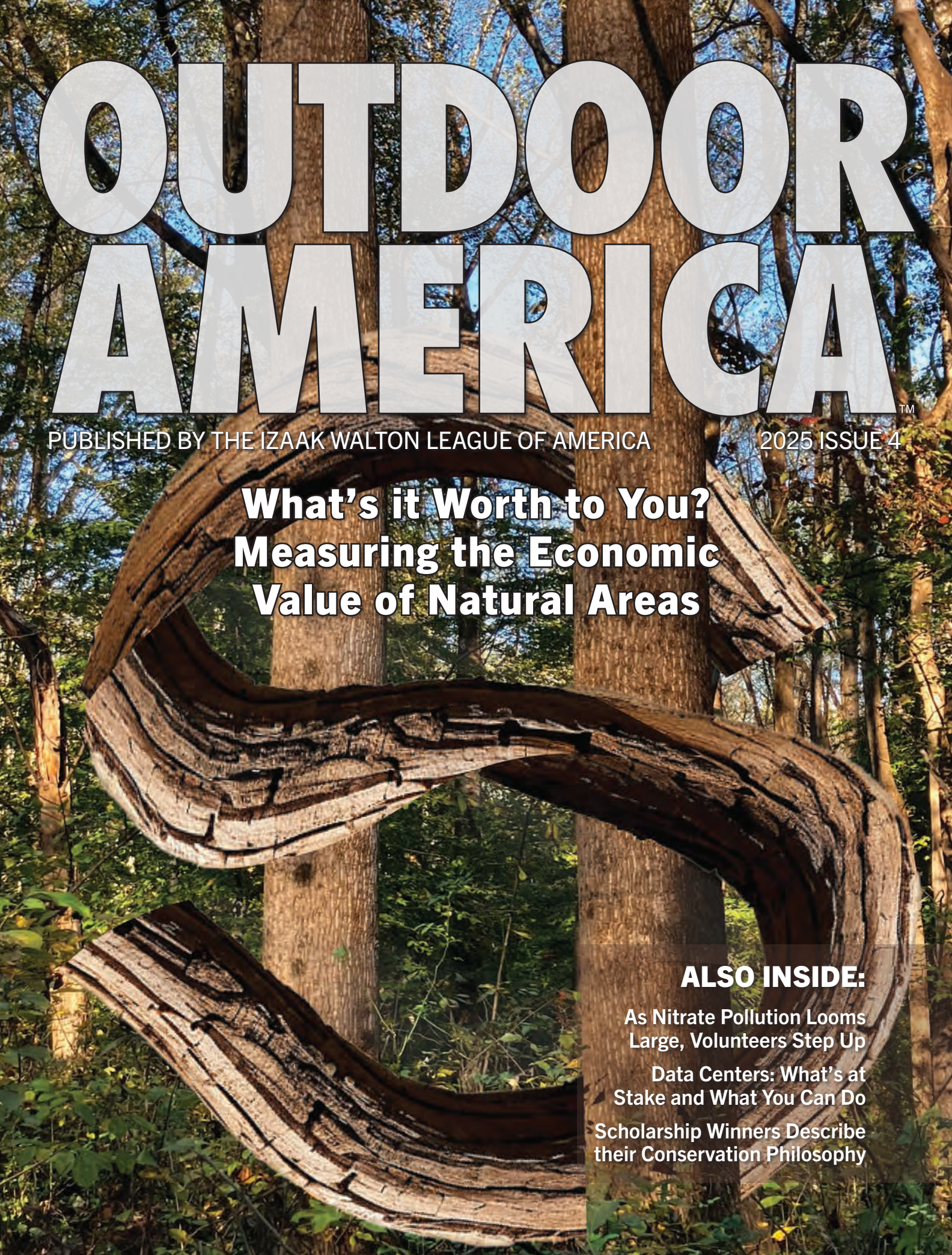

OUTDOOR AMERICA™

PUBLISHED BY THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA 2025 ISSUE 4

What's it Worth to You? Measuring the Economic Value of Natural Areas

ALSO INSIDE:

As Nitrate Pollution Looms Large, Volunteers Step Up

Data Centers: What's at Stake and What You Can Do

Scholarship Winners Describe their Conservation Philosophy

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Michael Reinemer

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.**

Taking on Hyperscale Data Centers: What You Can Do

SCOTT MEYER | National President

Writing this for the final 2025 issue of *Outdoor America,* I would like to start by highlighting some of our Ikes in action.

Hannah Barisonzi from the Minnesota Valley Green crew spoke at the Climate Mic Drop Summit during the UN Climate Summit in New York. The Des Plaines Chapter in Illinois hosted Senator Dick Durbin's State Director. The Arlington-Fairfax Chapter in Virginia performed its first Save Our Streams monitoring event.

Our national staff provided training to Maryland salt crews on proper salt application techniques. Staff also hosted the Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative, which was formed 10 years ago in partnership with the EPA to work with government and other organizations on Chesapeake Bay water quality.

The Iowa Division launched a GoFundMe campaign to support nitrate testing after Iowa's government ended support for the monitoring program. I know there is much more action being taken by Ikes that we don't have space to recognize. Keep up the good work!

Artificial intelligence (AI) and hyperscale data centers

Why should Ikes care about AI? For many people, AI lives in the Internet and does things for us. As many Ikes across the country have learned, AI is actually processed in hyperscale data centers which present a potentially significant environmental impact.

Picture a one and a half story building covering nearly six acres (250,000 square feet) with cooling towers on top of it. Depending on the location, most people would not think much about it. It is what they don't see that should concern them.

All of the data centers I looked into overstate the job creation numbers significantly while understating the requirements for power and water.

That building is potentially consuming the same amount of freshwater daily as about 2,000 households. To put that use in

perspective, building townhouses on that same acreage would result in about 100 households. While the consumption of freshwater is a concern, the effluent discharge is more onerous to many communities including those downstream. Data centers often treat the water they pump in with chemicals to prevent corrosion and bacteria growth, which are not always removed by water treatment plants.

Electrical power is another issue for these types of data centers. Current data center consumption amounts to about five percent of all electricity demand in the US. Electric vehicles are about 4% demand at the end of 2030 if targets are met. The interesting impact of these data centers is

that by 2030 they are expected to be at about 10-12% of total US electricity demand adding 30-40% of all net new demand. This means new high voltage distribution lines may be required to support a hyperscale data center. That's more land and more cost to the local consumers.

What can you do to take action?

Go to page 34 and read tips from Jared Mott, the League's Conservation Director. You can also find that information on the League website. This document has information you can use.

Also engage with your local and state level government and staff members. In Minnesota, we have already seen a local city government put under Non-Disclosure agreements (NDAs) by a company wanting to locate a hyperscale data center in the community. This allows building plans to progress without the citizen's knowledge and prevents transparency in the process.

Also be aware that these companies will promise jobs and funding to communities in exchange for permission to build. Based on industry design best practices, all of the data centers I looked into overstate the job creation numbers significantly while understating the requirements for power and water.

Some communities have found that when they do not take the carrot, the stick is a team of lawyers suing the local government into submission. Estimated spending on data centers in the U.S. between now and 2030 is estimated at $3.5 trillion, per industry publications.

However, when the people in the community unify and oppose these hyperscale data centers, developers will move on. Indiana demonstrated this more than once, and Wisconsin has also successfully opposed a data center development.

Taking action may also mean getting the local government and/or state government to strengthen regulations on these data centers. There are mitigation strategies that can reduce water consumption significantly. Requiring that the data center perform onsite water treatment to remove the chemicals from the water they return is an option.

Inform yourself and take action as needed to protect your water, your land and your communities.

In some areas, locally generated power may be used. Be aware of what companies are proposing. A Google data center is partnering with a mothballed nuclear power plant to restart it in order to provide 615 megawatts of electricity, the bulk of which will go to their nearby data center. Google also announced a $7 billion incentive program in Iowa as they bring data center development, and a proposal to bring another nuclear power plant online to power it.

Michigan has announced a deal for three AI data centers totaling more than 1.5 million square feet with "gigawatt power" in Saline Township. They promise thousands of jobs and $14 million in investments in the township. Saline Township had just over 2,200 residents in the 2020 census. If these data centers are such a good deal why are they being pushed into small communities with few resources to oppose them? A question for state and national governments.

With $3.5 trillion in investments expected over the next four years, data centers will be built. What we can do is try to ensure they don't wreck the local land and waters. Inform yourself and take action as needed to protect your water, your land and your communities.

Thank you! And best wishes for the next century of conservation success

SCOTT KOVAROVICS | Executive Director

Writing this column is bittersweet as it will be my last as Executive Director of the League. After 18 years on the staff—longer than any other place I have worked, I am resigning at the end of the 2025.

In one page, it is impossible to convey every thought, to thank so many or reflect on accomplishments that I am proud to have helped achieve with many of you. It has been a pleasure to learn from and work with dedicated leaders and volunteers at all levels, and to lead staff who are committed to advancing the League's mission and serving our members.

As I wrap up, I'll return to a theme you have read before in my columns and heard me talk about at chapter meetings and national conventions: the League's whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the things I enjoyed most as Executive Director was getting out of the office and visiting chapters. I've visited chapters from California to the Chesapeake Bay. I spent so many days in Iowa over two years I nearly became an honorary resident. Members everywhere were so welcoming, eager to show off the chapter house and grounds, and they all had pride in the chapter's contributions to conservation and outdoor recreation locally.

That's certainly not surprising to any of you. But, with a broader perspective across many chapters, I also saw a shared commitment to the League's larger mission. That commitment is demonstrated most tangibly in local communities, yet there are common threads running from chapter to chapter, state to state and issue to issue.

The League's whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The strength of the League—and the impact it can have on conservation and outdoor recreation in the future—comes from aggregating the common actions taken locally into a larger whole, regionally and nationally. And the impact will be amplified by collaborating more proactively and directly to undertake common actions, including some new ones. In other words, planning ahead and executing collectively rather than relying on gathering up the results after the fact. That's the opportunity for the future and how, I believe, the League can most effectively achieve its mission.

I am grateful for the opportunity to help lead this organization and for the personal ties I have built with Ikes nationwide. I will miss those most of all—the times catching up at convention, the late night texts and the familiar faces at chapter meetings (who smiled when they heard my spiel for the third or fourth time).

I'm not sure what comes next for me with respect to employment, but I will remain involved with the League. I am a Life Member and active with my local chapter on conservation projects, and, maybe, I'll even have some time to visit the range now and then.

Many, many thanks and very best wishes for the next century of conservation success!

OUTDOOR AMERICA

707 CONSERVATION LANE
GAITHERSBURG, MD 20878-2983
PHONE: (800) IKE-LINE

NATIONAL PRESIDENT
SCOTT MEYER

EXECUTIVE BOARD CHAIR
DALE BRAUN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCOTT KOVAROVICS

EDITOR
MICHAEL REINEMER

GRAPHIC DESIGN
ANNE VOLO

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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.

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What's It Worth to You? Measuring the Economic Value of Nature

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

LEIF SIEGRIST

As buildings, developments and populations grow, Mother Nature is feeling the pinch. Or punch. Clean water is more scarce. Prairie and parklands get paved over. Our remaining wild places are often squeezed into small, fragile fragments.

Nature could use a good economist or a business manager right now.

When proposals emerge that list the economic benefits of developing, draining or mining a natural area, or building a data center, how do we factor in the dollar cost of environmental damage? And the economic benefits derived from leaving the place alone?

For decades, conservationists, business leaders and economists have been working on ways to answer those questions.

Seeing the forest, not just the trees

Historically, we put price tags on the current value of the chunks extracted from nature measured in units like board-feet of timber or tons of coal. And these chunks are taken from natural resources that we once believed were not only free but inexhaustible. Until recent decades, we haven't really assessed the values of nature at scale—treating nature as large, integrated ecosystems that provide value now and far into future.

The idea of "natural capital" gained traction in the 1990s when one study estimated the annual value of the world's ecosystems at $33 trillion in economic benefits to humans. That's approximately the same value as the gross world product at that time (the combined value of all countries' gross domestic product).

In his 2005 book "Investing in Nature," entrepreneur-turned-conservationist William Ginn, argued that in order to conserve nature at scale, people need to leverage market forces, which also operate on a large, global scale. "Markets and market-based conservation tools are powerful complements to old-fashioned land conservation."

"Understanding the nature of business may be the best tool we have to put nature *in* business."

