized family farms by purchasing their products, and perhaps more importantly, through federal policy.

He cited the ways in which federal policies have shaped agriculture, and the importance of advocating for a new path forward if we want to see change. That includes many of the things the League advocates for like incentives to adopt beneficial conservation practices. He also described challenges, like the concentration of government payments to the biggest and largest farms, leaving little for the small- and medium-sized operations trying to stay afloat.

Above all, Fernholz emphasized the connection that smaller farms, particularly diversified ones, have on their local communities. Not only is it about land use and what a farmer grows and raises. It is also about keeping people on the land and passing the baton to the next generation, something his father did, and now he is as well.

Lessons learned

In their recent talks, Matt Liebman and Carmen Fernholz reminded us of a truth: we know the type of change that we need. No single practice will save us from the threats our natural resources face, but with enough change across the landscape, the sum of the parts can.



Protecting the “Duck Factory,” the Roadless Rule and Wetlands

By JARED MOTT, Executive Director

Our Prairie “Duck Factory”

A recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determination of “no further action planned” regarding changes for wetlands easements in the prairie pothole region (PPR) is welcome news to duck hunters and conservationists across the country. The League views that decision as consistent with preserving the integrity of permanent easements and avoiding a rollback of critical wetlands protections.

USFWS had issued a *Federal Register* notice requesting information on its drain tile setback calculations finalized in 2024 that protected wetland covered by these easements on a case-by-case basis. The notice published July 24 gave the public only 14 days to submit feedback on how USFWS determines setback distances for drain tile around wetland easements. Under the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program, USFWS buys voluntary easements from willing privatelandowners using federal Duck Stamp funds to permanently protect essential wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife.

The prairie pothole region spans roughly 118 million acres across Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota and serves as America’s primary duckbreeding landscape. Much of

this core habitat (about 64 million acres in the U.S.) is privately owned and farmed, so conservation depends on voluntary agreements with landowners.

The Izaak Walton League supports the USFWS 2024 rule that codifies six decades of sciencebased protections for wetland easements. These easements, purchased with Duck Stamp dollars, are permanent conservation investments that protect the small, shallow potholes critical for nesting waterfowl. Nearly 1.7 million prairie pothole acres are conserved under easement today, supporting roughly two million breeding pairs and contributing about 700,000 young ducks to each fall migration. The Duck Stamp program has generated about \$1.3 billion for habitat acquisition since its expansion in 1958.

The League remains concerned about any effort to align USFWS drain tile setback rules with USDA NRCS “Swampbuster” standards, which permit drainage judged to have only “minimal effects.” Swampbuster was designed as a baseline for program eligibility, not as protection for permanent easements. Applying its metrics could allow drain tile near protected wetlands and permit rapid water removal—hydrologic changes that can permanently degrade the shallow wetlands that make the PPR so productive.

The League supports the 2024 rule because it clarifies landowner expectations, retains sitespecific flexibility, formalizes a sciencebased setback method and provides a safe harbor for those who comply.

Rolling Back Roadless

On August 18, 2026, USDA proposed rescinding the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, a change that would remove protections on more than 45 million acres of roadless National Forest lands. If finalized, the proposal would reopen these backcountry landscapes to new road construction and largescale commercial logging.

Established in 2001 after an extensive public process, with more than 600 local meetings conducted and 1.6 million comments (95 percent in favor, submitted), the Roadless Rule currently safeguards roughly 58 million acres across 39 states. It prevents unnecessary new roads and broad commercial logging in roadless areas while allowing many activities to continue: hunting, fishing, recreation, grazing, mining and energy leasing. Crucially, as currently written, the Roadless Rule already permits hazardous fuel treatments, selective timber harvest and other forest management actions designed to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

Roadless landscapes protect headwater streams and provide

critical habitat for elk, deer, native trout and other fish and wildlife. An estimated 25 million Americans depend on drinking water from watersheds connected to roadless areas. Removing the Rule would increase the risk of degraded water quality and quantity, habitat fragmentation and diminished backcountry hunting and fishing opportunities.

The Forest Service already manages more than 370,000 miles of roads, far more than is sustainable, while facing an \$8.6 billion deferred maintenance backlog. And 58 percent of that maintenance need is tied to existing roads that are deteriorating. Building new roads into intact backcountry increases costs and risks. Studies show most wildfires on national forests originate near roads; expanding road networks can therefore raise human-caused fire risk. The 2001 Rule balances protection of intact landscapes with the ability to conduct hazardous fuel treatments where needed.

