



OUTDOOR AMERICA™

PUBLISHED BY THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

2026 ISSUE 1

The World and Wellbeing We Share with Wildlife

INSIDE:

**Wildlife Health and
Human Health:
Understanding the
Links Saves Lives**

**Lessons from 50
Years of Conserving
Nongame Wildlife**

**National Convention
Preview!**



Please donate to our 2026
Spring Fund Drive
to help protect clean
water, human health and
outdoor recreation



America's streams, wetlands and drinking water face extreme peril right now.

The U.S. EPA is racing to **rollback Clean Water Act** protections for tributary streams and wetlands. Forgetting their mission to ensure Americans have clean, safe drinking water, EPA is **pushing science aside** to serve the interests of farmers and developers.

Meanwhile, the “**Spring Flush**” adds to the problem as thunderstorms wash recently applied chemical fertilizer and manure from farm fields, backyards and golf courses into streams, lakes and drinking water supplies nationwide.

Budget cuts at all levels of government threaten further **reductions to already limited testing of water quality** in many communities.

But the Izaak Walton League is tackling each of these challenges head on, leveraging science, policy advocacy and grassroots engagement.

With your donation of \$50, \$100 or more today, the League will:

- **Mobilize our growing network of volunteer scientists** to test for and report sources of pollution.
- **Unleash grassroots pressure on Congress** to restore Clean Water Act protections for streams, wetlands and our drinking water.
- **Fight for investments in soil health and defend conservation programs in the Farm Bill** for voluntary wetland conservation on private land.

Thank you for your generous gift of \$50 or \$100 to our 2026 Spring Fund Drive today!

To donate by mail, send your check payable to “IWLA” to
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To donate online, please visit [iwla.org](https://www.iwla.org)

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CONTENTS

2026, ISSUE 1

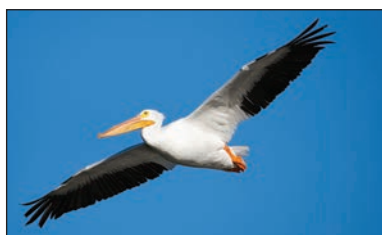
Features

8 Wildlife Health and Human Health: Understanding the Links Saves Lives By Michael Reinemer



USFWS

16 Lessons from 50 Years of Conserving Nongame Wildlife By Carrol Henderson

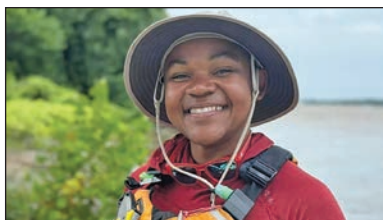


ISTOCK JCRADER

22 Register Now for the 2026 National Convention in Bloomington, Minn.



28 Solo Journey Down the Mississippi: A Work of Becoming By Devin Ashley Brown



Departments

League Leader.....2

Director's Chair6

Policy Pulse.....20

Ikes in Action.....26

Clean Water Corner32

Climate Change & Clean Water ...40

Soil Matters.....44

ON THE COVER ►

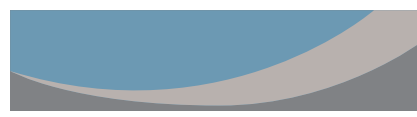
Red foxes
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CONTENTS ►

Lake at Izaak Walton League headquarters.

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.



Progress through Bold Advocacy and Plans for a Big National Convention

SCOTT MEYER | National President

First, thank you to the Minnesota Valley Chapter Convention Committee who has been very busy planning for and posting information for the 2026 National Convention in Bloomington, Minnesota. See details starting on page 22. You can register and book a hotel room at iwla-GetItDone.org. I will see you there.

Our volunteer leaders have also been working hard on the daunting task of identifying a new Executive Director. Scott Kovarovics left big shoes to fill after his long tenure with the League. We cannot thank him enough for his many years of service, stewardship and leadership. Stay tuned for an update on the hiring process.

We said a sad goodbye to Executive Board Chair and longtime Ike Dale Braun who passed away in January. Dale was involved at all levels of the League as a leader, and he is missed. I knew him as thoughtful and passionate in his love of the outdoors, conservation and the League's mission. Vice Chair Rachel McBride of Virginia has stepped into the role of Executive

Board Chair and we welcome new Vice Chair Luann Noll of Illinois. Thank you to Rachel and Luann for stepping up. I look forward to working with them both in 2026.

Updates on our advocacy work

I hope everyone is receiving the action alerts from Jared Mott, our Conservation Director and Interim Executive Director. Among recent issues was a proposed rule on Waters of the US (WOTUS) affecting wetlands and streams and another on protecting the Boundary Waters area from harmful mining operations. These alerts provide an easy way for all Ikes to help protect our woods, waters and wildlife. Find all our advocacy alerts at iwla.org/get-involved.

In the last issue of *Outdoor America*, I discussed data centers. As states kick off their legislative sessions, we are seeing several state and local governments tackling this topic. One common tactic is putting a moratorium on data centers to give officials time to study and better understand these developments. This is prudent and allows local and state



governments the time to make informed decisions. This also gives conservation groups like the League an opportunity to work with their elected representatives for common-sense guidelines for protecting the surrounding land, water and air. A moratorium also buys time for emergence of new technology that may lessen the impacts of data centers.

The recent announcement of \$1.2 billion in federal support for fish and wildlife conservation and outdoor access in 2026 is more than a budget milestone—it's a reminder of how deeply Americans invest in the natural world. These funds, generated through the PittmanRobertson Wildlife Restoration Act and related excise taxes, come directly from the sale of hunting, fishing

Notice to Members ► The League occasionally makes postal addresses available to carefully screened firms and organizations whose products or activities might be of interest to League members. If you prefer not to receive such mailings in the future, please send us a note along with a copy of your *Outdoor America* mailing label (including your membership identification number), asking that your name be excluded. Send requests to Izaak Walton League Membership Department, 707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878-2983.

and outdoor equipment. It's a uniquely American model: the people who enjoy the outdoors help pay to conserve it for everyone.

This year's apportionment will strengthen wildlife management, expand public access and support the shooting sports facilities that many of us rely on. I've used these facilities in Missouri and in Virginia and I've seen how they support safe, responsible participation in the outdoors. The funds are also essential to hunter education programs that do far more than teach safety.

They connect young people to the outdoors, wildlife and traditions that might otherwise fade.

During my years as a hunter education instructor, I saw a pattern that is called "generation skipping." Youth would arrive to class with a parent who didn't hunt, or a grandparent who did. The tradition had jumped a generation, but it hadn't disappeared. States are now leaning into this reality by pairing instructors with youth for mentored hunting. This approach not only builds skills but also gives many urban youth their first

experience in a truly wild setting. However, vigilance remains essential. Last year's federal budget bill included a proposal to sell off public lands. This was removed only after strong public pushback. The attempt is a reminder that our public lands, which belong to every American, are never guaranteed. They are the backbone of hunting, fishing, wildlife watching and outdoor recreation. They are also irreplaceable classrooms for the next generation of conservationists.

Welcome Donna Shriver, Digital Communications Manager

In July 2025, I was honored to join the League as Digital Communications Manager. My role focuses on strengthening and modernizing how we communicate the League's mission and impact. This includes amplifying news from League chapters—whether about community advocacy, stream monitoring or youth programs—across social media and digital platforms.

I also oversee website updates, manage HubSpot as our email database platform and produce the *Conservation Currents* newsletter, ensuring our members and supporters remain informed, engaged and inspired.

Communication strategies evolve rapidly and we must meet people where they are. So my goal is to ensure we are amplifying our advocacy, conservation, clean

water efforts and agricultural engagement in ways that resonate with longtime members and those just discovering us.

I earned my BA in Liberal Arts from West Virginia University and my MBA from University of Maryland Global Campus. Throughout my career, I've had the opportunity to serve in marketing leadership roles across nonprofit organizations, government contracting, manufacturing, security, commercial real estate, biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries.

Outside of the League, I volunteer my digital marketing skills to promote the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, which welcomes more than 250,000 attendees each year, connecting people to agricultural education



and traditions. When I'm not behind a screen, you'll find me swimming, walking, enjoying the outdoors or spending time with friends at a winery or brewery.

I look forward to working with members, supporters and partners. Your stories and passion bring the League's mission to life. Share them with me so we can strengthen our voice and inspire the next generation of conservation leaders.

Have a Project in Need of Funding?

Endowment Applications Due by May 1

Does your chapter or division have a project or program that could use a funding boost? **The Izaak Walton League of America Endowment** might be able to help with a grant.

The deadline for the 2026-2027 grant cycle is May 1, 2026. Grant awards will be announced at the 2026 national convention. Visit the Endowment website for the application form and details at iwla-endowment.org.

In 2025, the Endowment awarded 31 grants representing more than \$177,000 for projects ranging from prairie restoration and *E. coli* testing to trap machine replacement and aquatic weed control.

If you have questions, please contact:

Pamela Meara, President
Izaak Walton League of America Endowment
(703) 362-7293, pmearaiwla@gmail.com

Patricia Nunn, Endowment Executive Secretary
P.O. Box 189
Stephenson, VA 22656
iwlaendowment@gmail.com
(202) 246-1115

For this year, Endowment has created a special category to aid chapters installing renewable energy. Each chapter may request a grant of up to \$2,500 for any of the following:

- Install or lease solar panels
- Invest in a solar garden (off site)
- Install a solar aerator in a chapter pond or lake
- Install or invest in a wind turbine
- Install a heat pump on chapter grounds
- Defray the cost of upgrading heating and cooling equipment on chapter property.

Other similar grants may be considered if they create an energy efficient program.



OUTDOOR AMERICA

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Minimum national dues are \$50 for individual and \$75 for family memberships, which includes \$5 for *Outdoor America* magazine. Magazine subscription is inseparable from dues. Chapter and division dues vary and are set separately.

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IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA MISSION STATEMENT

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

IWLA.ORG

THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

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Izaak Walton League

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Not a member? It's easy to join!