Not that there's anything wrong with old-fashioned conservation. But, says Ginn, "commerce is a formidable force with no inherent environmental conscience driving it. Only we can shape its direction. Understanding the nature of business may be the best tool we have to put nature *in* business."

Ginn describes several strategies with examples from across the U.S. and the world: conservation investment banking, which uses capital to achieve conservation goals while meeting business needs; new environmental markets like "grassbanks" that allow ranchers to graze livestock while preserving

wildlife habitat; and incentive programs to move companies toward sustainable, green products.

Measuring natural values in land use decisions

Valuing natural areas should apply to everyday, local decisions about land and water uses. Matthew Winden, an economics professor at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, discussed this during the League's national convention in July.

Winden says developers have an advantage when they propose a development project that would displace a natural area. That's because the expected benefits, like jobs and tax revenue, are easy to understand and quantify—and policymakers understand their value.

The benefits of conserving a natural area can also be measured—as ecosystem services. Forests, wetlands and meadows serve as filters for clean water. Clean waterways offer opportunities for spending on outdoor recreation—boating, fishing, swimming. Natural areas sequester carbon, reducing the impact of climate change. Trees help clean air and reduce the heat in urban areas.

Yet these benefits often get under reported, Winden says. However, we can assign what's known as direct-use value to these ecosystem services. A wetland, for example, offers at least two important, tangible benefits— filtration for clean water and absorbing storm water to control flooding.

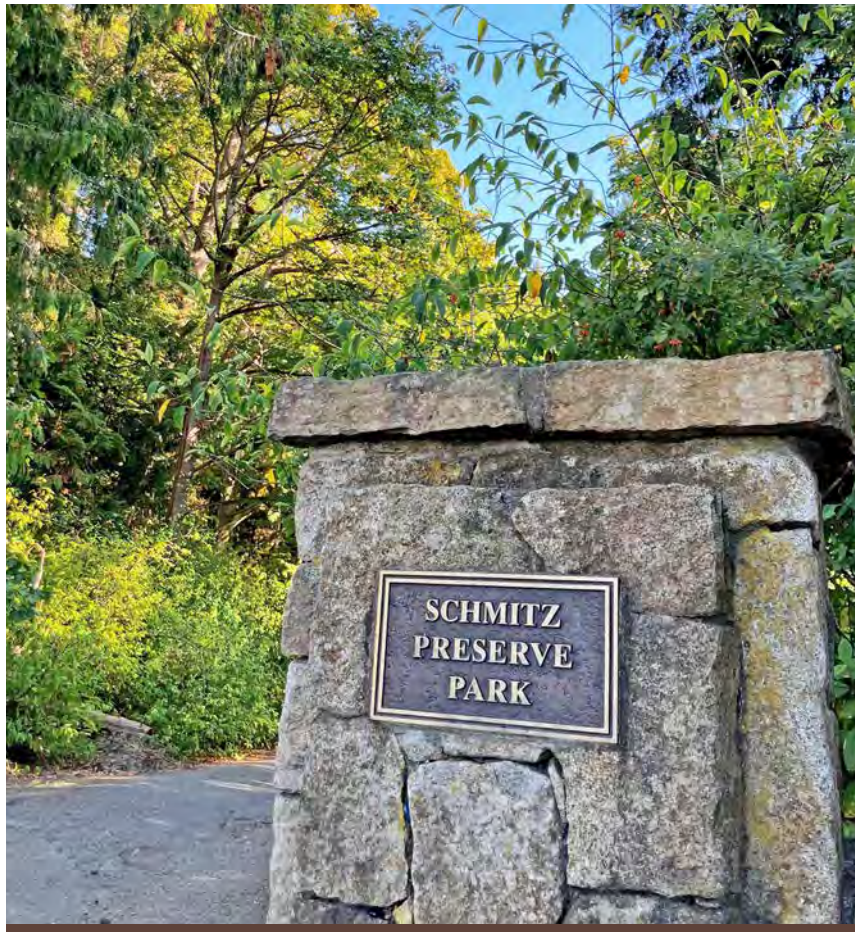
Other natural benefits may be harder to measure and for the public to grasp. Like the "intrinsic value that such a place exists," or existence value. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is perched on the northeastern coast of Alaska. It's very difficult and expensive to visit. Yet, many Americans value the fact that the refuge exists as a completely wild, untrammeled sanctuary. It's an immensely important destination for breeding birds from every corner of the world and home to polar bears, wolves, caribou and other wild creatures.

Likewise, parkland with trees or bike paths increases the value of nearby homes and boosts their tax rate, which provides an economic benefits to the community.

Then there are non-use values. That means preserving the option to use them in the future, including their value to future generations, which is known as a bequest value.

Converse in the language of dollars and cents.

Still it's important to speak the language of economics, Winden says. "Converse in the language of dollars and cents." Using these methods allows proponents of natural areas to compete with values assigned to other uses, like development, mining or timber harvests.



Urban parks like Schmitz Preserve in Seattle help clean the air and reduce heat while boosting property values and tax revenue.

MICHAEL REINEMER

With University of Wisconsin colleagues Russ Kashian and Emmer Shorts, Winden examined the case where Muskego, Wisconsin, restored an abandoned railroad corridor as a bike path in 2000. Their analysis published in *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration,* found the bike path had a positive, statistically significant impact on property values. The restoration increased values by 8.6 percent for homes directly adjacent to the path. Economists call this hedonic pricing.

Water clarity also affects home values and tax revenues. Healthy lakes can provide clear, measurable benefit to the local economy. Looking at the reverse, an economist could also estimate the cost or decrease in value tied to an algal bloom, caused by excess nutrients or other pollutants that make a lake toxic or unpleasant to visit.

The bottom line for conservationists? We need to make environmental valuations a standard step in land use decisions. Embed them in the planning, awareness and policy process. Give decision makers real data that reflects the value of natural areas. "Make it impossible to ignore," Winden says.

Nutrient pollution in our waterways costs between $40 billion and $100 billion per year.

Trading shares of natural areas

What if there were a standard way to measure the economic value of a natural area so we could invest in it and profit from the benefits it delivers or its appreciation over time?

Recently the New York Stock Exchange approved the concept of allowing the public to trade "natural asset companies (NAC)." NACs would represent the value of a parcel of land leased to the company that would issue shares investors could buy and trade like stocks on an exchange, such as the New York Stock Exchange or NASDAQ.

The idea is to define the economic value of natural areas and invest in them. One example would apply to working lands. Imagine a struggling farmer who grants a long-term lease to a NAC, which licenses the rights to the benefits the farm produces. Shares in the NAC would be traded publicly, attracting investors who recognize the value of the land.

The farmer or landowner would receive income from the sale of shares and that revenue could be invested in improving the land. This could help bring regenerative agriculture to scale, creating more sustainable farming with better nutrient management and less water pollution.

Unfortunately, an anti-conservation group called American Stewards of Liberty mobilized several states and members of Congress to oppose the idea, painting it as a "radical climate agenda" and dissuaded the Securities and Exchange Commission from permitting trading of NACs.

But the idea is not dead. In May, the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham University announced an agreement with the Intrinsic Exchange Group, the company that pioneered the idea of natural asset companies. Barbara Porco, associate dean at the business school, says their Responsible Business Center will oversee creation of an independent accounting framework for "ecological performance reporting," which she calls "an important step in the development of and marketplace acceptance for natural capital as an asset class."

By creating Intrinsic Exchange Group in 2017, CEO Douglas Eger established one way to leap frog the slow policymaking process and take the environment investments directly to the market. He views NACs as one way to get past what he calls the false dichotomy of "nature vs. economic development."

Putting a price tag on pollution

GDP, gross domestic product, is a well-known measure of a country's economic output or revenue. But missing from that calculation is the environmental cost. In terms of dollars, what is the cost of land degradation and water and air pollution connected to GDP? Some economists have been working for many years on a new metric, gross external damages (GED). That has garnered some attention from the federal government. In 2023, the White House issued a report on a national strategy "to put nature on the nation's balance sheet."

Daniel Phaneuf, a professor in the Agricultural and Applied Economics department at the University of Wisconsin, focuses on understanding the economic costs of water pollution in the U.S. and was

Municipal wastewater contributes the largest portion of economic damage in terms of surface water pollution, underscoring the need for abatement at treatment plants.

among the first to measure GED connected to water pollution.

Municipal wastewater contributes the largest portion of economic damage in terms of surface water pollution, underscoring the need for abatement at treatment plants.

A July 2025 paper, "Gross External Damages of Water Pollution in the United States," is one of the first to estimate GED for water pollution. Phaneuf, David Keiser from University of Massachusetts-Amherst and other researchers examined five areas in which water pollution has a harmful economic impact: water-based recreation, property values, drinking water treatment, human health and climate change. And they created a model to estimate the costs of damage in those areas.

They looked at the GED or economic damage from excess nutrients (such as nitrate and phosphorus) and the model found nutrient pollution in our waterways costs between $40 billion and $100 billion per year.

The researchers note that agriculture contributes the largest share of water pollution and more than one third of GED, but municipal wastewater accounts for the largest share of economic damages—an argument for better pollution abatement measure at water treatment facilities. Costs are higher near population centers and water treatment plants, and a significant proportion of the pollution flows to downstream communities.

A stubborn bias toward extraction

Meanwhile, looking at the natural world broadly, it's safe to say bias toward extraction is alive and well-funded. The volume of greenhouse gas emissions is expected to break a record this year. Plastic pollution costs us as much as $1 trillion per year. And while the concept of "balance of nature" is out of date, we should definitely consider "balance sheet nature," integrating natural capital into economics and corporate balance sheets.

MICHAEL REINEMER

LAMAR ADVERTISING

As Impacts of Nitrate Pollution Loom Large, Volunteers Step Up

Nishnabotna Water Defenders in southwest Iowa launched a series of billboards in the fall of 2025 to raise awareness about nitrate pollution.

By HEATHER WILSON, Save Our Streams Coordinator

Across much of the United States, nitrate is perhaps the most widespread and dangerous contaminant in our waterways. This colorless, odorless, tasteless compound is an essential nutrient for plant growth, applied to the landscape in chemical fertilizers and manure. But this nutrient becomes a harmful pollutant when it reaches the water.

In streams and lakes, nitrate pollution causes an ecological imbalance that is responsible for producing algae blooms and areas devoid of oxygen, called dead zones. When a waterway receives a large influx of nitrate pollution, fish and other aquatic life can suffer a sudden die-off event, otherwise known as a fish kill.

In our drinking water, elevated nitrate poses a serious threat to human health contributing to increased incidence of thyroid disease, pre-term births, neural tube birth defects and bladder, ovarian and colon cancers.

Unfortunately, none of this is news. We've long understood the sources and impacts of nitrate pollution, and yet it persists. The most effective solutions are well known, but their use is far too limited.

The sources and impacts of nitrate pollution are varied, and they impact communities across the country. After all, we're all downstream from someone.

This issue was on full display in Iowa this year as water utilities publicly struggled to protect residents from the harmful impacts of nitrate pollution. In a state with the nation's second-highest rate of cancer incidence (and one of only two states whose cancer rate is increasing), the stakes could not be higher.

A bad year for Iowa's water

The largest sources of nitrogen pollution in the United States are tied to agriculture, mainly chemical fertilizer and manure from farm fields and animal feeding operations. Iowa, with an estimated 84 percent of its land devoted to agricultural production, has long contended with this issue.

Prolonged exposure to nitrate in drinking water—even below the accepted standard—poses threats to our health.

In the summer of 2025, Iowa's struggle with nitrate pollution reached a new level when Central Iowa Water Works, the water supplier for over 600,000 Iowans, imposed a ban on lawn watering. The reason? High nitrate in the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers.

These rivers, which serve as source water for Central Iowa Water Works, had nitrate concentrations far in excess of 10 mg/L (milligrams per liter), which is the maximum level allowed in drinking water under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Frequently this summer, both rivers had nitrate concentrations exceeding 15 mg/L.

Peer-reviewed studies suggest that prolonged exposure to nitrate in drinking water—even below the accepted 10 mg/L standard—poses threats to our health. The Izaak Walton League has pushed for a review of that guideline.)

Even with Water Works' state-of-the-art nitrate removal facility operating at full capacity, it was difficult to keep nitrate concentrations in finished drinking water below the 10 mg/L standard. To ensure that they could deliver drinking water to customers that did not exceed the regulatory nitrate standard, the water utility had to reduce demand for water by issuing a ban on all lawn watering. In other words, the utility needed to reduce other uses of water to dilute nitrate pollution.