The Forest Service can address wildfire and forest health challenges without repealing durable protections for roadless areas. Maintaining the Roadless Rule preserves clean water, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and long-term resilience on public lands. This was reflected in the League's comments for the record, as well as the comments submitted by hundreds of Ikes who responded to the League's action alert.

Squeezing Wetlands

On September 4, EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) issued a supplemental

proposed rule that would further narrow which waters qualify as "waters of the United States" (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act. The new proposal would replace the previous "wet season" test with a stricter requirement that a waterbody must be "perennial" to fall within federal jurisdiction.

The agencies' November 2025 draft, which already gutted many of the Clean Water Act's protections, had used states' wetseason conditions to help determine jurisdiction, defining "relatively permanent" waters as those with standing or continuous flow year-round or at least during the wet season, and defining "continuous surface connection" as having surface water during the wet season and abutting a jurisdictional water. Those formulations prompted widespread confusion and critical public comments.

This new supplemental proposal seeks even narrower definitions for "relatively permanent," "perennial" and "continuous surface connection." Under the new approach, "relatively permanent" would be defined as "perennial bodies of water," with a limited exception allowing a single, nonanomalous dry spell of up to 30 days per year without losing status. Multiple or repeated dry periods would disqualify a waterbody, meaning most intermittent streams likely would not be considered relatively permanent.

The agencies also propose defining "perennial" as having standing or continuously flowing water every day of the year under ordinary conditions (and are

soliciting comment on simpler language meaning continuous year-round flow).

A narrower test for "continuous surface connection" is also proposed: only wetlands with perennial surface water that is continuously connected to a jurisdictional water, such that the boundary between water and wetland is indistinct, would qualify. The agencies admit very few wetlands would meet this standard.

This proposal represents the most damaging threat to clean water since passage of the Clean Water Act. It effectively takes America more than 50 years backwards to a regulatory landscape that hasn't existed since the Act was passed to address rampant water pollution in 1972.

The EPA and Corps only accepted public comments for 30 days, an incredibly short comment period for such a vast deregulation of federal clean water protections, ending on October 9. While the League has submitted comments and activated our grassroots networks of Ikes and volunteer water monitors to fight this short-sighted proposal, we are exploring options for restoring some of the Clean Water Act's protections.

Keep up by subscribing to the League's Conservation Currents and clean water newsletters and closely monitoring www.iwla.org/advocacy for opportunities to weigh in.

How Salt and Climate Change Threaten Our Waterways

BY ABBY HILEMAN, Salt Watch Coordinator

From life-giving seasoning and ancient currency to a winter safety necessity, salt is deeply woven into human infrastructure. We love it on our food, rely on it to keep our winter roads safe and marvel at it in our oceans. Yet the boundary between a helpful tool and an environmental pollutant is rapidly blurring. While peak road salting happens in the dead of winter, a quiet ecological crisis unfolds months later. Rising waterway temperatures and changing climate patterns are supercharging salt toxicity, turning a seasonal runoff issue into a year-round threat to our freshwater ecosystems.

The unseen winter inundation

Salt has quietly emerged as one of the most pervasive pollution problems in the U.S. Salt pollution can come from applying winter road salt, saltwater intrusion, water softener discharge, saltwater pools, sewage effluent, urbanization and dust control operations. In northern states, the vast majority of this contamination stems from winter management (the salt applied to sidewalks, parking lots and roadways to melt ice and prevent accidents). While public safety remains a paramount priority, winter salt is often grossly overused.

A cultural misconception drives this behavior: the belief that “more salt equals more melting.” Many assume that salt should cover the ground completely or crunch underfoot. In reality, when granular salt is applied, the granules should be spread out about three inches apart to allow for the most effective melting pattern.

Visualizing the correct amount is simple: a standard 12-ounce coffee mug holds enough granular salt to effectively treat a 20-foot driveway, 10 sidewalk squares or two parking spaces.

Fortunately, many professional applicators are shifting toward salt reduction strategies, including brine. Brine, a liquid mixture of 23.3 percent salt and water, drastically cuts application costs, reduces

overall salt use, minimizes tracking into businesses and protects the environment, all while maintaining winter safety. And this is important because just a small quantity of salt, such as a teaspoon, can permanently pollute up to five gallons of water.