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

How to Honor the Legacies of Dale Braun and Steve Labs

JARED MOTT | INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I sit down to write this column, much of the country is still locked in snow and ice, waiting for spring. For national staff, January and early February is when we prepare for the annual midwinter meeting, whether we're gathering in person or meeting virtually.

So I just sent off some text for the staff report updating League leaders on the state of conservation policy in DC and was only slightly admonished for leading off the report with a bit of a negative tone. And while it's true that setbacks to protections in the Clean Water Act and efforts to build a sulfide mine just outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness have gotten more traction than we'd like, it's important to remember that hope, like spring, is always coming, even when we can't see it.

Grassroots activists from across the League and across the country will rally to defend clean water, the Boundary Waters and a dozen other conservation causes, as surely as the turkeys will start gobbling and the dogwoods start blooming.

As we shake off the winter and cast an eye toward what's next, it brings me no pleasure to share that we'll do it without a couple of folks who've personified the League's mission for decades.

Dale Braun and Steve Labs passed away last fall and winter, and the League will sorely miss their leadership. Putting into words how much both of these men cared about the League, our members and our mission, is a fool's errand. But I'll try and leave you with some of what I learned from both of these great Ikes and cherished friends.

Dale Braun: a powerful advocate with a deft touch

The list of Dale Braun's contributions to the League would eat up every column inch I've been granted for this issue. He, at various times, led the Linn County Chapter, the Iowa Division and the League's Executive Board.

But I got to know Dale working closely with him when he was chairman of the League's Resolutions Committee. As



Conservation Director, I was responsible for shepherding resolutions submitted in hopes of becoming official League conservation policy through our resolutions process. Dale was an engaged and thoughtful partner. He understood the gravity of our work but engaged in it with a deft touch, empowering and encouraging the resource committees to deliver their best work.

Dale was also one of the League's most ardent clean water champions. Time and again he answered the bell in Iowa. Clean Water Act rollbacks, a liquid nitrogen fertilizer spill on the East Nishnabotna River, efforts to dredge the upper Mississippi, Dale was first to speak out every time.

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I remember talking to him last summer in Green Bay in the Iowa room at the Parade of States. We started off talking about shared experiences hunting mule deer out west, but as always, the conversation returned to protecting clean water. I sat on a cooler in that hotel room with a red solo cup and listened to Dale, in his unassuming way, talk about his plans to make the water a little bit cleaner for the next generation of Iowans, and as always, left more inspired than when I sat down.

Steve Labs: the complete and generous angler

There's an old Hayes Carll song called "If It Were Up to Me" and I always think of Steve Labs when I hear the line, "If it were up to me, the fish would all be biting." For Steve, the fish always seemed to be biting, and the only thing he loved more than hauling them over the gunnels was watching someone else do it instead. Steve once picked up a rod whose reel

was screaming drag because there was a blue marlin attached to the other end of the line, and he just handed it to me.

Even more than making sure Conservation Directors can catch their first billfish, Steve was passionate about getting kids fishing. As a member and then president of the Brown County Chapter, he was responsible for thousands of kids catching their first fish at the Chapter's pond at Osprey Point. That wasn't enough though, so he also volunteered to coach the local high school's ice fishing team.

As a member, then president, of the Izaak Walton League Endowment, Steve made sure that any chapter that wanted to get kids outdoors wouldn't suffer from want for equipment. As I got out of Steve's truck at the airport in Green Bay to fly home from convention last summer, he was talking about getting me out on Lake Michigan for lake trout in the fall.

Had he known a fishman like Steve, Izaak Walton himself surely would have written him into *The Compleat Angler* where Steve and Piscator would spend a day fishing the River Dove before happily retiring to an "honest ale-house" for a trout supper and endless stories.

So this spring, as we shake the winter off our shoulders, we could all do a lot worse than think about the ways to honor the memories of Dale Braun and Steve Labs. Contact your lawmakers and ask them to defend the Clean Water Act. Take someone to catch their first fish.

I know that I'll be thinking about Dale and Steve and the thousands of Ikes just as passionate as they were, as I'm walking the halls of Congress and while I'm on the water or waiting on some old tom to gobble one more time.



Dale Braun



Steve Labs

The Link between Human and Wildlife Health May Save Your Life

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

Five years ago, a woman in Fremont County, Wyoming, not far from Yellowstone National Park, developed a cough and shortness of breath. It got worse and worse and after a couple of days she went to the hospital. Testing negative for COVID-19 and pneumonia, the patient's health continued to decline and eventually she needed a mechanical ventilator to breathe.

The patient's history taken during her exam revealed recent contact with cats. This was important since medical professionals, veterinarians and public health officials know that some diseases endemic among wild and domestic animals can also infect people. These are called zoonotic diseases.

The cat contact prompted a disease specialist to recommend additional testing, and finally the Wyoming Public Health Laboratory was able to confirm that the pathogen afflicting this patient was *Yersinia pestis*—the plague.

The patient was treated with antibiotics. She recovered and was discharged from the hospital after 35 days. Linking the patient to animal contact, getting an accurate diagnosis and prompt antibiotic treatment probably saved her life.

This deadly form, the pneumonic plague, persists among several animals in Wyoming including wild rodents and their fleas. People can become infected if bitten by an infected flea or through contact with infected animals including domestic cats. And it can spread among humans.

Established in a few port cities in the U.S. around 1900, plague is concentrated in several western states,

and it rarely infects humans. But undiagnosed and left untreated, it nearly always is fatal.

By alerting physicians, local health departments and the scientific community about the prevalence of zoonotic diseases, wildlife hospitals boost your chances of accurate diagnosis and treatment for dangerous pathogens that humans trade back and forth with wild and domestic animals.



Who, me? Some mammals, like white-tailed prairie dogs, can spread zoonotic illnesses that infect humans.

Vital Role for Wildlife Hospitals

Wildlife hospitals not only provide care for injured or orphaned animals, they also help to inform the public about how to keep animals and humans safe. They also provide guidelines about what to avoid when you encounter a sick, injured or orphaned animal. More on that later.

One of the larger, over-arching contributions of veterinary science is accomplished through an approach called One Health, which has gained traction in recent decades. This way of understanding zoonotic diseases considers the close relationships between the health of humans, animals and the environment. It shares information across several scientific disciplines, and professionals collaborate to ensure optimal health outcomes for all.

Dr. Steve Osofsky, a veterinarian who teaches at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, helped to shape the One Health approach several decades ago. He describes it as "a way of thinking more holistically...recognizing that our own health and the health of domestic animals and the health of wild animals and biodiversity writ large are all inextricably linked to each other, and all are underpinned by how we approach environmental stewardship."

Rising Tide for Zoonotic Diseases

This One Health approach helps scientists deal with the growing threat of zoonotic diseases. Among the newly emerging infectious diseases, about 75 percent are zoonotic.

What's at stake? Zoonotic diseases account for about 2.5 billion illnesses and 2.7 million deaths per year, worldwide.

Global trade, climate change, intensive farming and developments that encroach into wildlife habitat can all create conditions where diseases spread more readily from animals to people.

A World Health Organization report from 2022 states that "rising temperatures encourage the development of zoonotic hosts, and more people are exposed to vector-borne diseases, because when

temperatures rise, both pathogens and vectors reproduce more quickly."

The geographic spread of diseases also expands as temperatures rise, bringing diseases to areas they may not have been found previously. Globalization and trade also contribute to expanding ranges—the West Nile virus is one example.

These conditions can accelerate the spread of both well-known and new, emerging diseases, which may be caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites and prions.

Rabies, salmonella, Lyme disease and avian flu, among other diseases, can thrive in environments where the lives of humans and animals intersect. Some can affect the food safety and the agricultural economy—consider the impact on poultry and egg prices.

In January 2025, the CDC, USDA and Department of the Interior published an ambitious five-year plan called the "National One Health Framework to Address Zoonotic Diseases and Advance Public Health Preparedness in the United States." Its mission is to improve public health

readiness, food safety, security and sustainability while also promoting conservation and biodiversity.

Drawing together different agencies and partners aims to help "address health concerns in a more collaborative,

effective, efficient, and sustainable manner than each sector approaching these issues alone," according to the CDC announcement.

In mid-January 2026, I reached out to CDC for an update on the One Health framework. As of press time for the magazine in February, I had not heard back.

A Top Wildlife Hospital in Rural Virginia

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in Boyce, Virginia, is one of the nation's top teaching hospitals for wildlife. With a staff of 15 and state-of-the-art surgery and recovery facilities, the BRWC provides care and rehabilitation for roughly 4,000 animal patients each year.

A large part of their mission is education and guidance for the public and policymakers, plus

Zoonotic diseases account for about 2.5 billion illnesses and 2.7 million deaths per year, worldwide.



Development Director Trish Carter (left) and Executive Director Annie Bradfield in the Blue Ridge center's kitchen, which can meet the nutritional needs of hundreds of wild species.

onsite residential training programs for future wildlife care professionals.

“Everything we do is One Health,” says Dr. Jen Riley, veterinarian and hospital director at BRWC.

Closely monitoring the health of wildlife and domestic animals can serve as early warning signs for disease that can spread to humans. The goal is optimal health for animals, people and the environment.

Riley says understanding these diseases is essential for managing or preventing future pandemics and caring for humans and wildlife alike. There is “spillover” when animal diseases spread to humans. And there is “spillback” when humans spread diseases to wildlife. COVID-19 is one example. The virus originated in animals, spread to humans and then humans spread COVID to some wildlife populations, like white-tailed deer. Because

of humans’ close interaction with these deer, we have spread the disease to them.

“It mutates within these wildlife populations complicating efforts to control its spread,” Riley says. These diseases can affect the wild food web, wildlife health and populations, public health, costs of veterinary care and the human-animal bond, she notes.

Closely monitoring the health of wildlife and domestic animals can serve as early warning signs for disease that can spread to humans.