This first-of-its-kind ban lasted from June 12 to July 31, a total of 49 days. The nitrate removal facility operated for over 110 days in 2025. This facility is reported to cost up to $16,000 daily when it is in operation. This cost is ultimately passed on to customers.

Pinpointing the source

The lawn watering ban in central Iowa shone a spotlight on water quality issues in the region and presumably caused many Iowans to wonder "where is this nitrate pollution coming from?" Coincidentally, a scientific report that answered that question would be released on July 1, right in the middle of the lawn watering ban.

The Central Iowa Source Water Research Assessment, or CISWRA, is an unbiased, scientific study commissioned by the Polk County Board of Supervisors. (Polk County is Iowa's most populous county, including Des Moines and much of the greater Des Moines metropolitan area.) The CISWRA report, which was roughly two years in the making, takes a detailed look at what contaminants are present in Polk County's watersheds and the sources of those contaminants. Some key takeaways from the report include:

- Over 75 percent of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers comes from agricultural sources.
- 54,000 tons of nitrogen flow past the city of Des Moines every year, equivalent to about 70 1,000-plus gallon cargo tanks each day. That's roughly $43 million in wasted fertilizer lost to the environment.
- Over the past two decades, nitrate in the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers has exceeded 10 mg/L about 15 percent of the time, requiring Des Moines Water Works to treat the water at great expense.
- On average, more than three fish kills occur in the Raccoon and Des Moines watersheds each year. Since 1996, fish kills in these watersheds have led to a loss of more than $732,000. This sum only accounts for the direct replacement value of the fish and doesn't include indirect costs associated with losses in recreation, business and ecosystem services.

Not only did this report answer important questions about sources of pollution in central Iowa, it also drew increased attention to water quality

issues from concerned citizens across the state. While the report was focused on Polk County, its findings and mitigation advice were relevant to watersheds statewide. At an August 4 presentation of findings from the CISWRA report, nearly 900 attendees joined in person and online to hear directly from a panel of scientists involved in the creation of the report.

We know the solutions

How do we keep nitrate pollution out of our water in the first place? The good news is that numerous well-researched solutions exist. In short, we need to keep nitrogen in the field where it belongs and reduce excess use.

Many of the best practices to mitigate nutrient pollution focus first on the soil. Conventional agricultural practices strip soil of its organic material and decrease its ability to retain water. When it rains, water moves quickly off the field—taking nutrients with it and causing erosion—instead of infiltrating through the soil as it should. Unhealthy soils also necessitate higher use of fertilizers, adding to the problem.

Regenerative agricultural practices work to restore the soil's organic matter, increase porosity and reduce a farm's reliance on inputs (such as chemical fertilizer or pesticides). A cover crop, for example, can be grown in the off-season to provide a shield for the soil and keep it in place. Over time, it will also help increase the soil's organic matter and ability to take in water.

Other tools in the toolbox protect and replicate natural processes to filter out nitrate. In Iowa, less than two percent of the state's original wetlands remain. Protecting and restoring them is one of the best strategies available to address nitrate pollution. Installing practices on the edge of a field, like bioreactors and saturated buffers, can also play a role by treating water before it reaches a local stream or waterway.

Barriers to progress

The solutions are known. The public is fed up. So why are waterways still receiving so much nitrate pollution?

It turns out that there are several factors preventing needed water quality progress in Iowa and other regions across the U.S.

Conservation programs are underfunded and oversubscribed. Installing conservation practices requires an investment in knowledge, equipment and supplies. To encourage farmers and landowners to install conservation practices on their land, the U.S. relies on a system that provides financial incentives and technical support for participating

Preventing dangerous nitrate and phosphorus pollution in our drinking water supplies requires a dramatic reduction in chemical fertilizers washing off agricultural fields.

farmers. These incentives are delivered via federal programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), including the Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Reserve Program.

These programs offer the largest single source of funds to help farmers and ranchers understand and adopt critically important conservation practices on the landscape. Yet, the programs are underfunded and oversubscribed. In recent years, only about one-third of applicants seeking help putting conservation on the ground through working lands programs receive it; the rest are turned away for lack of funding. In 2023, only 27 percent of Iowa applications were funded.

Several Nitrate Watch volunteers have taken a step beyond data reporting by sharing their data and their testimonial with lawmakers.

Reductions in the Department's workforce have exacerbated this problem. While some USDA employees are based in Washington, 99 percent of NRCS staff are local, helping the farmers in their communities with technical assistance related to conservation. Yet, since January of this year, more than one in four of these important staff have been lost. This raises serious concerns about NRCS' ability to assist with conservation projects across the country.

State-sponsored water monitoring takes another hit. Despite continued assertions that nutrient reduction in waterways is a goal for the state, water monitoring in Iowa continues to suffer setbacks. The most recent setback—the Iowa Legislature cut funding for a network of in-stream water monitoring sensors that measure nitrate, among other contaminants. This network includes sensors deployed by the University of Iowa (UI), the USDA and the U.S. Geological Survey. With the loss of funding, the number of UI sensors will drop from 60 to 0 in the summer of 2026.

For roughly 10 years, this network of nitrate sensors, part of the Iowa Water Quality Information System, has provided real-time data about nitrate pollution in Iowa's waterways, helping researchers and the public learn more about how nitrate moves through a watershed and how various conservation methods might work to mitigate the runoff.

Slashing real-time monitoring hinders our collective ability to track progress or detect nitrate pollution. It also reduces the amount of information available to water utilities that need to quickly respond to an influx of nitrate in source water. The League's Iowa Division has started a crowdfunding campaign to raise the funding for these sensors.

EPA steps in to remove stream segments from Iowa's impaired waters list. Under the Clean Water Act, states are required to identify waters that are not suitable for their designated uses, such as swimming, fishing or supporting aquatic life, due to pollution. Once listed, states develop specific pollution reduction strategies focused on contaminants, such as nitrate, identified by the state. In August, the EPA took the uncharacteristic action of rescinding its previous decision to add seven stream segments to Iowa's impaired waters list. These segments, including parts of the Des Moines, Raccoon, Cedar, Iowa and South Skunk Rivers, are known to have nitrate levels that frequently exceed the drinking water threshold of 10 mg/L.

In November 2024, the EPA determined that these seven stream segments needed to be on Iowa's impaired waters list because they exceeded safe drinking water standards. The events of this summer support this decision. After all, the lawn watering ban put in place by Central Iowa Water Works was a direct result of soaring nitrate levels in the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. Nevertheless, these segments were removed from Iowa's impaired waters list, leaving them more vulnerable to further pollution.

Iowa is committed to its Nutrient Reduction Strategy, despite a lack of results. Since 2013, the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) has been a part of virtually every conversation about nutrient pollution in Iowa. Iowa adopted the NRS to satisfy a policy from the EPA urging states to address nutrient pollution. The NRS requires certain action from point-source polluters, such as wastewater treatment plants and industrial operations. Agriculture,

ISTOCK

considered a non-point source of pollution, is only subject to voluntary measures. This means that farmers are under no obligation to adopt practices that will prevent pollution from their operation from entering nearby waterways or groundwater.

This voluntary approach has led to little measurable progress toward nutrient reduction goals. The stated goal of the NRS is to reduce annual nitrogen and phosphorus loss by 45 percent. The water quality data shared on NRS dashboards hosted by Iowa State University illustrate that progress toward this goal has been minimal, at best. In fact, the amount of nitrogen leaving the state through runoff into streams and rivers has slightly increased since the adoption of the NRS.

Despite the lack of results, politicians and leaders embrace the NRS. They point to the number of conservation practices installed and the amount of money spent on the initiative as signs of success. Notably, they do not measure success based on documented improvement in water quality or actual reduction of nutrients running off the land.

Consider the "signs of success." A 2022 Iowa Environmental Council analysis noted that *at the current rate* of adoption of conservation practices, Iowa will meet its NRS goals for cover crops in 85 years, it will meet its goals for wetland conservation in 942 years, and it will take 22,325 years to reach the NRS goals for bioreactors and saturated buffers.

And when the amount of nitrogen Iowa sends to the Gulf of Mexico is increasing instead of declining, it is hard to understand how the Nutrient Reduction Strategy's implementation could be considered a success.

Nitrate Watch volunteers step up

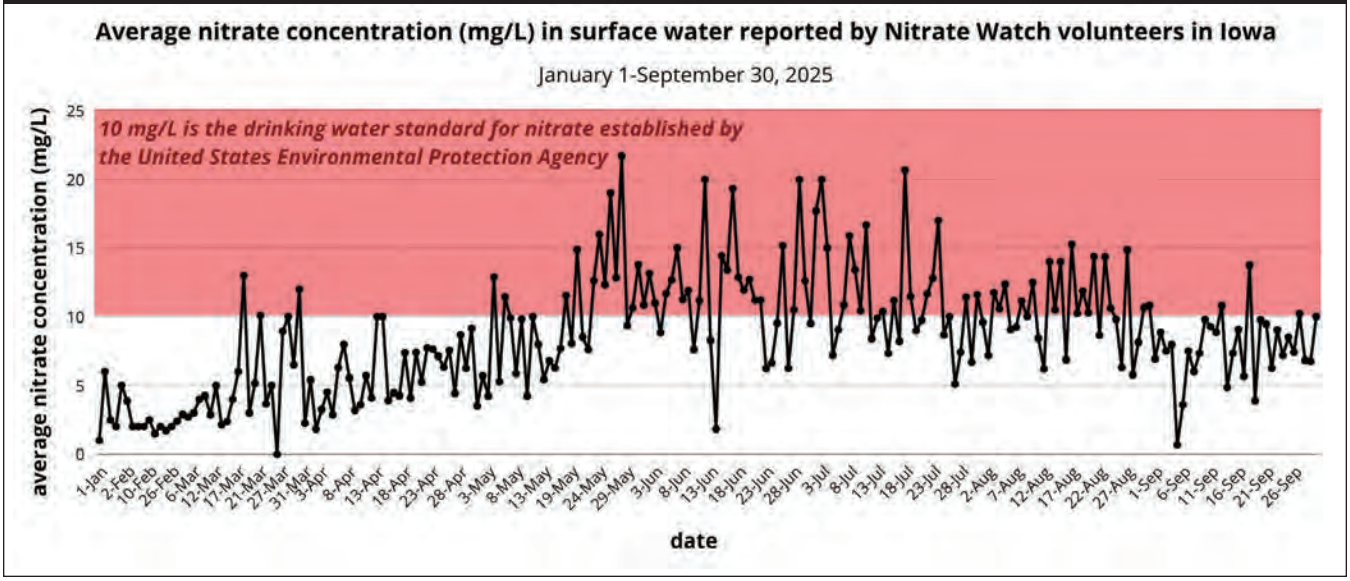
In the face of a nitrate pollution crisis, concerned citizens increasingly turned to the Izaak Walton Leauge's Nitrate Watch program as a hands-on, meaningful way to do something about the problem

Elevated nitrate is linked to increased risk for thyroid disease, pre-term births, neural tube birth defects and bladder, colon and ovarian cancers.

The Izaak Walton League has fulfilled record-breaking numbers of requests for nitrate kits from volunteers, especially Iowans. In August alone, we had requests for more than 500 kits. The uptick was spurred by extensive media coverage of the nitrate threat, including the central Iowa lawn watering ban, the CISWRA Report and the growing popularity of the Nitrate Watch program.

This massive influx in kit requests has also meant a marked increase in data reporting. At the time of

NITRATE WATCH CHART 2025 IOWA JAN-SEPT



IWLA

writing (October 2025), Nitrate Watch volunteers have submitted 3,428 nitrate test results in 2025. These results, reported at 1,364 sites in 35 states and the District of Columbia, report nitrate concentrations in surface water (including rivers, lakes, streams) as well as drinking water. This already exceeds last year's total of 2,469 Nitrate Watch readings submitted at 939 sites.

And volunteers are documenting dangerous levels of nitrate in surface waters. This year, 29 percent of surface water test results report nitrate levels greater than or equal to 10 mg/L, the Safe Drinking Water Act maximum threshold for nitrate in public drinking water. (Most of these results—56 percent—were reported by volunteers in Iowa.)

The impact of community science

A strong uptick in volunteer water quality monitoring is a hopeful sign. Of course, increased monitoring means more data that can be used to understand the scope and scale of nitrate pollution at a local and regional level. The data is also important in increasing each volunteer's individual understanding of the nitrate pollution problem in the waterways that they care about and rely on.