A year-round threat

Salt does not simply disappear when winter ends. While it dissolves and vanishes from sight, it lingers in soil, groundwater and local streams for decades.

Through the Izaak Walton League’s Salt Watch program (saltwatch.org), community scientists nationwide are tracking this persistent threat. Using free test kits provided by Salt Watch, volunteers collect and upload data directly to the Clean Water Hub (cleanwaterhub.org), the League’s national water quality database. Historically, this data highlighted massive pollution spikes from salt after winter storms, during thaws or rain events. However, as year-round sampling has increased, a troubling

It only takes
1 teaspoon of salt



to **permanently pollute**
5 gallons of water



trend has emerged: increased salt spikes during the summer and fall.

During dry seasons, drought conditions reduce water volume in streams and rivers. With less water available to dilute the system, remaining chloride (a component in most winter deicers) concentrates rapidly, causing salt spikes outside of winter months. Because salt is a non-point source pollutant, it washes from many diffuse surfaces—parking lots, highways, and driveways—into the groundwater and storm drains that empty directly into our local watersheds.

A warming planet fuels salt toxicity

Climate change and salt pollution are deeply entangled. Shifting weather patterns bring more frequent, volatile, and intense storms alongside warmer annual temperatures. We see this domino effect during erratic winter seasons, such as this past winter with unexpected, early-season ice storms prompting massive, reactionary salt applications that drained municipal stockpiles and triggered nationwide supply shortages.

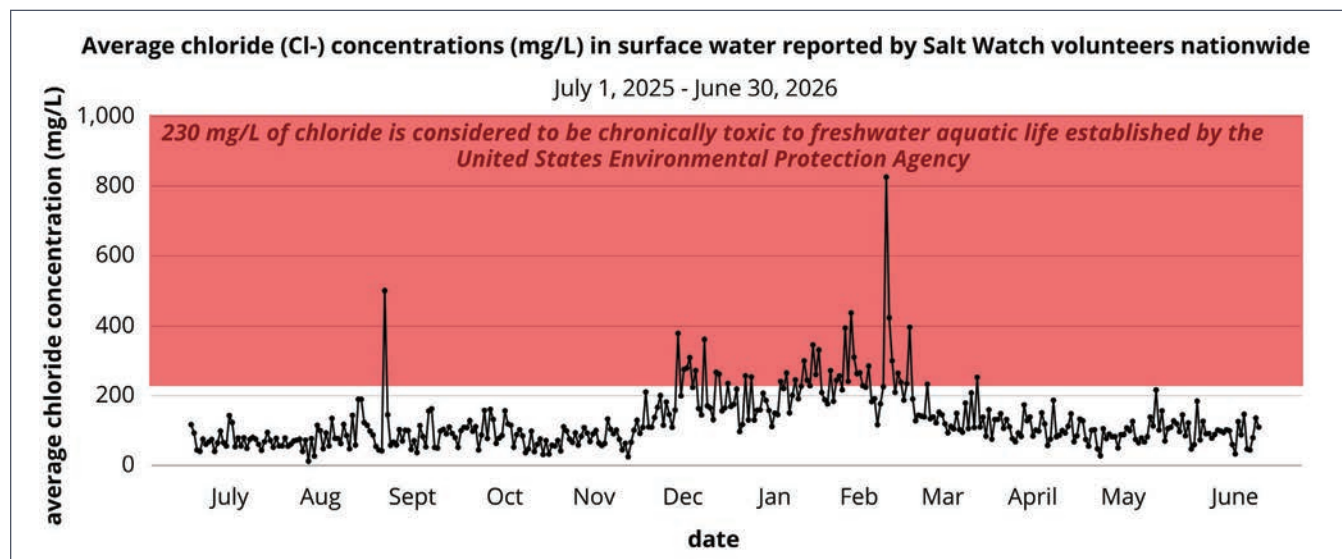
This excess salt can also negatively impact freshwater aquatic life. On a normal day, freshwater organisms, such as macroinvertebrates, plankton, and fish, must constantly regulate the salt inside their bodies through osmosis. Because freshwater organisms have bodies that are naturally saltier than the freshwater streams they inhabit, they work to pump water out and keep vital salts in.

Salty winter runoff reverses this pressure. When

streams are inundated with salt, aquatic organisms must expend immense metabolic energy to keep freshwater inside their bodies and actively pump excess salt out. In winter, freezing water temperatures slow down an organism's metabolic rate, which temporarily cushions them against the worst of this osmotic shock.