As they treat wild animals, BRWC staff also collect data about diseases and participate in surveillance research and prevalence studies. The Center works on about a dozen research programs managed by universities, the USDA and other organizations that together serve as a monitoring

and early-warning system for diseases, especially new or emerging diseases.

The goal, Riley says, is to help predict and model disease outbreaks and allocate resources to prevent



Dr. Jen Riley, hospital director at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, treats sick and injured animals but also collects data to help predict and prevent disease outbreaks.

them. The Center has recently contributed to scientific papers on tick-borne viruses in wildlife and on circulation of the La Crosse virus in Virginia.

Staff also collect local data about Powassan virus, a tick-borne disease named after a town in Ontario, Canada where a child died from the disease. Currently, the disease seems concentrated in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions, but Riley says it is probably under-diagnosed. Of 836 animals tested at BRWC, 18 percent tested positive for Powassan, which was found in white-tailed deer, opossums, cottontail rabbits and other species. There are no medicines for treating or preventing Powassan.

As the BRWC is able to identify new or emerging diseases in wildlife, their publications notify the medical community that these pathogens are circulating so medical professionals can be aware that they exist locally and could affect humans.

Riley says, “We are training future wildlife professionals to not only learn to care about One Health but to protect humans, animals and the environment from future pandemics.”

BRWC provides dozens of education programs that often enlist their resident “ambassador” animals whose injuries were too severe to allow them to be released to the wild.

Going Viral with Threats

In the context of One Health, one prominent example is highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), which currently afflicts wild bird populations and sometimes breaks out in chicken and other poultry populations. The H5N1 variant of this virus has spread to more than 50 mammals such as rats, seals, house cats and domesticated animals including roughly 1,000 herds of dairy cattle across 17 states in the U.S.

The potential harm of HPAI to some sectors of our food system is enormous, including economic damage. The poultry business is a \$664 billion industry that employs about two million workers in the U.S.

Human infections remain rare in the United States, with only a small number of confirmed HPAI cases to date. But without testing, it's hard to know

how prevalent the virus is.

The influenza virus easily mutates, which makes it unpredictable and hard to prevent. You know this because the flu vaccine gets updated every year in order to tackle the most prevalent form of the virus. Most pandemic preparations in the U.S. focus on influenza because of its potential to mutate into an especially deadly form, like the 1918 flu, which killed at least 50 million people worldwide.

In a 2025 article, Cornell's Osofsky, wrote, “the more a virus like this is able to mutate and find its way into a wide range of species, especially farmed species that live in close contact with people like poultry and now cattle, the more the odds go up that a viral strain will more easily make that leap to people.”

At BRWC all high-risk species are tested for HPAI. That list includes waterfowl, game birds, raptors and corvids (crows and ravens). Riley says positive cases show us where the HPAI virus exists in the Atlantic flyway at any given time.

In my tour of the hospital, Riley showed me their quarantine rooms and personal protective equipment (PPE) that the veterinarians and rehabilitators use for their own safety when handling high-risk animals.

Human-Caused Injuries

In addition to illnesses, some animals also suffer from human-caused hazards, whether windows, vehicles, lead ammunition, glue traps or trash. BRWC also treats these animals that are sick, injured or orphaned.

Glue traps which are designed to catch insects and mice sometimes also catch birds, snakes and other wildlife that are attracted to the trapped insects or mice.

One recent patient at BRWC was a Carolina wren, a small bird with a big personality. Removing the glue from its delicate feathers took several days and multiple sessions of gentle cleaning and rest to prevent “capture myopathy,” which is the death of muscle tissue caused by the stress of captivity.

For that reason, BRWC discourages use of these traps. A number of retail stores have discontinued sale of these traps because of their harm to wildlife.

**Protecting
wildlife ultimately
protects all of us.**



Displaying weakness and a drooping head, this bald eagle shows classic early signs of lead poisoning.

If you come across a bird or other animal stuck to a glue trap, BRWC recommends that you cover the remaining sticky surfaces with cornmeal, bits of tissue or dirt to prevent any further sticking and then take the trapped animal to a rehabilitator rather than try to remove the animal from the glue yourself.

Fishing line and lead also pose threats to birds. Another recent patient at BRWC required a dramatic rescue and intensive care and rehab. A bald eagle had become tangled in fishing line and was hanging upside down and struggling in a tree. Officers from the Loudoun County Animal Services climbed the tree and freed the bird. A local wildlife rehab organization called Kristi's Caring Hands transported the eagle to the hospital.

The bird had suffered tissue trauma to one wing.

After two months at the hospital, the eagle was released close to where it was found.

But a blood test identified a more serious threat that often afflicts scavenging birds—lead poisoning. Eagles and other birds sometimes consume shotgun pellets or fragments of lead bullets when eating gut piles from deer hunts or carcasses of dead wildlife.

The staff at BRWC administered several rounds of chelation therapy, in which medications given to the bird bind with lead in the bloodstream so the lead can be safely excreted.

With strict cage rest to allow the wing to heal and an eventual move to a large flight cage where the bird could practice flying, the eagle was finally released about two months after coming to the hospital. The bird was released back into the wild at a place not far from where it was found.

Another threat to eagles, other raptors in general and other birds and mammals is rodenticide—

To prevent this kind of injury:

- Gather any excess fishing line and dispose of it safely.
- Switch to non-lead ammunition for hunting to prevent poisoning of scavengers.
- Appreciate that consuming lead-contaminated meat can harm both wildlife and human health.

poison baits used to kill rats. Eating the poisoned rats can harm or kill wildlife.

Pets like outdoor cats cause many of the injuries to wildlife treated at BRWC. Among animal patients that suffered attacks by cats, only about 25 percent survive. Nationwide, cats kill billions of birds and small animals every year. Nearly half of all the small eastern flying squirrels admitted to their hospital are victims of cat attacks.

The bacteria from puncture wounds from cats' teeth and claws can cause fatal infections in small animals. Cats themselves can carry diseases, whether toxoplasmosis or avian flu. In Virginia, cats are the fourth most common animal that test positive for rabies. So keeping cats indoors protects the cats themselves as well as birds and other wild critters.



Dr. Riley radiographs a lead-poisoned bald eagle patient to look for fragments of lead in the gastrointestinal tract.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM BIRD FLU

- Do not handle sick or deceased birds.
- Did not feed pets or people raw milk products.
- Keep cats indoors.
- Handle and cook poultry properly.
- Use caution and use PPE when visiting farms or other areas with livestock.
- Inform your doctor about potential exposure to infected animals.
- Report suspicious cases of multiple (five or more) dead birds that may have HPAI.

(Source: Blue Ridge Wildlife Center)



Keeping cats indoors protects the cats as well as birds and other wild animals.

We cannot fault domestic cats, which are natural predators. But they are not part of a natural ecosystem outdoors.

The Prognosis

To try to gain greater traction for the ideas behind One Health, Steve Osofsky also uses the term “planetary health” as a way of approaching the same challenges but through the lens of benefits to humans.

He tries to convey this mission to his veterinary students at Cornell. He says that in spite of current political winds, he still believes that “saving the world is a growth industry.”

Annie Bradfield, executive director at BRWC, said, “Our work has always been about more than individual animals. Each patient helps us better understand the complex connections between wildlife, people and the environment we share. As we look ahead, our focus is on expanding research, training the next generation of wildlife professionals and using science-based education to prevent injuries and disease before they occur.

“Protecting wildlife ultimately protects all of us.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Blue Ridge Wildlife Center
blueridgewildlifectr.org

Cornell K. Lisa Yang Center for
Wildlife Health Wildlife.cornell.edu

A.J. BREMER

What I've Learned: 50 Years of Conservation for Nongame Wildlife

By CARROL HENDERSON

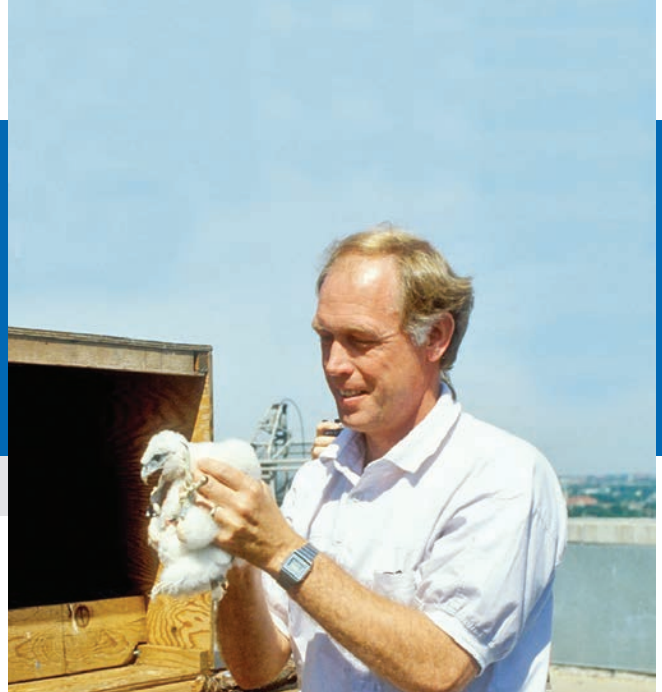
Wildlife sought by hunters and anglers—whether wild turkeys or walleyes—tend to get a lot of attention, and funding. That's fair. Hunting and fishing are popular traditions that also generate revenue for state natural resource agencies. But what about nongame wildlife?

Healthy populations of nongame species help to preserve biological diversity and give the public opportunities to observe and appreciate nongame wildlife. During my years as director of the Nongame Wildlife Program for Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources, my goal was to provide a comprehensive statewide conservation program for non-hunted species of wildlife.

Here's what I learned. Over time, my work was most effective when it touched on four key ideas: **habitat** preservation, a **holistic** approach, **high-profile** species and **hands-on** involvement. This is my own version of 4-H.