Water monitoring also presents a jumping-off point for volunteers interested in deepening their involvement. With support from Izaak Walton League staff, several Nitrate Watch volunteers have taken a step beyond data reporting by sharing their data and their testimonial with lawmakers. Other volunteers have shared their monitoring stories in news media, blog posts or on social media.

Whether they are reporting results, talking to neighbors, contacting lawmakers, posting about their findings or all of the above, Nitrate Watch volunteers are making a difference. Their efforts continue to shine a light on a pollution problem with serious impacts on public health and environmental quality, and provide tangible evidence that people are not willing to ignore this threat. We are excited to see the growing energy from our volunteers and partner organizations, and we look forward to continuing to work together to press for solutions.

NITRATE IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM

This article uses Iowa's nitrate crisis as a case study, but nitrate pollution is causing issues in waterways nationwide—and worldwide, for that matter.

Other midwestern states, like Minnesota and Wisconsin, are facing similar challenges to Iowa. The "Nitrates on Tap" report, released in September 2025 by the Alliance for the Great Lakes and Clean Wisconsin, outlines the scope and impacts of Wisconsin's own nitrate crisis.

States far from the Midwest are also grappling with nitrate pollution. In eastern Oregon and California's central valley, nitrate pollution in groundwater poses a serious public health risk for well users. In lakes across the country, from Lake Erie to Lake Okeechobee, algae blooms fed by nitrate and phosphorus pose challenges for recreation, safety and environmental quality every summer.

The sources and impacts of nitrate pollution are varied, and they impact communities across the country. After all, we're all downstream from someone.

For more information about checking nitrate in your drinking water, and surface water, visit NitrateWatch.org.

ISTOCK

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS STEP UP TOO

Volunteers working alone can create an incredible impact, but local and regional organizations can help amplify the work of individuals united by a shared vision. Nitrate Watch partner organizations serve a vital role by providing local expertise and support to volunteers. Here are just a few examples of Nitrate Watch partner organizations stepping up to raise awareness and support volunteers in 2025:

The newly formed Nishnabotna Water Defenders, a grassroots advocacy group in southwest Iowa, has embraced Nitrate Watch as a way for community members to understand the presence and impacts of nitrate pollution locally. They launched a series of billboards in the fall of 2025 urging Iowans to "Know What You Drink" and "Monitor Nitrate in Your Water."

Carver County Water Management Organization in Carver County, Minnesota launched a direct mail campaign in July that provided information about nitrate pollution to residents in the Bevens and Silver Creek watersheds, which are known to have high nitrate levels. In their communication, they directed residents to the Nitrate Watch program, resulting in more than 50 kit requests from residents.

Wisconsin's Green Fire is a new Nitrate Watch partner with big plans. Their organization has launched a Nitrate Watch page on their website including educational resources and a co-branded Nitrate Watch kit request form. In just a few months, volunteers with the group have already reported data at more than 25 sites across Wisconsin.

Over the past two years, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI) has built a large and active network of volunteer water monitors across Iowa, reporting over 900 test results at more than 200 sites in 2025. Iowa CCI supports their volunteers by hosting monthly Zoom calls in the summer to hear from guest speakers, share ideas, answer questions and discuss current water quality issues and opportunities for advocacy.

Izaak Walton League HIGHLIGHTS 2025

Conservation Leadership in Washington

- Led 75 meetings with congressional offices to advocate for the League's policy priorities for the 119th Congress.
- Protected at-risk investments for agricultural conservation. The House preserved funding and boosted program budgets by 54 percent.

Working with Our Chapters and Local Partners

- Created new League membership database and redesigned website with improved navigation and graphics.
- Worked with partners to erect billboards in Iowa urging nitrate testing. The campaign generated broad news in the state.

Advocating and Building Awareness for Clean Water

- Submitted technical comments to EPA and organized 58 League chapters and 14 state divisions to oppose effort to weaken wetland protections.
- Trained National Park Service rangers at Shenandoah National Park in Save Our Streams monitoring protocols.

Growing Visibility for the Izaak Walton League

- Attracted national and local news coverage of the League's work on clean water, agriculture and other conservation topics.
- Amplified the New York Times article that profiled the youth-led Green Crew program, pioneered at the League's Minnesota Valley Chapter.

Expanding Volunteer Science in America

- Engaged volunteers who reported more than 8,000 water monitoring results in our Nitrate Watch and Salt Watch programs. About one-third revealed troubling pollution levels.
- Hosted Winter Salt Awareness Week, a campaign to encourage smart salting and water monitoring through the expanding Salt Watch program.

Izaak Walton League

Learn more about the Izaak Walton League's mission, accomplishments and 100-year history of conservation leadership.

Visit iwla.org.

Your Gift Will Help Us Protect Clean Water i

When billboards like the one shown here go up along the highway, it's clear people are fed up. This fall, the Izaak Walton League and partners paid for this billboard—and another one—to build public awareness of the nitrate pollution crisis in Iowa.

But make no mistake: **this isn't an Iowa-only problem—this is an everywhere problem.** Drinking water is contaminated in communities stretching **from Oregon and California to every midwestern state.** Red tides and other harmful algal blooms close beaches and cause major economic harm along the west coast of **Florida**, throughout the **Great Lakes states** and in countless communities across the country.

Moreover, **nitrate pollution in drinking water is a serious threat to human health.** The weight of scientific evidence continues to grow linking nitrate in drinking water—often at levels well below federal safety standards—to **higher risk for ovarian, colon and other cancers, thyroid disease and birth defects.**

These billboards underscore two important realities: the League is **broadening public awareness about the conservation challenges we all face . . .** and we're **mobilizing thousands of people**—through Nitrate Watch, Salt Watch and other volunteer science programs—to test local waters for pollution, and then put the data they collect into action!

With your generous gift of $50, $100 or even more today, you can help the Izaak Walton League expand the scope and impact of volunteer science and advocacy to **protect our drinking water, conserve natural resources, and secure a healthy environment for future generations.**

To donate by mail, send a check payable to '
707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 2(

n America—Now and for Future Generations

Here are just a few examples of how **your donation today** will have an impact in 2026.

Your support will help the League **expand the Nitrate Watch volunteer network**—and take our public education campaign nationwide by **leading the first-ever Nitrate Pollution Awareness Week** to facilitate collaboration among volunteers and foster advocacy to reduce nitrate pollution and protect public health.

Your gift will help us launch **new Salt Watch campaigns reaching millions of residents in Ohio**—where volunteers, including in Cleveland and Columbus, routinely measure toxic levels of chloride pollution . . . and where our growing base of volunteers and partners are working with the League to implement solutions that will **reduce water pollution caused by road salt.**

And with your generosity, the **League won't back down** from an activist Supreme Court and EPA in their **unrelenting drive to gut Clean Water Act protections** for wetlands that protect our communities from flooding and streams that flow to drinking water supplies 1 of every 3 Americans . . . while we advocate for funding and public policies to **scale up conservation across millions of acres of farmland over the next 10 years.**

Please make a tax-deductible gift of $50, $100 or more today—and help safeguard human health, expand conservation across the landscape, and mobilize more Americans as advocates for a healthy environment!

Thank you for your generous support!

"IWLA" to: Izaak Walton League of America, 0878. To donate online, visit iwla.org/donate.

Reviving Rivers and Lakes with Science and Art: An Indiana Blueprint for Restoring National Waterways

By AVON WATERS

Before bidding, auction goers perused the 100 paintings from the Indiana Waterways Project.

For many, the COVID pandemic feels like a distant memory—a time of isolation, uncertainty and change. But for nature, and for a group of artists and scientists in Indiana, that period of stillness became an opportunity for awareness and action.

Born from the pandemic's solitude, the Indiana Waterways Project—first featured in 2023 issue 2 of *Outdoor America*—brought together five artists, a scientist, three conservation writers and the Indiana Division of the Izaak Walton League. Their goal: to shine a light on the beauty and challenges facing Indiana's waterways.

What began as a creative response to environmental concerns evolved into a traveling exhibition, a published collection of conservation essays and a movement that reached an estimated 100,000 people across Indiana and other states.

The impact of art and awareness

What started as a waterway project during Covid continues—one brushstroke, one essay and one clean lake at a time.

The project's impact was undeniable. Over four years, the exhibition toured five museums and galleries, bringing attention to Indiana's rivers, streams and tributaries. The 100 paintings created for the project eventually found homes in private collections.

But the message continues through a coffee table book that remains in circulation. Even after the project formally ended in 2024, its influence persisted—in fact, the national Izaak Walton League

AVON WATERS (2)

bought two of the original paintings and then resold them at its national convention raising funds for further conservation efforts.

Today, Dr. Jerry Sweeten stands at the heart of one of Indiana's most ambitious environmental efforts. Sweeten is a conservation scientist and limnologist whose work has reshaped the future of freshwater restoration. His pivotal essay on rehabilitating Indiana's Eel River offered more than regional insights—it became a blueprint for revitalizing degraded waterways across the nation.

With support from grants and a dedicated team of researchers, Sweeten led the removal of all but one outdated low-head dam along the Eel River, reconnecting migratory fish to thousands of miles of tributaries. Native eelgrass, long lost to agricultural runoff since the 1960s, was replanted. Mollusk populations—once decimated by pollution—have begun a remarkable recovery.

Confronting a modern menace with science and art

But Sweeten's vision extends far beyond the Eel River. He turned his focus northward, to Indiana's glacial lakes—rare, post-Ice Age bodies of water that represent the southernmost reach of glacial impact in the United States.

Entire lake-based economies—fueled by seasonal tourism and legacy families—stand to lose. When water quality deteriorates, so too do property values.

Today, these fragile ecosystems face a modern menace: toxic blue-green algae blooms that have increasingly closed beaches, disrupted local ecologies and threatened human and animal health.

"Glacial lakes are in trouble," Sweeten warns. "Water quality in lakes and reservoirs across Indiana is threatened by non-point source pollution that includes sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus." He says these pollutants cause harmful algal blooms and aquatic plants that compromise cultural as well as ecological resilience.

"The solution is pragmatic watershed initiatives

"Toxic Algae Air," pastel by Avon Waters.

Indiana Public Media records artists working at Crooked Lake for a documentary about the artists' and scientists' working to create a blueprint for solving blue-green algae issues in lakes nationwide.

JULI METZGER, ARTNATURE

and policies that will reduce non-point pollution in these aquatic systems," Sweeten says. "New technologies are emerging that can mitigate the effects of these pollutants and improve water quality.

"All of these initiatives must be rooted in science, education and public awareness," he says.

Despite the transformative success of the Indiana Waterways Project, the broader challenge remains daunting. Indiana's 163,000 miles of rivers, streams and lakes weave largely through private farmland, rendering most of them inaccessible—and invisible—to the public.

The trouble with streams is they disappear behind miles of fields, and people don't see the degradation. But lakes? The impact is immediate. The algae smells. Your dog gets sick. You can't let your kids swim or water ski.

The stakes are more than ecological. Entire lake-based economies—fueled by seasonal tourism and legacy families—stand to lose. Small businesses that depend on summer visitors suffer when beaches close unexpectedly.

Generational family cottages, once humble retreats, are now year-round homes—and, in many cases, valuable lakeside investments. And when water quality deteriorates, so do property values. Some lakes now have multi-million-dollar homes. When the water suffers, those investments are at risk.

In a notable shift from river restoration, this focus on glacial lakes was not launched by scientists, but by concerned citizens, Sweeten points out. Local lake associations approached Sweeten and his colleagues, seeking guidance and long-term solutions. The result: a new interdisciplinary initiative that blends environmental science with creative expression.

The Glacial Lakes Project

Launched in 2024, the ArtNature Consortium's *Glacial Lakes Project* brings together five artists and a team of researchers to not only raise public awareness again through art and storytelling— but create solutions to plug into any lake in the United States.

Like the last, this initiative will culminate in a traveling exhibitions (2027–28), a coffee-table book pairing essays and paintings and a featured documentary produced in partnership with Ball State Public Media. Funded by the Knight Foundation, the documentary is slated for wide PBS distribution in Indiana and other states confronting similar water quality issues in 2028.

Donations to the project through ArtNature go to build public awareness, but the nonprofit hopes the public support can also provide grant money to help a few lake associations with less access to funding for the solutions. Fixing or improving water quality takes money, Sweeten added.