The real danger arrives with warmer weather, like in the summer when metabolic rates of freshwater organisms increase. Waterways with still elevated levels of salt from winter runoff cause additional stress on freshwater organisms. Organisms are forced to exhaust their energy reserves on basic survival and osmoregulation rather than growth or reproduction. This metabolic exhaustion can dramatically lower their upper temperature tolerance, leaving them highly vulnerable to dying during summer heatwaves.

Under a changing climate, these distinct stressors are no longer isolated seasonal events; they are colliding to form an ongoing, year-round crisis. As global temperatures rise, summer heatwaves are becoming longer, more frequent, and more severe. Concurrently, shifting precipitation patterns trigger extended periods of summer drought, drying up streams and concentrating the lingering winter salt. This means our local wildlife is trapped in a compounding trap: just when the water gets its hottest and metabolic stress is at its highest, the water also gets saltier. By shifting the baseline of both temperature and salinity, climate change ensures that freshwater ecosystems are given no time to recover,



accelerating the decline of vulnerable native species year after year.

The collapse of the food chain

Smaller organisms, such as the macroscopic crustacean *Daphnia*, are often the first to succumb to these salty, warm conditions. As a foundational link in the aquatic food chain, *Daphnia* graze on algae and serve as the primary food source for young fish and other wildlife.

A study published by Dr. Shelley Arnott et al in *Environmental Science and Technology* revealed that *Daphnia* are incredibly sensitive to road salt, experiencing reproductive failure and increased mortality at chloride levels far below current federal guidelines—sometimes as low as 5 to 40 mg/L. When these zooplankton populations collapse under stressors like salt, the entire ecosystem shifts.

As documented in an ecological review by Dr. Hilary Dugan of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Dr. Shelley E. Arnott of Queens University in *WIREs Water*, salt pollution drastically disrupts the flow of energy and materials through aquatic food webs. With decreased numbers of *Daphnia*, unchecked algae growth can block sunlight, deplete dissolved oxygen and create aquatic “dead zones.” This, coupled with biological stress from increased temperatures, increased salt and less food, can lower survival rates among all but the most robust and adaptable organisms, opening the door for robust, highly adaptable invasive species to take over.

The path forward: hope on the horizon

Salt is a complex piece of the broader climate puzzle, but unlike many global environmental stressors, it is a problem we can actively solve at the local level. With increased public awareness and smarter community management, we are already making significant strides. But there is a lot more work to do.

Protecting our waterways and drinking water starts right at home. This winter, we can all become better stewards of our watersheds by practicing three simple steps on our own doorsteps.

- **Shovel First:** Clear snow early and often, reducing the need for chemical deicers altogether.
- **Scatter smartly:** If you use salt, leave space between the granules rather than creating a solid white sheet. Shoot for granules being 3” apart for most effective melting.
- **Sweep up:** Once the storm passes, sweep up leftover salt so it doesn’t wash into the nearest storm drain during the next rain. You can store this salt in a closed container for use during the next storm event.

By changing how we manage winter safety, we can ensure our summer streams remain vibrant, healthy, and full of life for generations to come.

THE TOXICITY THRESHOLD

How much salt is too much? Water quality criteria for chloride established in 1988 by the EPA set national baselines for freshwater aquatic life, though several states are updating their rules to adjust chloride toxicity based on other factors (like water hardness).

U.S. EPA CRITERIA:

- **Chronic (Long-term exposure):** 230 mg/L (Four-day average, not to be exceeded more than once every three years).
- **Acute (Short-term exposure):** 860 mg/L (One-hour average, not to be exceeded more than once every three years).

CANADIAN CRITERIA:

- **Chronic (Long-term exposure):** 120 mg/L (Protects all life stages from reproductive and growth failure).
- **Acute (Short-term exposure):** 640 mg/L (Severe limit to prevent immediate lethality).

While federal guidelines are traditionally established using standardized laboratory tests at fixed temperatures, real-world climate shifts are altering how organisms tolerate these thresholds.



2025 Financial Highlights

Combined balance sheet, statement of activities and changes in net assets for year ending December 31, 2025.