Habitat conservation. Without safeguarding access to the specific habitat that species require, we can't conserve wildlife. So for instance, for prairie birds, water birds and lakeshore wildlife, we need to designate habitat where these species can thrive. They may be called wildlife management areas, aquatic management areas or simply natural areas.

Holistic approach to wildlife. Especially for nongame wildlife that has not benefited from a lot of research and attention, we need a holistic approach that accounts for how the species fit into their native ecosystems. That includes research to determine their populations, status and habitat management needs.



The author places the first peregrine falcon chick into a “hack box” atop the Mayo Clinic headquarters in Rochester, Minn. in 1987. The chicks were fed remotely until they were old enough to fledge and fly free. This strategy successfully established a nesting population of these falcons in Rochester.

High profile species. I have found that it's easier to enlist public support for conservation when you include high-profile species as examples—whether that's the bald eagle, trumpeter swan or other “charismatic” critters—appreciation and funding gets a boost when animals we revere get a spotlight.

Hands-on. Enlisting public support is key. Non-professionals can play a huge role in preserving habitat for species like purple martins, common loons, native bees and other essential insects and invertebrates.

Historic perspective. Sneaking in a fifth “H,” appreciation of our historic treatment of species is important too. It was once routine in wildlife management to kill species like eagles, pelicans and other animals that consume game fish and wildlife.

These four, or five, H's described in my book have helped to guide wildlife conservation programs towards success for a number of species in Minnesota. Two examples come to mind.



A fundraising strategy allowed Henderson to eventually capture and transplant dozens of otters, which now thrive along the Minnesota River and tributaries.

There ought to be otters

I never observed any river otters during my years in the 1970s as assistant manager of the Lac qui Parle Wildlife Management Area in southwestern Minnesota. Stricter trapping laws had allowed the populations to grow in other parts of the state, but not in the southwest. So, I did some research and submitted a plan to the Department of Natural Resources to introduce otters there, where there was plenty of suitable habitat.

An approved plan with no budget is a real challenge. Fortunately, conservation groups in the state stepped up and responded to a sponsorship plan where a \$600 investment would pay for live-trapping of several otters in northern Minnesota and release in the targeted region in the south.

This fundraising strategy allowed us to eventually capture and transplant dozens of otters, which spread along the Minnesota River and tributaries. Local television stations and newspapers captured some of the otter releases into the wild, which helped generate more public attention and support.

Technically, river otters are managed as a game species because there is a trapping season in Minnesota. But even in the restored region, the population is healthy enough to thrive under that challenge.

American white pelican

In flight, the American white pelican is one of the most impressive and graceful birds I have ever observed. Up close, they create a different impression.

In 1975, I helped attach tracking bands to pelican chicks on a nesting island in Marsh Lake in the Lac qui Parle Wildlife Management Area. Our task was to surround a cluster of pelican chicks, kneel, grab each chick and clinch a federal bird band onto their legs with pliers.

Here's the thing. When you pick up a pelican chick, it has a double-barreled defense. First, it barfs up in your direction its most recent meal. That might be a partially digested salamander or bullhead. Then it poops.

The full experience was like a step back into a prehistoric era of the smells, sights and sounds associated with wild nesting colonies. But as a site for collecting banding data, Marsh Lake generated important data for understanding the bird's population health in North America.

Why the concern about the pelicans? Early European settlers killed this species in their nesting colonies under the mistaken belief that the pelicans reduce populations of game fish. By 1904, these pelicans had disappeared from Minnesota as a nesting species. That prejudice against pelicans lasted a long time. In reality, pelicans do not dive for aquatic prey and primarily eat non-game fish and other aquatic creatures.

But with greater human awareness and appreciation of the birds' place in the wild, the



ISTOCK

Early European settlers killed white pelicans due to the birds' undeserved reputation for eating a lot of game fish.

American white pelican showed resilience over the past century and staged a remarkable recovery. They pose no threat to our sportfishing resources. It's a wonderful sight to behold a "kettle of pelicans" circling on a thermal updraft, migrating across the Midwest sky.

Consider a career in conservation

If this kind of activity appeals to you, consider a career in conservation. Whatever your age, young or old, this work is rewarding and important.

Looking back on my 50 years in this field, I've come up with a few "life lessons" for people considering work in conservation. It's a long list, but I'll share just five of my favorite for *Outdoor America* readers.

Follow your passion

When I started college, I was an engineering science major, but it did not motivate me to do my best. I switched to zoology with minors in botany and physics, which sparked a dramatic improvement in my enthusiasm and my grades.

Find mentors who will share their insights

I have been fortunate to enlist many memorable mentors over the years. They inspired me with their commitment and dedication to conservation and created the foundation for sincere friendships.

Develop complementary skills

Throughout my career, I have been able to develop some writing, photography and public speaking skills that have helped me accomplish important conservation goals. Compelling stories and images help build support for our work.

Know your publics

There is no such thing as the "general public." There are unique publics including conservation partners, scientists and advocates who are essential to achieving conservation goals. Get to know them and their networks.

Think big and be patient

What is your big-picture goal or vision? Don't let small problems get in the way. Often, big projects offer the best chance for getting approval and



Carroll L. Henderson shares his passion and five decades of experience helping to conserve a vast array of wildlife species.

funding. And remember that some vitally important goals will take years to accomplish.

Finally, Mark Twain once said, "Always do right. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

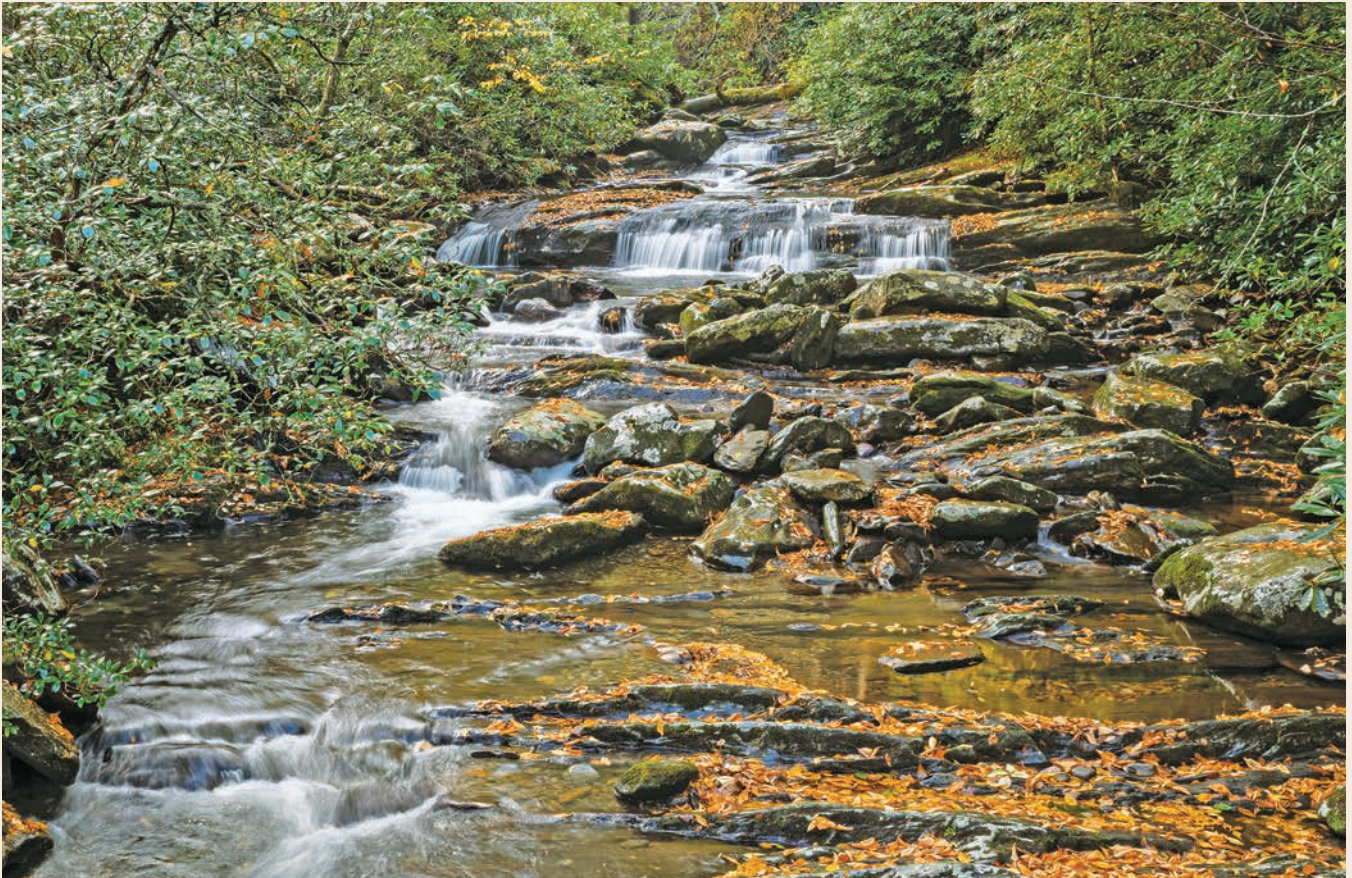
My hope for fellow conservationists is this: "May we leave many astonished people in our wake."

For most of his long career in conservation, Carroll Henderson served as director of the Nongame Wildlife Program for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Author of more than a dozen books, including A National Legacy: 50 Years of Nongame Wildlife Conservation in Minnesota, Henderson has received acclaim and awards from many conservation groups.



The League Continues its 100-Year Fight for Clean Water and Wild Places

By JARED MOTT, Conservation Director



Streams and wetlands provide clean, filtered water, reduce the impact of flooding, provide habitat for wildlife and provide lasting economic and recreational benefits.

EPA Rule Would Erode Protections for Streams and Wetlands

The Izaak Walton League strongly opposes the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' proposed redefinition of "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS), a move that would put the nation's

already dwindling clean water resources at serious risk.