The Indiana Waterways Project demonstrated the power of combining science and art to inspire change. Now, as lakes across the nation face the same issues as Indiana's glacial lakes face, this is a defining moment for conservation efforts. What started as a waterway project during Covid continues—one brushstroke, one essay, and one clean lake at a time.

For more information visit: artnatureconsortium.org/projects.

Avon Waters is an artist known for his expressionist and semi-abstract landscape and wildlife images. He was an organizer for the Indiana Waterways Project and is a member of the Indiana Plein Air Painter's Association. Visit him at avonwaters.com.

Outdoor Classroom and Garden Brings Detroit Lakes Together

By ERIKA GILSDORF and SUE SONNENBERG, Prairie Woods Chapter

The **Prairie Woods Chapter** of the Izaak Walton League of America partnered with Scouting America Troop #674 and the community to create a native plant garden to serve as an outdoor classroom at the Lyle Crovisier Memorial Park at the Boys and Girls Club of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

This project is a labor of love for our pollinator populations and our community neighbors today--and for those who come 100 years from now whose names and faces we'll never know. They will find these wonderful things waiting for them. Bill Henke, President of the Chapter, said the program aimed to appeal to youth and community at large. "It was always our hope that this would be a collaborative effort," he said. "An outdoor classroom highlighting the plight of our pollinators certainly fits with the kind of conservation stewardship exemplified by the Izaak Walton League."

The project was part of Peyton Malecka's Eagle Scout project. Malecka's Scout Master, Lance Akers of Troop 674, said, "By partnering with our local chapter of the Izaak Walton League on his project, [Malecka] has drawn together the skills, knowledge and experience of the Ike's and paired them with the youth of our community."

The community responded with enthusiasm.

Supporting organizations represented in photo include the West Central Initiative, Pelican River Watershed, Malecka Family, Prairie Woods Chapter, Scouting America Troop 674, Detroit Lakes Regional Chamber of Commerce, Detroit Lakes City Park Board, Detroit Lakes Community Foundation, Detroit Lakes Noon Rotary. Not shown is the Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League.

Eagle Scout Peyton Malecka welcomes support from Amanda, Quam, grant administrator for Minnesota's West Central Initiative.

This community worked together to protect what they love for the people they love.

ROXIE LINDQUIST; JOANIE MALECKA

Outdoorsman Mark Trail Urges Water Testing in C

The nationally syndicated Mark Trail comic on Sunday, September 7, 2025 highlighted threats to drinking water safety, including from nitrate and heavy metal pollution, and encouraged readers to conduct simple tests on their tap water. Although the strip did not mention the Izaak Walton League or our volunteer science programs by name, it focused public attention on some of our signature issues.

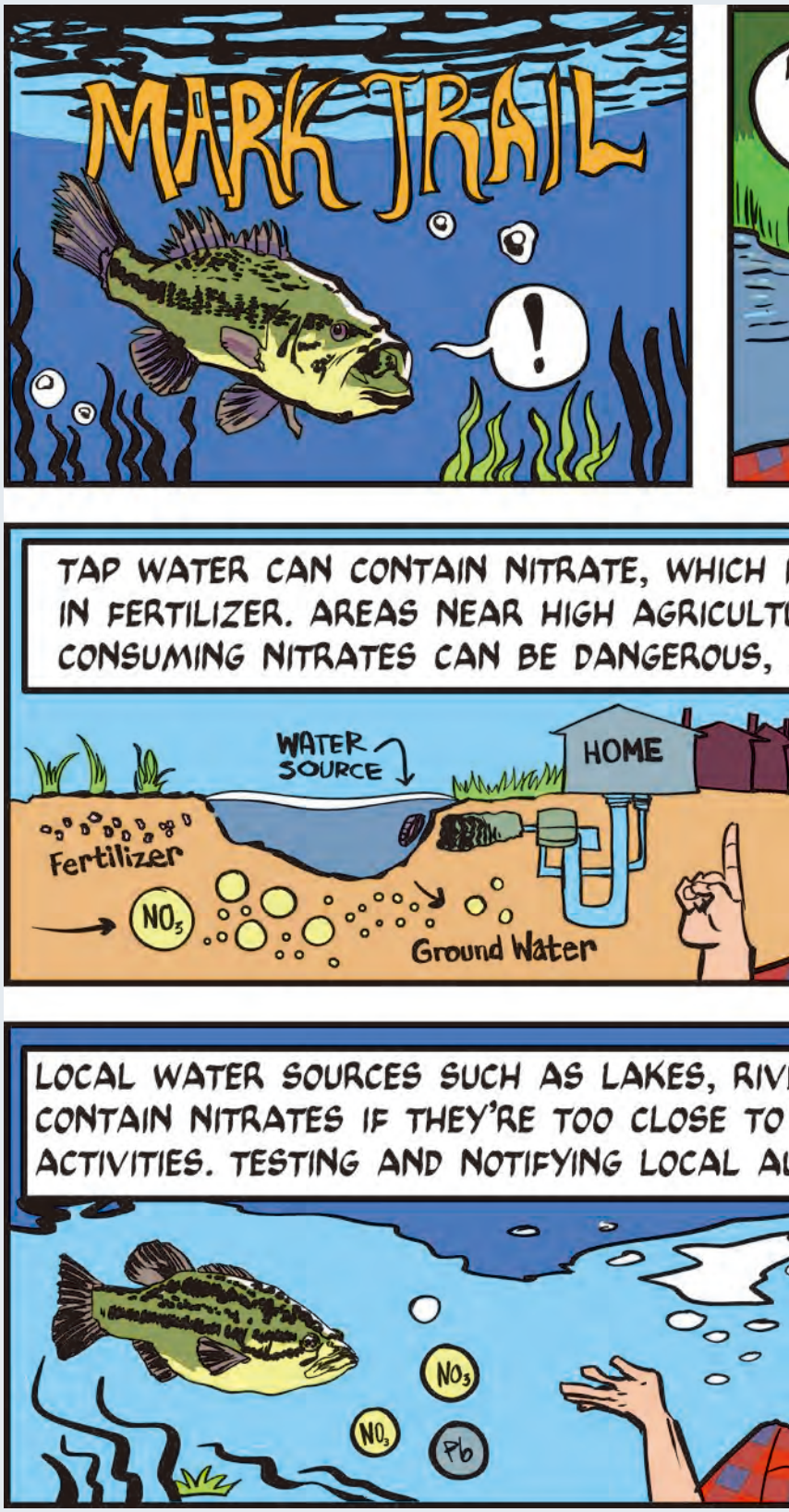
Mark Trail appears in 175 newspapers reaching 23 million readers worldwide.

It is exciting to see some of our issues covered in this way and to know audiences the League could not reach alone learned important facts we highlight in our public education:

- Pollution continues to threaten the safety of our drinking water.
- Much of that pollution flows unchecked and untreated off the land, including from farms.
- Knowing what's in your water, including by using simple tests at home, is the first step in assessing and mitigating risk.

Thanks, Mark!

(In *Outdoor America,* Issue 4, 2021, "Mark Trail Goes Millennial," we profiled the strip's cartoonist, Jules Rivera, and we "interviewed" Mark and his wife Cherry Trail, with help from Rivera.)



Credit: Jules Rivera, Reprinted with permission from North America Syndicate, Inc.

Cartoon Strip that Reaches 23 Million Worldwide

The Future Is Theirs!

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

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

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

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

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Gaithersburg, MD 20878

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

Fish Habitat, Public Land Priorities and Deer Invasion

MICHAEL REINEMER | Editor

If Fish Could Applaud: Dingell-Johnson Turns 75

In 1950, the Izaak Walton League helped to establish a law to protect fish habitat through taxes on fishing gear. Modeled after the Pittman-Robertson Act (which the League also helped establish), the law provides a way to collect funds that are distributed to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Adjusted for inflation, the law has raised $20 billion for protecting and restoring waterways for the benefit of fish over the past seven decades. The American Sportfishing Association calls the Act "the cornerstone of the American fisheries model."

(Source: Matt Geiger, *Wisconsin Outdoor News,* Oct. 3, 2025)

A variety of policies and laws adopted with help from the Izaak Walton League support conservation and wildlife, including habit for trout in Colorado, shown here.

ISTOCK

62-Year-Old Trout: Almost as Old as Dingell-Johnson

Perhaps a beneficiary of the Dingell-Johnson Act, a 62-year-old lake trout was collected for study by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The specimen was a humper lake trout, which is a slow-growing variety.

The species dwells deep in Lake Superior and derives its name from its preference for reefs or "humps" in the water. This one was found near the Canadian border in a remote area called Klondike Reef. A trout's age, among other details, can be determined by examining its ear stone, or otolith.

(Source: Shawn Sitar, *Pennsylvania Outdoor News,* Oct. 10, 2025)

Interior Says Conservation Not a Priority for BLM

In September, the Department of the Interior took action to kill the Conservation and Landscape Health rule that was adopted during the Biden Administration. That rule was designed to include conservation as one of the multiple uses for the millions of acres overseen by the Bureau of Land Management. BLM lands are often leased for drilling, mining and other resource extraction.

The rule, in its own words, "clarifies that conservation is a use on par with other uses of the public lands," under the multiple-use and sustained-yield mandate in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The text goes on to say, "The rule does not prioritize conservation above other uses; instead, it provides for considering and, where appropriate, implementing or authorizing conservation as one of the many uses managed under FLPMA."

In September 2025, the Interior Department issued a new rule to undo the Conservation and

Landscape Health rule, in keeping with a long line of actions by the Trump Administration to prioritize energy development on federal lands and dismantle environmental guidelines that might restrict expanded energy development.

Most of the 244 million acres of BLM land are out west with 155 million acres available for livestock grazing. A smaller portion, 37 million acres, and are National Conservation Lands, and are managed for scientific, historical or recreational uses.

(Sources: *E&E News,* Sept. 10, 2025 and *Federal Register,* May 9, 2024)

Whitetail Population Problems in Maryland

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources says there are about a quarter million deer in the state, and that's bad for forests.

Heavy browsing by deer reduces the number of native plants and shrubs and accelerates the growth of invasive species like Japanese stiltgrass. This slows the development of new forest and harms conditions for other critters like quail, turkey and important insects.

"Like rabbits overrunning a garden, an overpopulation of deer will have detrimental effects on the undergrowth and vegetation in a forest."

The population problem is exacerbated by the drop off in the number of hunters in Maryland—a loss of more than 40 percent since the 1970s.

As *Outdoor America* has reported, a number of states encourage bow hunting to help keep deer population in check in suburban areas where their numbers exceed the carrying capacity of the land.

(Source: Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Aug 12, 2025)

Wait There's More: "School Invaded by a Rabid Deer"

On the list of downsides for deer populations, you don't typically see "school invasions." Yet a front-page headline in *New York Outdoor News* reads: "Columbia County invaded by a rabid deer."

"Rabid" is not a typo. The deer, which was euthanized, was the second in the Empire State to be diagnosed this year with rabies. One possible explanation is that the ungulate had contact with a raccoon, which is a more common carrier of rabies.

(Source: Dan Ladd, *New York Outdoor News,* Oct, 2025)

ANNUAL COST OF PLASTIC POLLUTION MAY TOP $1 TRILLION

A new study from Duke University says the omnipresent plastic enmeshed in our daily lives may be costing us as much as $1 trillion per year in damage to human health, the environment and the economy.

Authors of the study looked at the complete life cycle of plastic products, from the extraction of fossil fuels through production, usage, management and disposal. They examined several major cost categories including greenhouse gas emissions during extraction and production; increased disease and mortality from oil and gas extraction and plastic use; landfill expenses; cleanup; damage to fisheries, marine shipping and tourism; and loss of marine ecosystem services.

Researchers described the total estimated tab as a range: from $436 billion to $1.109 trillion per year. That range, they say, "is likely an underestimate, as not all harms observed from plastic had documented costs in the literature at the time of the analysis in July 2025."

For many consumer and commercial items, it's hard to find alternatives to plastic products. But given the staggering costs, it's worth the trouble to look.

(Source: *"The Social Cost of Plastic to the United States,"* 2025, Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment and Sustainability.)

Illinois Chapter Hosts Congressional Staff to Share Conservation Priorities

By JESSICA GORDON, Grassroots Advocacy Manager

Des Plaines Chapter members and League staff meet with Senator Durbin's staff.

Advocating for conservation of natural resources is deeply rooted in the mission of the Izaak Walton League. In 1922, our founders became alarmed by the toll development and pollution were taking on places they hunted and fished. More than 100 years later, Ikes across the country continue that legacy, defending our nation's soil, air, woods, water and wildlife.