Public Support and Revenue

Grants and contributions	3,051,944
Investment income	204,205
Rental income, net	438,598
In-kind services	279,358
Other	<u>23,040</u>
Total public support and revenue	3,997,145

Program Expenses

Clean water	920,009
Membership	752,043
Communications, media	647,820
Conservation	589,903
Agriculture	229,652
Chapter relations	202,454
Annual national convention	66,208
Missouri River Initiative	<u>9,618</u>
Total program expenses	3,417,707

Supporting and planning services	
Management and general	279,289
Fundraising	<u>417,655</u>
Total supporting and planning	696,944

TOTAL EXPENSES 4,114,651

Changes in net assets from operations	(117,506)
Unrealized loss or gain on investments	649,238
Changes in net assets	531,732

Net assets beginning of year	<u>12,556,200</u>
Net assets ends of year	13,087,932

Balance Sheet

Assets

Cash and cash equivalents	2,885,764
Grants receivables	27,009
Rent receivables	20,093
Prepaid expenses	39,855
Net fixed assets, building, land, etc	1,692,788
Investments	8,529,440
Rent receivables, net current portion	162,212
Operating leases right to use asset, net	<u>32,198</u>
Total Assets	13,389,359

Liabilities and Net Assets

Liabilities

Accounts payable & accrued liabilities	151,382
Accrued salaries & related expenses	70,525
Operating leases liability, current	8,446
Operating leases long term	24,842
Security deposits	28,075
Deferred revenue	<u>18,157</u>

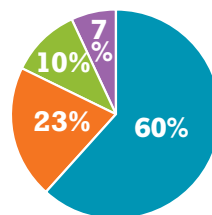
Total liabilities 301,427

Net Assets

Without donor restriction	11,348,454
With donor restriction	<u>1,739,478</u>

Total Net Assets 13,087,932

Total Liabilities and Net Assets 13,389,359



USE OF FUNDS

- Conservation and Education
- Membership and Chapter Relations
- Fundraising
- Management and General



Six Years of Outdoor Adventure Inspire the Next Generation of Conservationists

By DONNA SHRIVER, Digital Communications Manager



Ohio ► This summer, 52 young outdoor enthusiasts traded screens for streams during two free, three-day Conservation Kids Camp hosted at the **Hamilton Chapter** of the Izaak Walton League chapter property and organized by Butler Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Now in its sixth year—and its third year at the chapter's beautiful outdoor facility—the camp continues to connect kids with nature through hands-on learning, outdoor exploration and unforgettable experiences.

Campers explored a wide range of conservation topics, including survival skills, first aid, forestry, fishing, water quality, birds, reptiles, amphibians,

bees and decomposers. Rather than learning from a classroom, they spent their days outdoors, discovering the natural world firsthand.

The camp's success is made possible by an incredible team of volunteers and partners. Butler SWCD staff, Izaak Walton League members, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service employees, MetroParks staff, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists, Ohio State University of Butler County agents, Hamilton Conservation Corp volunteers and former campers donated their time and expertise. This collaborative support helps keep the program completely free for families.

Fishing remained the favorite activity for many campers. Using educational materials from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' First Cast program, children learned casting, knot tying and the importance of healthy waterways before heading to the pond with rods provided by the chapter. Whether they caught a fish or simply cheered on a friend, the excitement was contagious.

Wildlife programs were equally memorable. Campers learned about turtles from a former camper who now rehabilitates turtles, explored Ohio's frogs and toads before searching for amphibians around the pond, and discovered the fascinating

world of birds through bird walks, binocular activities and owl pellet dissections.

One of the newest additions this year—survival shelter building—quickly became a favorite. Using invasive honeysuckle removed from the property, campers worked together to build shelters while learning how both people and wildlife use natural materials for protection. Many couldn't wait to recreate their shelters at home.

Conservation Kids Camp also teaches the importance of giving back. During the June session, campers created tree identification stakes that will be installed

throughout the chapter property and at a local tree planting site. Previous campers have also planted native flowers, painted rain barrels, created educational displays and participated in community science projects.

Community partnerships make the camp possible. The Izaak Walton League provides the pond, forests, wildflower plantings, playground and meeting space, while Butler Soil and Water Conservation District organizes the camp, plans themes, handles registration and covers consumable supplies. Educational materials from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources

and support from numerous conservation organizations further enhance the experience.

The greatest measure of the camp's success isn't found in attendance numbers—it's in the excitement of campers asking about next year's activities before this year's camp has even ended.