More than 80 percent of wetlands and millions of miles of streams will lose protection.

The proposal is part of EPA's ongoing rulemaking process to interpret the scope of the Clean Water Act following the Supreme

Court's 2023 *Sackett v. EPA* decision. Rather than maintaining protections consistent with decades of science and law, EPA and the Corps have issued a draft rule for public comment that significantly narrows which waters qualify for federal safeguards. The agencies accepted public input through a formal comment period.

The League submitted detailed

ISTOCK

comments on January 5 urging withdrawal of the proposal and reaffirmation of the 2023 WOTUS rule. Additionally, 14 state divisions of the League submitted their own comments opposing adoption of the proposed rule.

The proposed rule would strip protections from many small streams and wetlands that filter pollution, reduce flooding and recharge our drinking water supplies. These streams and wetlands also help to sustain fish, wildlife and the outdoor recreation economy. By the agencies' own estimates, the combined impact of this proposal and the *Sackett* decision would deny Clean Water Act protections to more than 80 percent of the nation's remaining wetlands and millions of miles of streams.

Clean water is indispensable to public health, ecological integrity and economic well-being. For more than 50 years, the Clean Water Act has been grounded in the scientific reality that upstream pollution harms downstream waters. This proposal would increase regulatory confusion, undermine cooperative federalism, and directly conflict with the Act's core objective.

For more than a century, the Izaak Walton League has fought to protect water—starting with our 1924 victory saving the upper Mississippi River wetlands. That continues with today's advocacy for science-based rulemaking that recognizes the vital role of streams and wetlands in filtration, flood mitigation, climate resilience,

biodiversity, wildlife habitat and lasting economic and recreational benefits.

Congress Revives a Pollution Threat to the Boundary Waters

On January 21, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed H.J. Res. 140 by a vote of 214–208, marking a significant escalation in efforts to revive copper-sulfide mining and resulting pollution near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

If successful, the resolution could set a sweeping national precedent, allowing Congress to unravel long-standing public land protections.

Introduced by Representative Pete Stauber (R-Minn.), the resolution would allow the administration to reinstate federal mineral leases for Twin Metals, which is owned by Antofagasta Minerals—a company based in Chile. The resolution would reopen the door to mining immediately adjacent to the most visited wilderness area in the United States.

The stakes could not be higher. The Boundary Waters is a globally unique network of lakes, streams and forests that support clean drinking water, world-class recreation and a robust outdoor economy.

Copper-sulfide mining poses well-documented risks of acid mine drainage and heavy metal pollution that, once released, cannot be fully contained or reversed in a water-rich landscape like the Boundary Waters watershed.

In a statement, the Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters said the resolution places “a foreign mining project above the hunting, fishing, paddling and outdoor community of the United States.”

Equally alarming is the mechanism used to advance this resolution. H.J. Res. 140 relies on the Congressional Review Act (CRA) to overturn a public land withdrawal that protected the area from mining. Using the CRA in this way is unprecedented and dangerous. If successful, the resolution could set a sweeping national precedent, allowing Congress to unravel long-standing public land protections across the country with a simple majority vote, bypassing science, public input and established environmental review processes.

At the time *Outdoor America* went to print, the U.S. Senate has not acted on H.J. Res. 140. The League is actively working to defeat this measure in the Senate and protect the Boundary Waters from irreversible harm. We will continue pressing lawmakers to vote no on the resolution and keep their hands off the Boundary Waters. To see how you can help, visit www.iwla.org/advocacy.

While you're here...

Why not make it a family vacation? There are so many amazing things to experience in the Twin Cities. Here is a sampling of the best of the best:

MINNESOTA YACHT CLUB FESTIVAL: JULY 17-19

Experience sound waves underneath the giant cottonwoods & along the majestic Mississippi River. This annual music festival brings fans together for three days of performances across two stages. Enjoy live music from The Lumineers, Matchbox 20, The Strokes, Cage the Elephant, Lord Huron, Semisonic and many more.

THE LARGEST SHOPPING EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

We call it the Mall of America for a reason! Located just a few miles away from the 2026 National Convention is the largest shopping and entertainment complex in the United States and the Western Hemisphere.

THE FAMOUS CHERRY SPOON BRIDGE AT THE WALKER SCULPTURE GARDEN

It's one of the largest urban sculpture gardens in the country, with 40 permanent art installations. The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden is free, open to the public, and is open from 6 am to 12 midnight every day. media arts.

FALL IN LOVE WITH MINNEHAHA FALLS

One of the Twin Cities' most beloved features is a striking, wilderness waterfall in an urban setting. Overlooking the Mississippi River, Minnehaha Park is one of Minneapolis' oldest and most popular parks!

WHERE DOVES CRY IN PURPLE RAIN

Paisley Park is the sanctuary where Prince would create, record, and perform his legendary music. It is now an immersive look into Prince's life where you can experience the rich history of the greatness created within these walls.

THE GOLD MEDAL FLOUR CAPITOL OF THE WORLD

This stretch of the upper Mississippi River includes natural, historical, recreational, cultural, scenic, scientific, and economic resources of national significance. Be sure not to miss the Stone Arch Bridge, Mill City Museum, the "Endless Bridge" at the Guthrie Theater and the weekend Farmer's Market!



And this is just a sample! To see all the opportunities you and your family can enjoy scan the QR Code and sign up for a few amazing excursions you'll never forget!

This Hotel has it all!

The Hilton Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport in Bloomington, MN, is a convenient, pet-friendly hotel located less than three miles from MSP Airport and one mile from the Mall of America. It features a glass-enclosed atrium with a heated indoor pool, a 24-hour fitness center, on-site dining at the Blue Water Grill, and 18,000+ sq. ft. of meeting space.



The Izaak Walton League of America is proud to partner with award-winning executive chef Troy Vanasse, who has created a custom, farm-to-table menu featuring locally sourced ingredients. From breakfast through dinner, meals are designed to reflect the flavors of the Twin Cities and the values we share—care, quality, and connection to place. We hope the food becomes part of what you remember and enjoy long after the convention concludes.



The BUNDLED PRICING includes all meals, snacks and beverages at the Hilton Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport during the convention.

OPEN CALL FOR ARTISTS!

Know an artist whose work belongs here?

We're launching the first-ever National Art Exhibition, a juried show exploring conservation, wildlife, and nature, hosted at the Confluence Gallery in partnership with Artistry.



ARTISTRY Confluence
THEATER AND VISUAL ARTS GALLERY



SUBMIT TODAY!



SEEKING INNOVATION!

Interested In Sharing Your Work At The Innovation Fair?

If you're leading a project that's making a difference locally—and could work in other communities—we want to see it. The Innovation Fair is your chance to share what's working and invite others to join you. Let's Get It Done. Reserve your table today.



LOOKING TO VOLUNTEER?

Play a Larger Role in the 2026 National Convention!

We are seeking, motivated, outgoing volunteers for a variety of positions before, during and after the National Convention. Apply today at www.iwla-getitdone.org/volunteer.



Reserve Your Spot TODAY at iwla-GetItDone.org

GET IT DONE

Turning Passion into Action

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

2026 National Convention JULY 16-18 *Bloomington, Minnesota*

Home to the Largest Shopping Mall in the Country!



**SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT!**



CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS:

- Welcome Reception
- Silent Auction & Raffle
- Innovation Fair
- Parade of States
- Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony and Banquet
- Conservation Luncheon
- Kouba Gallery National Wildlife Art Show
- Award-Winning Food
- Conservation Luncheon
- Affordable Accommodations
- Family-Friendly Activities
- Additional Recreational Opportunities
- Green Crew Summit
- So Much More!

Dear IKEs –

We're thrilled to welcome chapters, divisions, delegates, alternates, and guests from across the country to the 2026 National Convention this July. It's an honor for Minnesota to host—and to invite you into a week designed to be inspiring, accessible, and deeply connected to our shared work.

This year's convention is about doing: celebrating conservation wins, learning from one another, and turning passion into action. We're excited to bring together longtime members and first-time attendees, students and seasoned leaders alike—everyone who cares about conserving our woods, waters, and wildlife and connecting more people to the outdoors.

Throughout the week, we'll celebrate the heart of the League: our volunteers, our youth, our leadership, and our partners—creating space for stories, ideas, and collaboration across generations. Highlights include the Innovation Fair, the 2026 Youth Convention, the Green Crew Summit, our first-ever National Art Exhibition, group excursions to some of Minnesota's most cherished places, and the always-beloved Parade of States.

We're committed to making this a convention that feels welcoming, affordable, and worth the journey—a gathering that sends us home energized and ready to get it done.

Sign up today – so we can see you in July.

Introducing Bundled Pricing!

To make the National Convention welcoming and affordable for everyone, we're excited to offer simple, bundled pricing. One price includes all official convention events, chef-prepared breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, plus all-day snacks and beverages—so you can focus on connecting, learning, and getting things done.



DELEGATES/ALTERNATE

All inclusive access to chef-prepared meals and dining, all events and activities, all banquets, seminars and ceremonies.

ALL-ACCESS COST:

\$250

Does not include travel and lodging

GUESTS

All inclusive access to chef-prepared meals and dining, all events and activities, all banquets, seminars and ceremonies.

ALL-ACCESS COST:

\$100

Does not include travel and lodging

FIRST TIME ATTENDEES

All inclusive access for delegates and alternates from chapters that did not have a delegate attend in 2025.

ALL-ACCESS COST:

FREE

Does not include travel and lodging

YOUTH

All inclusive access for youth convention participants, volunteers, counselors and advisors.

ALL-ACCESS COST:

FREE

Does not include travel and lodging

BOOK YOUR ROOM:



Scan here to reserve your room at a special convention rate while they last!



75

Be one of the first 75 members to sign up for the convention and you could win a FREE night at the award-winning Hilton Mpls-St. Paul Airport hotel!