We must take the lead and start new conversations.

But to this day, there are still elected officials and community members who don't have a clear understanding of who we are and what we do. So we must take the lead and start new conversations.

In one recent example, members of the **Des Plaines Chapter** in Illinois hosted staff of U.S. Senator Dick Durbin for a visit. Several members were present to highlight the League's conservation priorities, the historical accomplishments of their chapter, their goals moving forward and partnership opportunities for the senator's office. Senator Durbin's State Director met with the group and took a tour of the property.

Meeting with the policymakers that represent your chapter and members is a great way to build relationships. Congressional staff located in your state, or "in-district" (as opposed to in Washington), are a great resource for starting this dialogue.

Informing Senator Durbin's staff about the Illinois Division's on-the-ground conservation work at its

ILLINOIS DIVISION

Giant Goose facility or work for more effective agricultural policies that protect soil health, reduce water pollution and protect wildlife habitat, all showcase the League's proud traditions.

Most congressional offices welcome an opportunity to meet with local groups, like League chapters. Sharing information about our work and partnerships in Illinois helps the Senator's office, especially since he serves on the Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committees. And of course congressional decisions can affect the entire nation.

Jessica Gordon explains the Clean Water Hub website to Senator Durbin's State Director Clarisol Duque.

Pick advocacy tactics that work for you

The event in Des Plaines is just one example of what our chapters are doing to advocate for conservation. The term "advocacy" often gets misconstrued as just phone calls and letters to elected representatives. And while it certainly can include those actions, there are endless other ways for League members to advocate on the national, state, community and personal levels.

Advocating for conservation practices can range from quick and easy, like sharing posts on your own personal social media—to longer, more complex efforts such as inviting decision-makers to your chapter and developing relationships with them.

If you or your chapter are interested in getting more involved in advocacy, here are a few ideas to start:

- **Bringing awareness** to an issue and making a suggestion for a solution is a great first step in advocating for change. Writing a letter to your local paper about the need for more pollinator gardens or less salt on the roadways in your community can raise public awareness about issues that might not be top of mind for most people.
- **Building partnerships** is an integral part of working toward solutions. These partnerships can be with like-minded individuals, volunteers, fellow Ikes, chapters or other organizations.
- **Finding solutions** can often feel daunting. When planning to make suggestions for solutions, bring as much knowledge and input to the table as possible. Often, your solution can be a starting point for deeper thought about the issue and a springboard for creativity.
- **Highlighting the positives** goes hand-in-hand with bringing awareness. Shouting out kudos when they are due not only brings awareness to the original issue but shows that solutions are possible. A phone call, a letter or a post on your social media to promote the positive all count as important advocacy actions.

Starting to form some ideas? We're here to help. For support or guidance on advocacy actions you can do at your chapter, contact the League's Grassroots Advocacy Manager, Jess Gordon at jgordon@iwla.org.

AMY TOOKEY

CLEAN WATER CORNER

Improving Water Quality through Advocacy and Partnerships in Ohio

By ABBY HILEMAN, Salt Watch Coordinator and JESSICA GORDON, Grassroots Advocacy Manager

MEDINA CHAPTER

The Medina Chapter in Ohio welcomed Abby and Jess during their trip to meet with Salt Watch partners in the state.

In mid-September, League staff members Abby Hileman and Jessica Gordon traveled to Ohio to work toward grassroots mobilization of Salt Watchers and partner organizations. This is part of the League's effort to expand the reach of Salt Watch in new regions.

The League plans to connect with lawmakers in Ohio to push for statewide legislation that supports road salt applicators who reduce oversalting.

One of the key goals of the Izaak Walton League's Salt Watch program is to reduce pollution at the source and improve drinking water safety throughout the U.S. During a recent trip to Ohio, we had 11 meetings with groups that participate in Salt Watch and other individuals and organizations who promote strategies to reduce road salt pollution.

We also got to learn about some of the great work the League's **Medina Chapter** is engaged in, which includes a partnership with a Girl Scout Troop, a glow shoot (nighttime turkey shoot) and an event for children in need of a quieter environment. We were also able to meet with Gregg Lamb, the new president of the **Ohio Division.**

Among our meetings was an opportunity to speak

with the staff of an Ohio Environmental Protection Agency program called H2Ohio. This statewide water quality initiative, established in 2019, employs science-based strategies to improve Ohio's water systems. To combat dangers like algal blooms, road salt runoff and other forms of pollution, H2Ohio funds projects that support better farming practices, land conservation, creation of wetlands and litter clean up.

This Ohio program also works to remove dams and improve public access to clean drinking water. Although significant funding goes to larger, more expensive projects like stream restoration, the program offers grant funding to municipalities to upgrade salt application equipment and salt storage strategies (to prevent runoff into waterways during wet weather).

The storage and equipment grant was welcomed with great enthusiasm by the H2Ohio staff. They recounted the number of phone calls and messages received about the impact the grant program has made on communities. Staff member Josh Griffin remarked that the grant program allowed municipalities to make upgrades that they wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise.

The H2Ohio funds help communities and municipal road salt applicators to better achieve their goals of balancing environmental protection and public safety.

From data to action

In meetings with partner organizations, we discussed turning Salt Watch data into local action to reduce pollution. League staff provided tips about connecting with local, state and federal lawmakers and creating more awareness about how the public can improve water quality.

In meetings with partner organizations, we talked about turning Salt Watch data into local action to reduce pollution.

At our final stop, we participated in the Clean Water Fest held in Cuyahoga Heights, hosted by the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. The festival attracted more than 2,000 members of the community and policymakers who met with local watershed groups and partners.

Tabling at the festival, we helped connect the public with their local waterways and encouraged them to get involved in monitoring water quality. Importantly, we also provided giveaways and resources about best practices for reducing pollution that starts in the home. To learn more about this event, visit cleanwaterfest.com/activities.html.

In the months ahead, our team will expand efforts in Ohio to build more partnerships at the local and state level and make advocacy a priority to reduce oversalting. And we continue to engage the public to adopt better salting practices, encourage their neighbors to do the same and follow up with their elected officials.

Everyone can do their part at home: shovel, scatter and sweep! Shovel early and often to reduce the amount of snow that turns into ice. Scatter salt: a 12-ounce mug holds enough to salt a 20 footlong driveway, two parking spaces or 10 sidewalk squares. Sweep up salt after a storm event or if a walkway was oversalted. Store that salt in a closed container to use during the next storm event.

SALT WATCH®
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

POLICY PULSE

Data Centers: What's at Stake and What You Can Do in Your Community

By JARED MOTT, Conservation Director

This data center was recently built in northern Virginia, host to a large concentration of data centers.

ISTOCK

At the 2025 national convention, delegates from the League approved a resolution about data centers and other high energy-consuming facilities. The resolution appeared on page 23 of Outdoor America, 2025, Issue 3.

Below are talking points and background to help local residents and advocates participate in the vital public processes related to the siting, construction and operation of data centers.

Why Local Governments Matter

- Most decisions about land use, siting, and permitting for data centers are made at the local level.
- City councils, county boards, and planning commissions often hold public hearings where residents can voice concerns.
- **Action step:** Sign up for email alerts about hearings, zoning meetings, and permit applications in your community.

Watch the State Legislature

- Some states have passed laws that limit local authority over data centers.
- In some cases, state laws:
  - Prevent cities/counties from rejecting data centers.
  - Redirect tax revenue from local governments into state coffers.
- **Action step:** Monitor state bills that affect local control and funding from data centers.

Key Environmental Concerns

Energy Use

- **Scale:** Data centers operate 24/7 and require enormous amounts of electricity. A single large facility can consume as much power as a small city. According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute, electricity demand from data centers can vary, but will account for about 12 percent of all U.S. demand by 2030.
- **Sources:** If electricity comes from fossil fuels, data centers increase **air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.** Even with renewables, grid demand may slow down the transition to clean energy for homes and businesses.
- **Local Impacts:** Utilities may need to build new power plants or transmission lines, with construction costs often passed to residential ratepayers.

Water Use

- **Cooling Needs:** Most data centers use water-based cooling systems. Facilities can consume millions of gallons of water every day—especially in hot or dry climates. In fact, large data centers can consume 5 million gallons of water per day, as much as a city home to 50,000 people.
- **Competition:** This demand can compete directly with local drinking water supplies, agriculture, or river ecosystems during droughts.
- **Transparency Issues:** Companies rarely disclose exact water use, leaving communities uncertain about long-term impacts.

Wastewater Treatment & Disposal

- **Discharge:** About 80 percent of water used by data centers evaporates during the process of cooling the center's technology, but the remaining 20 percent is wastewater. Heated water discharged into rivers or streams can raise water temperatures, harming fish and aquatic life.
- **Chemicals:** Some cooling systems add biocides or anti-corrosion chemicals that require treatment before release. If treatment systems fail or are overloaded, pollutants may enter waterways.
- **Local Systems:** Increased wastewater loads can overwhelm municipal treatment plants, leading to higher infrastructure costs for communities.

Habitat, Wetland and Landscape Impacts

- **Construction:** Building large-scale facilities often means clearing farmland, wetlands, or forests.
- **Wildlife:** Loss of habitat disrupts migration corridors, nesting sites, and local biodiversity.
- **Land Use Conflicts:** Data centers are often located in industrial zones but may expand into rural or natural areas where impacts are greater.

Environmental Review Process

- **Importance:** Environmental reviews should carefully assess energy, water, and land impacts before approval.
- **Gaps:** In some states, large data centers have been exempted from review or granted fast-track approvals.
- **Community Role:** Public comments during reviews can highlight overlooked issues and push agencies to require mitigation measures.

How You Can Engage

- **No expertise needed.** Showing up and speaking out is the most powerful action.
- Ask **general questions** at hearings:
  - How much energy will this facility use?
  - Where will the water come from?
  - How will wastewater be treated?
  - What are the impacts on local land and wildlife?
- Encourage decision-makers to slow down and fully consider the long-term **costs and risks.**

Bottom Line

Data centers bring serious environmental challenges. Local voices can ensure that decisions put community needs and natural resources first.

POLICY PULSE

Conservation Slammed to a Halt during Federal Government Shutdown

By JARED MOTT, Conservation Director

ISTOCK

The Roadless Rule limits new road building in U.S. Forest Services lands that are remote and ecologically valuable. USFS already manages 370,000 miles of roads with an $8.6 billion maintenance backlog.

As *Outdoor America* went to print, the longest federal government shutdown had just ended. The federal government had been shut down since October 1st. The shutdown occurred after Congress failed to pass the appropriations bills needed to fund federal agencies for the new fiscal year (FY2026). Deep divisions between the House and Senate, particularly over spending levels, policy riders, and demands to cut or restrict funding for environmental protection, clean energy, and social programs prevented agreement on a long-term budget or even a short-term continuing resolution that would have kept spending levels static.

As the fiscal deadline passed without action, funding lapsed for most federal agencies, resulting in widespread furloughs of employees without pay, program suspensions and service disruptions across the country.

A government shutdown doesn't just halt activity in Washington, it undermines our nation's ability to protect clean water, healthy lands and wildlife, while threatening the jobs and communities that depend on them. From delayed cleanups and stalled conservation projects to closed parks and shuttered research programs, the environmental and economic toll would reach every corner of the country.

Below are a few highlighted impacts to agencies that conduct most of the conservation and environmental protection work done by the federal government.

Environmental Protection Agency

- Halts cleanups and inspections at Superfund sites, leaving communities exposed to toxic contamination.
- Suspends oversight of drinking water systems and hazardous waste facilities, raising public health and safety risks.
- Freezes State Revolving Fund programs that finance clean water and wastewater infrastructure, and halts brownfield grants that revitalize communities.
- Delays Clean Water Act permits and slows enforcement, stalling infrastructure projects and private-sector investments.
- Shuts down laboratories that test air and water samples, impeding timely detection of pollution.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Pauses Natural Resources Conservation Service programs that help farmers and landowners reduce erosion, protect soil health, and improve water quality.
- Delays Farm Bill conservation contracts that support wildlife habitat, wetland restoration and sustainable agriculture.
- Halts technical and financial assistance to producers implementing conservation practices that improve soil health and protect drinking water on working lands.
- Disrupts the U.S. Forest Service efforts to maintain trails, reduce wildfire risk and manage national forests for recreation and wildlife.