After six years, Conservation Kids Camp continues to inspire curiosity, build confidence and foster a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors, proving that the next generation of conservationists is already hard at work.

*Content Contributions from:
Anita Walls and Lynn White*



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.



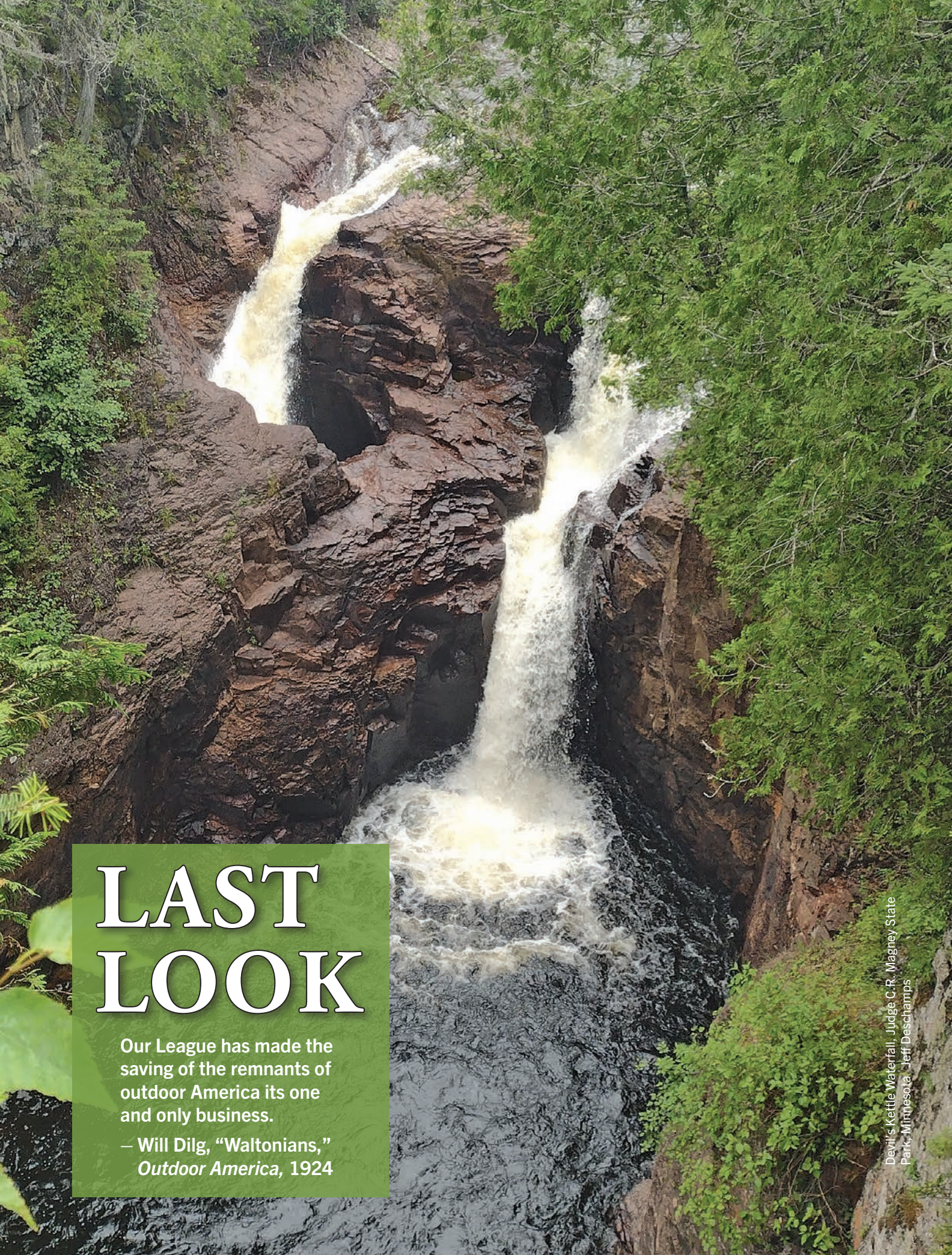
SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

LEARN MORE ABOUT NHF DAY AND TAKE THE PLEDGE AT:



NHFDAY.ORG





LAST LOOK

Our League has made the saving of the remnants of outdoor America its one and only business.

— Will Dilg, "Waltonians,"
Outdoor America, 1924



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

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
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Lebanon Junction, KY

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***