Scan here to register for the 2026 National Convention

GET IT DONE

Turning Passion into Action

Not-to-Miss Youth Events

Do you love being outdoors, exploring new places, and discovering how nature works? Ready for an adventure? The 2026 National Convention is designed to be family-friendly, with a wide range of hands-on activities, outdoor experiences, and learning opportunities for youth of all ages—including the Youth Convention and many other youth-focused events throughout the week. Youth and youth volunteers can register free, including all meals, because investing in the next generation is how we Get It Done.



AGES 5-8

THURS-SAT, JULY 16 - 18



Designed specifically for youth ages 5-8, ELF is led by parents who are **certified early childhood educators with training in outdoor education**. Held concurrently with the Youth Convention, ELF offers guided time in nature where children explore insects, learn about trees and plants, and engage in hands-on activities. The program is designed to nurture curiosity, confidence, and a lasting appreciation for the natural world.

AGES 8-18

JULY 13-15, BEFORE THE CONVENTION



The **Green Summer Day Camp** is a supervised, drop-in daytime program for youth ages 8-18, offered Monday through Wednesday prior to the National Convention. Participants engage in age-appropriate outdoor ethics education, water-quality science, wildlife learning and tracking, and guided conservation projects, supported by trained youth leaders, advisors, and volunteers. The program is designed to be safe, flexible, and enriching—no overnight stay required.

AGES 14-21

WEDNESDAY JULY 15



The **Green Crew Summit** is a one-day gathering for current and future youth leaders ages 14-21. This is where leaders learn from one another how to design, launch, and grow a Green Crew—sharing tools, stories, and strategies from an award-winning, nationally recognized youth conservation and leadership program, while helping lay the groundwork for a growing national movement.

AGES 8-18

THURS- SAT, JULY 16 - 18



The **2026 Youth Convention** is a youth-led, two-day experience where youth of all ages explore nature, insects, wildlife, trees, and hands-on science with air, water, and soil. Days are filled with games, experiments, and outdoor discovery, with time each evening to reunite with grown-ups—plus an optional overnight camping experience for those who want to extend the adventure.



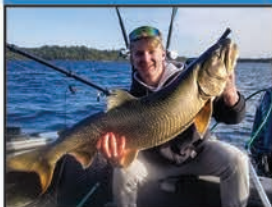
Learn about all the activities & events for kids happening during the 2026 National Convention!

Scan the QR Code and sign up for the 2026 Youth Convention or the Green Summer Day Camp! Have questions? Contact Joseph at 612.518.5536 or jbarisonzi@iwlamnvalley.org

Associated Activities

This is how we Get It Done at the 2026 National Convention—turning passion into action! So many ways to jump in, so little time. Reserve your spots today!

FISHING



FIN-TASTIC FISHING ON MILLE LACS

An unforgettable morning on one of Minnesota's legendary fishing lakes where you'll cast for trophy walleye while learning about the lake's ecology and conservation.

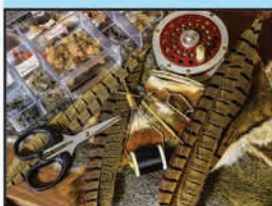
15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



ROD & REEL RENDEZVOUS:

Participants will enjoy a relaxed day of bank fishing while learning about the environmental and recreational value of rough fish such as carp, buffalo, and gar.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



OLD-FASHIONED FISHING FEST WITH WIL DILG

From a boat on the Mississippi you'll fish with the same traditional gear Wil Dilg would have used, targeting summer species like walleye, sauger, catfish, and bass.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS

OUTDOORS



ANIMAL DEEP-DIVE: BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE MINNESOTA ZOO

Discover the Minnesota Zoo as both a beloved Minnesota institution and a national leader in wildlife conservation through an exclusive, family-friendly experience.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS



SWING & SUSTAIN AT BAKER NATIONAL

Join us for a round of golf that blends challenging play with sustainable practices, showcasing how golf and conservation can thoughtfully coexist.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



MARKSMAN FIELD DAY AT HORSE & HUNT CLUB

Experience premier outdoor recreation at the Minnesota Horse & Hunt Club, one of the nation's finest shooting venues.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS

OUTDOORS



CYCLING ADVENTURE: RIVER BOTTOM RIDE

Embark on a thrilling 14-mile round-trip ride along Bloomington's breathtaking Minnesota River Bottom trail.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



WATER WONDERLAND: KAYAKING THE MINNESOTA RIVER

Led by experienced paddlers, this outing showcases the river's natural beauty, diverse wildlife, and rich conservation history.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



FROM PASSION TO PROFESSION

An immersive experience for Green Crew leaders and youth ages 14–25—bridging Wednesday's Summit with hands-on, real-world conservation pathways.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS

SERVICE



ECUMENICAL SERVICE: BREAD OF LIFE, WATER OF EARTH

Gather outdoors in a setting of natural beauty for an ecumenical service celebrating our shared spiritual connection to the earth.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE DIRT: SUNDAY SERVICE PROJECTS

Roll up your sleeves and join IWLA members in hands-on service across our metro chapters.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS



ROOTS & RECIPROCITY: TEK GATHERING

Join Indigenous leaders and IWLA members for an immersive dialogue on Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS

ARTS



KOUBA GALLERY NATIONAL ART SHOW

Celebrate world renowned artists at the Kouba Gallery Art Show in the stunning Confluence Gallery at the Bloomington Wildlife Refuge.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS



NATURAL PIGMENTS ON PAPER

Sip tea and unleash your creativity at this participatory workshop in the Kouba Gallery.

15 AVAILABLE SPOTS



LET THE MUSIC FLOW: SONGS ON THE RIVERBANK

Close the day with music, fellowship, and the beauty of the Minnesota River.

30 AVAILABLE SPOTS

Got questions? Contact Joseph: jbarisonzi@iwlammvalley.org or 612.518.5536

Go to iwla-getitdone.org and reserve your spot today! Attendance for each event is limited!



LEARN ABOUT THESE AND OTHER ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR THE NATIONAL CONVENTION!

Collaboration for Conservation Abounds among Upper Mississippi Chapters

By MICHAEL REINEMER, Editor

America's waterways bind us together in conservation and collaboration. Whether along the Great Lakes, the mighty Mississippi or a small tributary stream, caring about water is in the Izaak Walton League's DNA.

This unifying cause runs through *Great River Soundings*, a newsletter that first appeared in February as joint endeavor published by the **Will Dilg Chapter** in Winona and the **Upper Mississippi River Chapter** in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

In the inaugural issue, Barry Drazkowski (who is active in both chapters) explains that the word "soundings" refers to the language early navigators used to communicate the depth of the Mississippi. They called out measurements like "mark twain," which means a depth of two fathoms or 12 feet.

Through the joint newsletter, Drazkowski says, the chapters invite Ikes, families and friends to "begin this journey of navigating our river and its watershed through information, pictures, stories and personal soundings...."

One major development Drazkowski reports in the newsletter is a growing partnership launched by Ikes to help federal and state agencies that manage natural resources programs in the region. These agencies face serious challenges after years of funding and staffing reductions.

To help the agencies, the Izaak Walton League collaborates with sister non-government stakeholders in the region like Audubon and One Mississippi to create a "renewed era of community engagement in river management" at a scale that has not been seen

In their migration north, bald eagles congregate along the upper Mississippi to catch gizzard shad and other fish.



BRUCE BARTEL

since the 1980s—or since the League’s campaign to save the Upper Mississippi in 1923-24. Planned support for the agencies includes help with wildlife studies, water monitoring, engaging the public and field logistics.

Catching up with a new chapter

The newsletter also catches us up with one of our newer chapters—the Upper Mississippi River Chapter in La Crosse, Wisconsin. It was established in August 2024, during the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Chapter President Fritz Funk says the Chapter is focused on restoring habitat along the upper Mississippi, working with natural resource agencies, partnering with other conservation groups and engaging the public. Funk says the Chapter has a growing partnership with the University of Wisconsin River Studies Center to explain historic and ecological features of the river to the public.

Green Crew habitat work at the Will Dilg Chapter

Named for one of the League’s founders who was instrumental in saving the Upper Mississippi wetlands, the Will Dilg Chapter still strives to foster stewardship, community engagement and growing its membership.

The Chapter, launched in 1923, recently served as a catalyst, funder and champion for work to improve water flow for the Sam Gordy Slough where sediment build up threatened habitat for overwintering fish populations.

Anne Conway, president of the Chapter, says their work today also includes citizen science projects that monitor on both aquatic and terrestrial habitat. Over the past year, the Chapter has established a youth-led Green Crew that connects the members with the natural world and builds leadership skills—while making a real difference in the community. Conway says that, among other projects, the Green Crew has been promoting the League’s Salt Watch program and will train to become Save Our Streams monitors.

Great River Soundings features articles about advocacy, the health of the Mississippi and other topics. It’s best to just read it online at willdilg-iwla.org/newsletter.



Through the Fog: A Solo Journey Down the Mississippi, a Work of Becoming

By **DEVIN ASHLEY BROWN**



I first met the Mississippi River in 2012 on a business trip to Minnesota. I was living on the East Coast then, moving fast, building a career, checking the boxes that were supposed to mean something. But when I stood on the banks of that river, something in me went quiet.

I didn't know why. I said to myself, "If I ever lose my mind I'm going to move to Minneapolis."

When I returned to New Jersey, I eventually quit my job. I became an adventure trip leader at my childhood summer camp, knowing that nature would again bring me back to myself. When that season ended, I found myself back in my childhood home, deeply depressed, trying to figure out how I had done everything "right" and still felt so lost.

Listening to the River

Late one night, searching for purpose online, I found the Mississippi River Paddlers group. I watched ordinary people take on an extraordinary journey paddling from the river's headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. Something inside me said, That's it. That's what's going to keep you here. The goal didn't feel like an adventure. It felt like a lifeline.