National Park Service

- Closes or reduces staffing at national parks and historic sites that drive outdoor recreation and tourism.
- Shutters many visitor centers, restrooms, and trash collection, leaving public lands unsafe and unwelcoming.
- Postpones maintenance on trails, bridges, and facilities, increasing the risk of accidents and damage.
- Reduces search-and-rescue operations and wildfire prevention on park and adjacent lands.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Furloughs most non-emergency staff, halting habitat restoration, refuge management, and conservation grants.
- Suspends Endangered Species Act consultations and permitting, creating uncertainty for conservation and development projects.
- Stops wildlife monitoring and invasive species control on refuges and public lands.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

- Pauses coastal and watershed resilience grants, marine debris removal and estuary monitoring programs.
- Slows or stops harmful algal bloom tracking, threatening drinking water safety and fisheries health.
- Reduces fisheries management and enforcement, harming coastal and river-dependent economies.
- Delays critical research, mapping and climate data that support flood planning and local decision-making.

A shutdown doesn't save money—it weakens our ability to protect the environment, public health and local economies that depend on clean water, healthy soil and thriving outdoor recreation. The League joins the entire conservation community in calling for prioritization of stable funding to provide the necessary tools to ensure that America's natural resources, communities and conservation programs remain protected and productive for generations to come.

A government shutdown undermines our nation's ability to protect clean water, healthy lands and wildlife, while threatening the jobs and communities that depend on them.

League Urges Protection for America's Backcountry by Preserving Roadless Rule

The Izaak Walton League recently sent a comment letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture urging the agency to maintain the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which protects 58 million acres of unfragmented backcountry in our national forests.

Adopted in 2001 after extensive public input, including 600 meetings and 1.6 million comments, the Roadless Rule limits new road construction in designated areas while allowing flexibility for activities such as wildfire prevention, habitat restoration and access to existing leases and inholdings. These safeguards have helped conserve

fish and wildlife habitat, protect clean water, and sustain opportunities for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.

In its letter, the League cautioned that rescinding the Rule would open the door to new roadbuilding and industrial-scale logging that could degrade water quality, fragment habitat and diminish backcountry recreation opportunities. With more than 370,000 miles of existing roads—enough to circle the Earth nearly 15 times—and an $8.6 billion road maintenance backlog, the U.S. Forest Service should focus on repairing the roads we already have, not building more.

The League urged USDA to keep the Roadless Rule's core conservation protections in place while collaborating with hunters, anglers, Tribes and local communities to address forest health and wildfire concerns. To read the League's comment letter, visit iwla.org/press-statements.

During the shutdown, the National Park Service closed the popular Great Falls Park in Virginia sending visitors scrambling to find other parks along the Potomac.

Court Dismisses Challenge to Prairie Wetlands Protection

The Izaak Walton League of America welcomed the recent dismissal of *Ellingson Drainage, Inc. v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service,* a federal lawsuit that sought to overturn the Prairie Potholes Regulation, a rule designed to protect critical wetland habitats in the Northern Plains.

The case, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and backed by the Pacific Legal Foundation, was dismissed before trial, preserving an important conservation tool for America's wetlands and waterfowl.

Adopted in 2024, the Prairie Potholes Regulation provides a voluntary "safe harbor" process for landowners who hold federal wetland easements. Through this program, landowners can request technical guidance on how far to set back drain tiles to avoid unintentional drainage of protected wetlands. When landowners follow this guidance, they are protected from enforcement action if a wetland inadvertently dries up.

Common-sense policies balance private land use with the protection of shared natural resources.

These easements—funded by Duck Stamp dollars and managed as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System—are a cornerstone of waterfowl conservation in the Prairie Pothole Region.

Had the lawsuit succeeded, it could have weakened protections for thousands of wetland easements nationwide and undermined decades of investments by hunters, landowners and conservationists. The court's decision ensures that these vital wetlands—essential for migratory birds, flood control and clean water—remain protected.

The League strongly supports the outcome and the clarity that the court's decision provides for landowners and conservation agencies. The dismissal reinforces the importance of common-sense policies that balance private land use with the protection of shared natural resources.

At a time when many wetlands have lost federal protection following the Supreme Court's *Sackett v. EPA* decision, the court's ruling is a welcome affirmation of the value and legality of proactive wetland conservation. The League remains committed to defending these essential landscapes for the benefit of wildlife, clean water and future generations of hunters and outdoor enthusiasts.

MICHAEL REINEMER

NATIONAL
★AWARDS★
2026

A good Ike is easy to find.

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- Advancing the shooting sports, or
- Writing informative newsletters about the League's work

Nominate an outstanding member, chapter, division or ally for an Izaak Walton League national award.

Nominations are due June 1, 2026.

Visit www.iwla.org/awards

ISTOCK

Volunteers Discover Severe Stream Pollution and Take Action to Improve Public Health

By MAGGIE DOMBROSKI, Save Our Streams Coordinator

In 2021, certified Virginia Save Our Streams (VA SOS) volunteers from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) made an alarming discovery. While conducting benthic macroinvertebrate surveys in Lucketts, Va., the volunteers discovered a severe pollution problem and took action to protect the health of local residents as well as the health of the stream.

To understand the story those benthic macros told the monitors, it's first important to understand what benthic macroinvertebrates are: aquatic critters that live at the bottom of streams and possess varying levels of tolerance to pollution. As a result, the number and diversity of macroinvertebrates found in a stream provides information about how healthy the stream is. With the VA SOS method, certified volunteers collect, identify and count macroinvertebrates to generate a stream health score.

Volunteer water monitors were surprised that the downstream testing site scored only a 5 (unacceptable stream health) and contained only pollution-tolerant midges and leeches.

AMY ULLAND

The water monitors, led by LWC Stream Monitoring Program Coordinator and Board President Amy Ulland, surveyed two locations about a quarter mile apart on a tributary of Limestone Branch in Lucketts. The two locations were chosen because they are upstream and downstream locations within LWC's JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, so they would provide a baseline for how upcoming restoration projects in the sanctuary would affect the health of the stream. During the initial macroinvertebrate surveys in May 2021, the upstream site received a score of 10, indicating acceptable stream health conditions. The monitors found a variety of macroinvertebrates, including pollution-sensitive species like mayflies and beetles.

After that positive result, the monitors were surprised to discover that the downstream site scored only a five (unacceptable stream health) and, despite its proximity to the previous site, contained only pollution-tolerant midges and leeches.

Most families didn't trust their tap water, and some were spending up to $3,000 per year on bottled water, even while relying on food assistance.

"This was our first sign that something was wrong," recalled Ulland, "and we needed to figure out what it was."

Identifying the danger

Curious about what could be happening in that quarter mile to result in such a drastic change in stream health, Ulland walked the area with the sanctuary manager. About halfway between the two sites, they discovered a wastewater treatment

plant from an adjacent mobile home community discharging effluent directly into the stream. "This seemed like a great place to start," Ulland said. So, LWC worked with Friends of the Shenandoah River to test the effluent for bacteria.

The findings were revealing and concerning—the effluent sample had *E. coli* levels more than 192 times the facility's permitted limit. This posed a threat not only to the health of the stream and environment, but also to the health of the mobile home community residents, whose drinking water well was located near the stream.

What started as a simple stream survey became a catalyst for change.

"At this point, we knew that we had to act," said Ulland. In January 2022, LWC secured a $41,432 grant from the Tides Foundation through the Google Data Centers Grants Fund for *E. coli* sampling and community assistance.

Over the course of the year, volunteers conducted extensive *E. coli* testing and semi-annual macroinvertebrate sampling and shared the data with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ). Their findings inspired VA DEQ to conduct follow-up investigations. Ultimately, the EPA mandated the complete replacement of the wastewater treatment facility within 2.5 years.

This was a great victory but knowing that the community couldn't wait more than two years for safe drinking water, LWC took matters into their own hands. Led by Ulland, LWC began partnering with organizations that were already connected with the local community (including a food bank) to learn about residents' drinking water concerns.

"What we heard was alarming," said Ulland. They learned that most families didn't trust their tap water, and some were spending up to $3,000 per year on bottled water, even while relying on food assistance. LWC continued to build trust in the community through other local organizations and held a community meeting to explain the wastewater issue and to offer free, comprehensive drinking water testing to residents.

LWC tested the drinking water at 17 homes within the mobile home community and was pleasantly surprised by the results: No *E. coli* was present in the drinking water, and the samples met all of the state drinking water standards.

Interestingly though, the community still didn't feel safe drinking their tap water. According to Ulland, "The issue, thankfully, wasn't contamination, but water hardness, which affected the taste of the water, and deep-seated concerns about water safety that were reinforced by cultural and community beliefs."

To address these concerns, LWC used grant funding to install high-quality countertop carbon water filters and electronic descalers in each of the 17 homes they tested in August 2022. LWC currently has funding to supply replacement filters through the end of 2026, which is projected to save the community $375,000 over six years.

"In fact, the residents joke that Costco is going to be going out of business soon because they're not purchasing water there anymore," Ulland shared.

The effluent sample had *E. coli* levels more than 192 times the facility's permitted limit, posing a threat to the community whose drinking water well was located near the stream.

AMY ULLAND

Ending persistent pollution

The mobile home residents have safe, affordable drinking water, but the issue with the wastewater treatment facility continues. The upgraded facility received a certificate to operate from VA DEQ in September 2024.

When volunteers headed to the site in November 2024 to conduct a follow-up assessment, however, they discovered a large, floating brown mass in the stream. After LWC reported this, VA DEQ began a series of inspections at the facility. Since then, inspectors have visited the site 21 times, documenting repeated violations — including trenches discovered on multiple occasions that resulted in raw sewage entering the stream.

This family in the mobile home community now has safe drinking water. A water filter they received is shown on the counter.

After months of oversight and enforcement, the process finally resulted in a consent order between VA DEQ and the property owner in September 2025. Under the order, the owner agreed to install a tertiary sand filter system, update the facility's maintenance manual and submit monthly operator reports, among other measures. Both LWC and VA DEQ hope this agreement will finally bring the facility into compliance and help restore the health of the stream.

To ensure that progress is made, LWC volunteers will continue VA SOS monitoring upstream and downstream of the facility so that changes in stream health can be tracked as the updated treatment system comes online. In addition to these sites, Ulland and other LWC volunteers continue to conduct VA SOS monitoring at 28 other VA SOS sites across Loudoun County.

This project demonstrates how powerful volunteer water quality monitoring can be when volunteers think critically about the data they collect and pursue partnerships, funding, community engagement and regulatory action.

"What started as a simple stream survey became a catalyst for change," Ulland said, "and we used this data to advocate for cleaner water and push for solutions that improve water quality and public health, especially for underserved communities. This wasn't just about addressing pollution; it was also about improving lives."

The Izaak Walton League of America is proud to partner with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy through both the VA SOS and Salt Watch programs to protect the health of our waterways and communities. To learn more about our community science water quality monitoring programs, visit iwla.org/water.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

One challenge that Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy faced when seeking to connect with the local community was a language barrier, as this is a majority Spanish-speaking community. The key to addressing this challenge was local partnerships. A native Spanish speaker from an affordable housing nonprofit that was already working in the community provided translation services for the community meeting.

For Ulland and a few other volunteers who had some experience with Spanish, Google Translate was also a helpful tool for communicating and translating written materials.

AMY ULLAND

2026 NATIONAL CONVENTION

If you attend only one event next year, this is it!

- Kouba Gallery National Wildlife Art Show
- Main IWLA National Convention
- Inspiration Stations & Parade of States
- Volunteer Appreciation Banquet
- Immersive Conservation Activities
- Tons of Family Focused Experiences

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Izaak Walton League of America 2026 National Convention

JULY 16 -18

Bloomington, Minnesota

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JULY 13-19

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Contagious Enthusiasm Drives Participation in Water Monitoring

By MAGGIE DOMBROSKI, Save Our Streams Coordinator

Fred Bailey first joined the Izaak Walton League because he was looking for a shooting range in his area, and a Google search brought him to the Arlington-Fairfax Chapter in northern Virginia.

He became familiar with Save Our Streams (SOS) from the information on the Izaak Walton League website shortly after becoming a member. He took the macroinvertebrate identification test and began attending some stream monitoring activities.

"I sort of became fascinated at the concept that you can go into the water and pull out some macroinvertebrates or bugs and determine the stream quality from what you find in the water," he said.

After joining the League, Bailey noticed that the term of the Chapter's Conservation Director had expired so he decided to put his name on the ballot and was elected. "I always had an interest in conservation," he said. And he thought the chapter could devote more time to conservation.

One of his primary goals as Conservation Director was to organize some SOS monitoring events at the Chapter, which he began earlier this year along with Nitrate Watch and Salt Watch monitoring

When asked if ramping up SOS was difficult, he said "I wouldn't call it hard, but it took time and planning." The key was using the available resources and leaning into local partnerships. Bailey used the Izaak Walton League website to find out what equipment he needed and to print off the datasheets and macroinvertebrate identification tools.

He also reached out to the Northern Virginia Soil

ARLINGTON-FAIRFAX CHAPTER

Bailey enlists Chapter members as well as local partners to monitor waterways through SOS, Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch.

and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD) and participated in some of their stream monitoring events, led by VA SOS trainer Ashley Palmer, to get an idea of how an event runs. This also provided opportunities to practice identifying the macroinvertebrates. Palmer came out to provide support during the Arlington-Fairfax Chapter's first monitoring event, and in turn, the Chapter started monitoring a site previously monitored by the NVSWCD.

Bailey reports that he did not have much trouble recruiting chapter members to participate in monitoring. "There are a lot of members who are really interested in conservation, and I've heard a lot that 'we've been waiting for the chapter to do more with conservation,'" he said.

The online sign-up for his April event quickly filled up. Now his goal is to keep the momentum going. He hopes to get a few more Chapter members certified and start monitoring another stream.

See the results of the Arlington-Fairfax Chapter's recent stream monitoring events on the cleanwaterhub.org.

SAVE OUR STREAMS®
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Save Our Streams! You Can Recruit New Water Monitors

In addition to monitoring, Fred Bailey is spreading the word about water quality at community events, including the Vienna Green Expo in northern Virginia. For the event, he created posters for both Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch using information from the League's website and set up his tablet with a slideshow of stream monitoring photos. He also requested free outreach materials from the national office.

Are you an Izaak Walton League member? Request Clean Water outreach materials at iwla.org/requestoutreachsupplies.

MICHAEL REINEMER

Your Endowment in Action

2025 National Conservation Scholarships Awards

Each year, the Izaak Walton League awards two $2,500 national scholarships to complement scholarships offered by League chapters and divisions. The national scholarships help pay for the education of future conservation leaders, supporting college students pursuing degrees in natural resources and related studies. These scholarships are made possible and are fully funded through a generous annual grant from Izaak Walton League of America Endowment.

The scholarship review committee selected the following students to receive the League's National Conservation Scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year. The recipients' thoughts about conservation follow.

Nora E. Foreman

Fergus Falls, Minnesota
Major: Science – Conservation, Biology and Ecology
Montana State University

Conservation philosophy:

"I am a firm believer that regenerative resource management should be the future of conservation. Our world already has many sustainable practices in place that aim to minimize environmental damage and preserve natural resources for future generations. But even more can and should be done. Regenerative management takes things a step further by employing standards that leave the environment in better condition than it originally was before the management occurred. These regenerative ecosystems possess positive feedback cycles—meaning they can regenerate and improve themselves over time with a little help from human oversight."

Critical conservation issues:

"Two of the most significant conservation issues that North America will face in the next decade are habitat fragmentation and soil degradation. Fragmentation leads to a loss of biodiversity because different populations of wildlife are unable to travel to meet and exchange new genetic materials. The combination of less diverse populations and said populations being regulated to smaller areas of land is a massive concern, particularly in the United States due to increasing agriculture and urban development."

"Livestock and plant agriculture are primary causes of soil degradation. Unsustainable agriculture practices erode soil and deplete it of nutrients. This is a cause of great concern for plants, animals and humans. Many methods of mining for common and rare minerals also deplete the soil as they can cause nutrient toxicity when too much nitrogen or heavy metals are leached into the soil. Plants are primary producers in the food web, and without adequate soil their growth is stunted, or they fail to grow at all in a degraded area."

More about Nora Foreman:

Foreman intends to use her education and previous experiences in conservation, ecology and biology in a career to work directly with wildlife and people. Her goal is to help protect vulnerable species while educating the future generation of conservationists. After working in the field, she hopes to continue her learning and pursue a graduate degree.

National Conservation Scholarships

Alyse A. Walenski

Green Bay, Wisconsin
Major: Environmental Engineering and Technology
University of Wisconsin – Green Bay

Conservation philosophy:

"Conservation is critical to business and the economy in that environmental preservation and restoration will produce more materials for longer amounts of time. If humanity chooses to prioritize the instant gratification of money over the long-term health of ecosystems for use from generation to generation, any chance of continuing profit will cease to exist."

"Natural resources cannot be managed alone for the sole purpose of that specific material, but must be together to promote the health of all resources-providing environments. Promoting soil health can not only be useful for food agriculture, but the growing of forests for lumber. Ensuring that water quality standards are met in streams and lakes will provide healthy water for recreation, fish and other marine species, and drinking water."

Critical conservation issues:

"My work experience and interest in wetland destruction make it the one that crosses my mind the most. There are claims that our country has lost fifty percent of its wetlands since the 1780s, mostly due to agricultural practices and development, but also sea-level rises. Due to the various benefits of wetlands, the decimation of these precious ecosystems results in negative impacts on water quality, increased erosion, more susceptibility to climate change, and habitat loss for native species."

"Although not popularly thoughts of as a natural resource like forest or waterways might be, wetlands have an incredible influence on water quality. These ecosystems are known to slow water flow, preventing erosion of banks and allowing sediments to settle out and providing clear water downstream…and aid in the natural removal of excess nitrogen and phosphorus. Sediments, nitrogen, and phosphorus are all contaminants that are removed during water treatment process, costing thousands of dollars to water treatment plants each year. Despite knowing that these ecosystems could negate some of the costs of providing clean water to communities by implementing them into treatment processes, wetlands continue to be destroyed across the country at an alarming rate."

More about Alyse Walenski:

Using her engineering background, Walenski has conducted environmental assessments of public transportation projects as an advocate for wetlands and biodiversity preservation. Her dream job would be to work towards preserving and rebuilding natural ecosystems for public and environmental health—perhaps as a wetland specialist for a state conservation agency.

League Looks for Conservation Scholars for 2026 Awards

Know a conservation-minded college student who could use an extra $2,500 for tuition and expenses? Learn more about specific requirements and find application form on the League's website at iwla.org/scholarship. The next application cycle begins January 1, 2026, with applications due to the League's national office by May 15, 2026.

Every member of the Izaak Walton League of America is also a member of the League Endowment, which raises funds for grants to chapters and divisions. The Endowment holds its annual meeting at the League's national convention.

THE DEFENDERS CHAPTER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Izaak Walton League's Defenders Chapter Achievement Award is named after the League's motto: "Defenders of Soil, Air, Woods, Waters and Wildlife." Based on your activities in the last calendar year, your chapter might be eligible to receive this national recognition for your many ongoing efforts and accomplishments.

To be eligible for this annual award designation, your chapter must have met criteria in five of the following categories during 2025: membership, financial contributions, education, conservation, youth involvement and communication.

Initial recognition of your chapter's 2025 accomplishments will be made at the 2026 IWLA National Convention, and will be published in a future issue of *Outdoor America*.

Applications for both awards are mailed in January to each chapter president, secretary and awards chair. For additional information or an application form, please contact the IWLA Chapter Relations Department toll-free at (800) IKE-LINE, extension 216, or email awards@iwla.org. Forms are also available online at iwla.org/awards. **Applications must be postmarked no later than March 15, 2026.**

2024 AWARD RECIPIENTS

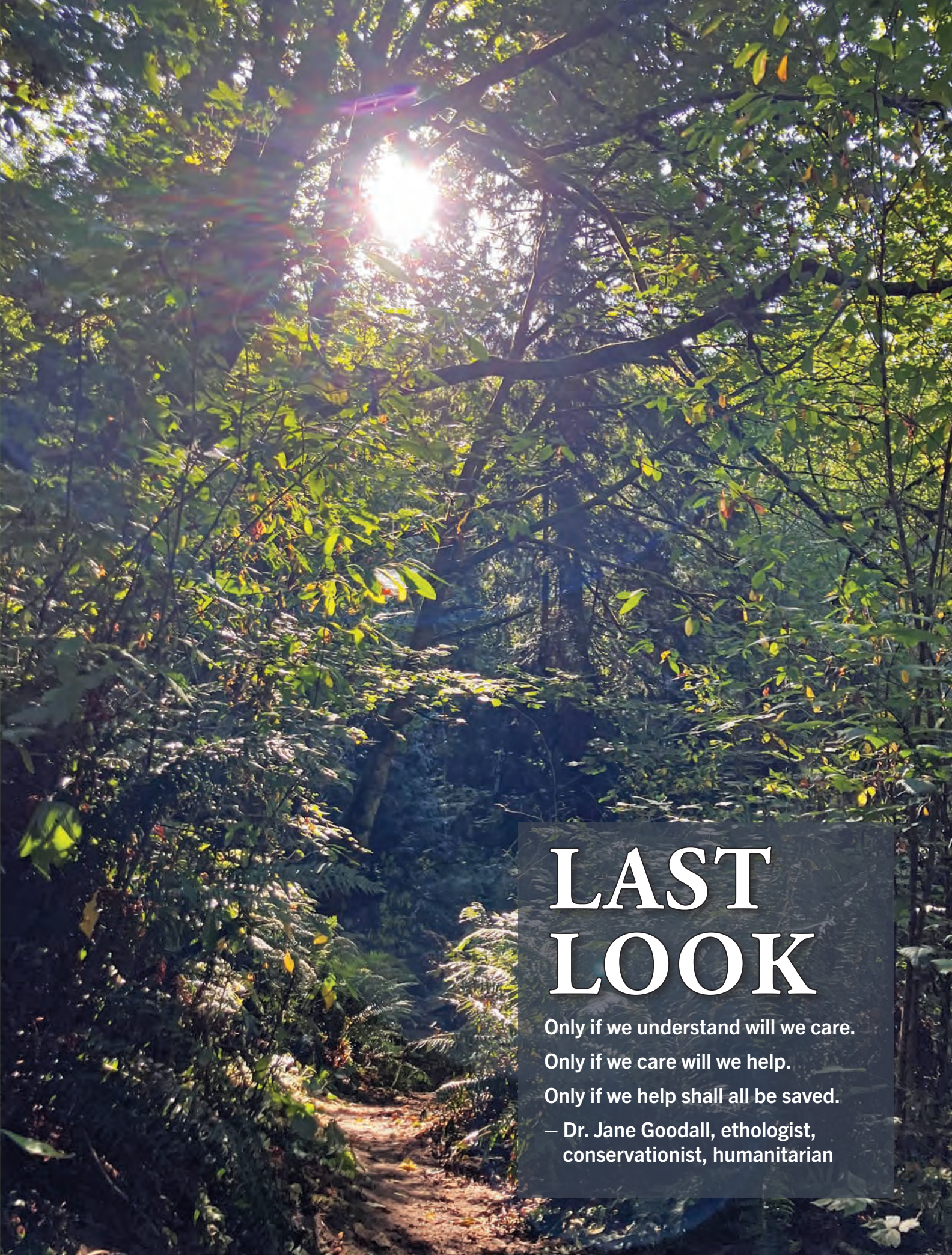
Arlington-Fairfax Chapter, Virginia
Austin Chapter, Minnesota
Berkeley County Chapter, West Virginia
Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter, Maryland
Bill Cook Chapter, Wisconsin
Brown County Chapter, Wisconsin
Bush Lake Chapter, Minnesota
Cass County Chapter, Minnesota
Central New York Chapter, New York
Des Moines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

THE TOBIN AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

Who are the dedicated Ikes among your division or chapter members? You know—the ones who show up for all the meetings, sign up first for work crews, help maintain the grounds and make the organization run more smoothly? They are your chapter's most generous members and they deserve a hearty thanks.

The Judge John W. Tobin Volunteer Appreciation Award, established in 1976 by past IWLA President John Tobin, is the perfect way to recognize that special member. Every chapter is encouraged to present a Tobin Award to one of its members each year. The award not only recognizes a member's conservation commitment, but also demonstrates the connection between chapters and national as it is presented by a national director during a chapter meeting.

Make sure your chapter nominates its Tobin Award winner by March 15!



LAST LOOK

Only if we understand will we care.

Only if we care will we help.

Only if we help shall all be saved.

— Dr. Jane Goodall, ethologist, conservationist, humanitarian

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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**

SALT WATCH®
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