Over the next decade, my life quietly reorganized around that promise. I moved to Minneapolis. I worked two or three jobs that barely kept me stable. I got my massage certification. That work eventually allowed me to buy the house to store the boat and the car to move the boat. Stellar Kayaks and my supporters hooked me up with a great boat that would carry me. Poverty had kept me away from the river for a long time, but when I was finally able to return to her regularly, I listened.

I felt the River say it was time.

I had hoped for blue skies and easy miles but

discovered that the River was raw, alive. And indifferent to my plans.

The River as it is

When I began my solo journey, I hoped for blue skies and easy miles. Instead, I got weeks of rain. After a winter without much snowpack, I had prayed for water to help carry me downstream. The River answered. Just not gently. A dam broke. The current surged. The Mississippi reached catastrophic levels and I was just a few days ahead of the crest. But the River never sleeps.

Early in the trip, crossing Lake Cass, wind pushing and sky heavy, I understood this wasn't going to be a simple endurance challenge. The River wasn't there to perform for me. It was going to be what it was—raw, alive. And indifferent to my plans.

And still, there was joy. So much joy.

But the River will check you real quick. There were moments of fear. I recall coming out of a lock with my rudder not working, after a wave knocked me into the wall. Unbeknownst to me, an engineer had a barge parked immediately outside of the chamber, water high, dam roaring, recirculating currents violent. I proceeded forward with about six feet of clearance between the barge and a pillar, learning quickly that my rudder was not responding to the panic in my toes. I paddled with precision I didn't know I had, legs shaking once I was safe. I sat on the bank of the river until I could settle the adrenaline.



And then there were the people.

Nights alone at camp, hearing footsteps in the dark. Dead fish hanging from bridges I couldn't fully understand but knew to take seriously. Being a solo woman on the river means learning to read more than water.

River angels opened their homes, fed me, washed my laundry, gave me warm beds and wonderful conversations. Pontoons to help me cross big water. Handed me cookies under bridges. They made signs and cheered like I was family. The thing that tied us together wasn't politics or background—it was love. Love for the river. Love for the sport. Love for this moving body of water that somehow belongs to all of us and none of us.

The inner journey

A day of 12 to 16 hours of paddling doesn't just move your body. It moves your mind.

There's nowhere to hide from your thoughts out there. I processed grief, old stories about myself and how much energy I still spent caring about what other people thought of me, especially with the trip being public. The River made it clear I couldn't carry that weight forever.



The River was raw, alive.
And indifferent to my plans.

Each time I twisted to look behind me, my narrow kayak wobbled, and I almost capsized with each glance. It became a lesson I couldn't ignore: stop looking back.

Around Wabasha I realized that every time I kept looking back over my shoulder. Each time I twisted to look behind me, my narrow kayak wobbled, and I almost capsized with each glance. It became a lesson I couldn't ignore: stop looking back. The past throws you off balance. Stay present. Move forward.

This journey isn't about proving anything. It's about listening, to the river, to the earth, to that

inner voice we're often trained to ignore. Extended time in nature does something spiritual without needing a label. Across cultures, people seek pilgrimage, silence, fasting, solitude to understand themselves and their relationship with God. Long days on the water do something

similar. They open you up. They strip away distraction. They bring you back into relationship with yourself.

A weekend outside is beautiful, but your nervous system barely begins to unwind. After days and weeks, old versions of yourself fall away. You step into a stronger, more resilient version of who you are. And today as I stop by Pepin or Winnebago, I can visit the pieces of myself I left in the River.

When the River says stop

After more than a thousand miles, the River rose beyond flood stage. Full-sized cottonwoods were breaking loose and moving like whales in the current. Experienced paddlers warned me about the crest. In Hannibal, Missouri, I had to stop.

It was heartbreaking. But it didn't feel like failure. It felt like instruction. There was one important promise I made to my son, and it was that I was going to come home to him.

I realized there was still inner work to finish—expectations to release, ways of performing to let go. The river had carried me far, but she was also showing me where I still needed to grow before continuing.

I will return. The journey is paused, not ended.

Why this matters

When you love a river this intimately, conservation stops being an abstract idea. After paddling mile

after mile and seeing signs of human alteration at nearly every bend, restored and rewilded stretches of shoreline feel like an exhale. They show what foresight looks like—the kind of foresight visionaries carry long before the rest of us catch up.

People like Izaak Walton, an early conservation thinker, understood that if we didn't protect soil, water and habitat, the consequences would ripple far beyond their lifetime. In a different but deeply connected way, George Washington Carver was saying something similar through the land—that the earth isn't an endless supply to use up, but a living system to work with, restore, and respect.

Out on the Mississippi, you can see what happens when that wisdom is ignored—and you can feel the difference where it's honored.

Wild places are not luxury scenery. They are living systems that shape us back.

It deepened my understanding of why rivers—and the lands that hold them—are worth protecting.

Experiences like this matter beyond one person's story. When people see someone step into the unknown, it gives them permission to explore their own edges. It reminds us that nature is not separate from us. Our relationship with it has to be reciprocal.

This trip gave me therapy, joy, fear, humility and strength. It showed me I am capable even when things don't end the way I imagined. It deepened my understanding of why rivers—and the lands that hold them—are worth protecting.

Because once you've felt that kind of connection, you don't want to lose it.

Taking in a view of the River from Saint Paul.



JEREMIAH SHUSTER, HARVEST FILM COMPANY



At the League's headquarters, About 70 advocates produced a lot of enthusiasm underscoring a clear message that reducing salt pollution is essential to protecting ecosystems, drinking water and public health.

Winter Salt Week Draws National Attention to Reducing Pollution

Winter Salt Week 2026, held from January 26-30, marked an annual collaborative effort across the U.S. to balance public safety with environmental protection. Originally a local Wisconsin initiative through Wisconsin Salt Wise, it has evolved into a national awareness campaign involving scientists, public works professionals and residents.

Experts from across the country led livestream presentations that were featured on the Winter Salt Week YouTube channel. The presentations covered critical topics across five days:

- Freshwater salinization trends and causes.
- “Salt Wise” success stories from private contractors and municipalities.

- Smart salting contracts and policy.
- Engineering solutions for smarter winter maintenance.
- Advocacy, community action and salt monitoring training.

Abby Hileman, the League’s Salt Watch Coordinator, presented on the topic of advocacy actions to help reduce road salt pollution. More information and recordings of the webinars can be found at www.wintersaltweek.org.

In Gaithersburg, Maryland, at the Izaak Walton League’s national headquarters, the week ended with an open house on January 31 featuring experts and partner organizations from the DC region. Presenters described the effects of road salt on

wildlife, water quality and infrastructure, and how their organizations inform the public about smart salting practices. The event was well-timed this year, as there was an icy snowfall the week before affecting dozens of states, leading to egregious oversalting—and salt shortages across the country.

At the January 31 event, Delegate Linda Foley from the Maryland House of Delegates presented the League with a citation recognizing the League's efforts to inform "Marylanders about protecting the environment, infrastructure and drinking water with smart salting practices."

Speakers from the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, Maryland Department of the Environment, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection and others discussed the work needed to raise awareness such as the state level training program for road salt applicators (now in its third year).

League staff assisted attendees with water testing and helped them to report their results to the League's online water quality database, the Clean Water Hub.

This gathering of roughly 70 clean water advocates produced a lot of energy and enthusiasm, which one participant described as "energizing and magical."

Together the event underscored a clear message: reducing winter salt pollution is essential to protecting ecosystems, drinking water, and public health—now and for future generations.

Raising awareness in Maryland House of Delegates

On Tuesday, January 27, Izaak Walton League Clean Water Program staff attended the Maryland General Assembly House of Delegates floor session where Delegate Lily Qi gave Salt Watch and Winter Salt Week a shoutout. On the House floor, Qi said less salt can be used without sacrificing safety and praised Salt Watch volunteers and the Izaak Walton League of America for taking action on the issue of excessive road salt use and its harmful effects on water quality.

Delegate Qi has been a leader in Maryland, proposing bills to establish a state-wide road salt applicator training program in 2022 and 2023. In 2024, she introduced a bill to require state agencies,

counties and municipalities to maintain records of salt application and use. In 2025, she proposed a bill to prohibit uncovered road salt from being stored outdoors.

While none of the measures were approved by the Maryland legislature, the awareness and pressure from Delegate Qi, the Izaak Walton League and others have pushed Maryland Department of the Environment to create and implement a state applicator training program, which is heading into its third year, and additional road salt reporting requirements for MS4 (Municipal separate storm sewer system) permits across the state starting this year.

The Izaak Walton League is immensely grateful to Delegate Qi for her inspiration and leadership in promoting clean water locally.



The League is immensely grateful to Maryland Delegate Lily Qi, center, who has raised awareness and introduced legislation to reduce salt pollution, pictured here with League staff.

KATHRYN HARDY



Hands-on activities included a smart salting sidewalk demonstration by Jason Swope of the Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council.

Corrosive chloride can leach lead into drinking water

While road salt is a vital tool for preventing slips and collisions in the winter, using more than necessary can lead to costly, unintended consequences. Finding the right balance ensures our streets and sidewalks stay safe while protecting our infrastructure from the premature wear and expensive damage caused by salt pollution.

Elevated chloride levels in water sources, which can result from excessive road salt use, may also contribute to the corrosion of metal pipes.

Chloride (a component of road salt) is known to mobilize heavy metals and is incredibly corrosive to metal pipes. This corrosion can potentially lead to the leaching of metals like lead or copper into drinking water, particularly in homes and businesses with older plumbing or fixtures that may not meet today's standards.

According to the EPA, in November 2025 there were an estimated four million lead service lines in the United States. They pose significant risk to human health. Many of these are connecting water mains to private properties and are concentrated in older urban areas.

The EPA reports that lead in water poses cardiovascular, kidney and reproductive health risks to adults. Even low levels of lead in the blood of children can result in behavior and learning problems, lower IQ and hyperactivity, slowed growth, hearing problems and anemia.

Sources of lead in drinking water can come from

SMART SALTING

Smart salting can help communities stay safe, save money and protect water resources by using less salt. To reduce salt at home or in your community, follow these steps:

- **Shovel:** Clear snow early and often to reduce the amount of snow that turns into ice. You can also sweep after shoveling to reach bare pavement (and sometimes that is all you need!)
- **Scatter:** Use only what is necessary; 12 ounces of salt can treat 10 sidewalk squares, a 20-foot long driveway, or two parking spaces.
- **Switch:** Use sand for traction when temperatures drop below 15°F, as salt loses effectiveness at 15 degrees and lower.
- **Sweep:** Clean up excess salt and sand once the ice melts so it doesn't wash into waterways. You can store this in a closed container to use during the next storm event!

of the home as well. Check out the graphic from our new "Road Salt, Lead & Drinking Water" Fact Sheet.

To find out if you have lead in your drinking water, have your water tested. To learn more, visit: epa.gov/safewater.

SOURCES OF LEAD IN DRINKING WATER



Faucets: Faucets and fixtures made or installed prior to 2014 may have lead content exceeding today's standards.



Galvanized pipes: Galvanized pipes (even lead-free ones) can accumulate lead particles from other sources (e.g. lead lines or lead solder), later releasing them into the water supply.



Copper Pipe with Lead Solder: Copper pipes installed before 1987 were often joined with lead-based solder, meaning they may contain traces of lead.



Lead Service Lines: Pipes that run from the public water main to a residence may be a source of lead contamination.

..... **Property Line**

Utility-Owned Water Main

Keeping an Eye on Federal Actions, Conservation Focus Shifts to States

MICHAEL REINEMER | Editor

Action Shifts to State

In 2026, any progress on conservation issues will likely come from states as they assume a larger role while federal agencies rollback programs and cut budgets for science and environmental programs. The National Caucus on Environmental Legislators, which has about 1,300 state legislators in their membership, says their focus for 2026 includes:

Data centers: 27 states have bills pending to establish guidelines to foster greater transparency about the water and energy requirements and setting emission standards.

Access to residential solar: 34 states have legislation to lower costs and reduce barriers to small solar panel systems that residents can install themselves.

Source: NCEL,
www.ncelenviro.org

League Briefs State Lawmakers on Nitrate

On February 26, the Izaak Walton League hosted a briefing for Iowa state lawmakers about nitrate in surface and drinking water during 2025. League staff told the legislators that Iowa volunteers have submitted more than 4,000 readings that revealed the average concentration in

surface water often exceeded the EPA's 10 mg/L standard for safe drinking water, which triggers water treatment plants' use an expensive process to reduce nitrate to safe levels, raising the cost of drinking water for consumers.

EPA Backs Deadline for Lead Pipe Replacement

In a February court filing, the Trump Administration's EPA said it will support the 10-year deadline for replacing lead pipes—a rule approved under the Biden Administration.

"EPA concluded that the only way to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act's mandate to prevent anticipated adverse health effects 'to the extent feasible' is to require replacement of lead service lines," the agency's filing stated.

The Izaak Walton League applauds the EPA's decision.

Source: Associated Press, Feb. 20, 2026

And, EPA Rolls Back Green House Gas Regs

In a blow to climate change mitigation, the EPA rolled back the 2009 Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding that identified six greenhouse gases in the atmosphere—carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur

hexafluoride—as threats to "public health and welfare of current and future generations."

Source: EPA

Potomac Spill Underscores Infrastructure Needs

A catastrophic spill in January, described by officials as perhaps the largest in U.S. history, has dumped about 250 million gallons of sewage into the Potomac River just upstream from Washington, D.C. A six-foot pipe began releasing 40 to 60 million gallons of raw sewage per day. The pipe had been tagged as in need for repair.

"This should serve as a wake-up call for municipalities and government agencies across the country," said the League's Clean Water Program Director Sam Puckett. "Our aging infrastructure requires proactive maintenance and funding to ensure the safety of our communities, the health of our environment and the vitality of the industries that depend on a clean river."

Source: New York Times, Feb. 17, 2026

100 YEARS AGO IN OUTDOOR AMERICA

He Never Took More Than He Needed



“He never took more than he needed” is the caption for the cover illustration for the March 1926 issue of *Outdoor America*, which depicts an Indian hunting geese.

During our early decades, the League pushed for ethical hunting practices and game preserves and warned about the dangers of over-hunting. In a previous issue of the magazine, December 1923, founder Will Dilg had written about the prospect of some wild game disappearing completely from the nation unless sportsmen and women spoke up.

The March issue, which was 80 pages in length, featured more than a dozen authors who wrote about camping, boating and fishing. The first article was a five-page account of a hunting trip to Africa written by Mrs. E.L. King, described as champion trap shooter.

Other articles plunged into topics like ice fishing, Irish setters, tree growth and water pollution, including an article on that topic from Herbert Hoover, who was Secretary of Commerce at the time. There was a preview of speakers lined up for the League’s fourth national convention and a lengthy article about the climate consequences from cutting down more trees than we plant. — MR



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.

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Email develop@iwla.org or visit iwla.org/donate.



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

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

After the Flood: The Hidden Ecological Toll of Hurricane Helene

MAGGIE DOMBROSKI,
Save Our Streams Coordinator

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene dominated national headlines as it tore through western North Carolina and east Tennessee, leaving a trail of decimated towns and fractured lives.

While the staggering loss of 250 souls and \$78 billion in property damage defined the immediate tragedy, a quieter crisis unfolded beneath the surface of the region's waterways. Beyond the ruined roads and leveled homes lies another overlooked, yet lasting impact: the widespread upheaval of small-stream ecosystems and the vital macroinvertebrate populations that sustain them.

Fly fisherman and Virginia Save Our Streams monitor Alan Edmunds has experienced these impacts firsthand. Edmunds has been monitoring several rivers east of the northern Blue Ridge Mountains with the Old Rag chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists (ORMN) for the past four years. ORMN is a volunteer organization dedicated to conserving and managing natural resources in Virginia through education, citizen science and stewardship. Save Our Streams is one of the many projects that they support. Two years ago, Edmunds took over as the lead monitor for the Rose River, which ORMN volunteers have been sampling since 2011.

"I love the Rose River," said Edmunds, "because I've been fishing it my whole life."

The Rose River, which flows 8.8 miles southeast from Hawksbill Mountain in Shenandoah National Park to its confluence with the Robinson River, was impacted by Hurricane Helene, which dumped 40



Save Our Streams monitors along the Rose River in Virginia noticed a decline in stream health after Hurricane Helene.

trillion gallons of water throughout the southeastern U.S. Virginia received 10-15 inches of rain during the storm.

How Floods Can Degrade Streams

Helene caused significant damage to the area surrounding the Rose. "We had roads that were completely covered, bridges were covered," recalled Edmunds, "The entire streambed was moved in certain places. Rocks got thrown all over the place. There was a lot of erosion and a few bushes and trees were washed away."

Prior to the storm, ORMN's sample site on the Rose River always received high marks in terms of stream health. "It was a top performing little stream," reported Edmunds, "We always found mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies. It was always fun to find water pennies and things like that, which really don't live in polluted water."

Because the river was so great for demonstrating aquatic life, the testing site was often used for education events like Envirothon trainings and Meaningful Watershed Education Experiences with area school children.

After the storm, stream health scores declined, entering into the “unacceptable” range for the first time since 2011. “The insect life in that area went down significantly from what it had been,” stated Edmunds. “What happened, in my opinion, was that the stream bed was scoured by the storm, washing away the macroinvertebrates and the debris that the macroinvertebrates feed on and shelter in, leaving a significantly reduced habitat for the few that remained to feed and thrive.”

Interestingly, although the storm hit all ORMN’s monitoring sites severely, the other sites did not experience a distinct drop off in stream health score like the Rose did. This variation in impact among different streams correlates with broader findings in the region.

In late 2024, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) conducted a study of post-Helene macroinvertebrate populations across the state. The study had varied results—there was a 28.5% reduction in macroinvertebrate abundance overall, but some streams had significantly reduced macroinvertebrate populations, and a few had almost no bugs at all, while other streams were relatively unaffected. NC DEQ found that the greatest reductions in macroinvertebrate populations corresponded to sites with the greatest loss of vegetation along the streambanks and the greatest habitat degradation.

The differences in amounts of this riparian vegetation and available habitat could be a factor in the differences in the effects of the Hurricane on ORMN’s monitoring sites. The Rose River site is unique among their sites in that it is not in a natural area, but rather on a property that has been open to the public since 1965 and features ample outdoor recreation opportunities. Shortly after the storm,

the streambed of the river at the site was rebuilt using river rocks to repair the channel. The riparian area, although sparse even before the storm, was not replanted. “There weren’t a lot of trees there to begin with,” said Edmunds, “Now there are even less.”

Edmunds believes that the rebuilding of the channel and the absence of vegetation along the river was a major contributor to why scores at the Rose were more impacted than those at other sites that were left to recover on their own. “When I go to the Hazel and the Hughes River, I walk the same streambed that I did before,” described Edmunds, “Those rivers were changed, but the base channel is the same. They still contain leaves and rocks and dirt and food. There might be some trees that have been pulled over, but there’s still plenty of other trees and shrubs along the banks.”

Upstream and downstream of the monitoring site on the Rose River, the river seems to have recovered better. “Where we do our testing got really badly mangled. However, upstream and downstream from our testing site, the trees are still there and the river is

still doing well. What I have seen on other sections of the river is evidence that it has rebounded better. A mile up the stream or a mile down the stream, it’s still a healthy, native stream.”

The difference at the site makes sense when you take into account what the area is managed for. “It’s a place that’s designed to support the public, almost like a park,” explained Edmunds, “The owners allow a lot of people to come onto the property for a multitude of uses, so they want to keep the space open so that they can have space for events.” According to Edmunds, this is not a bad thing. The easy access, in addition to great stream life, is why ORMN and education groups love the site. That being said, planting some trees and bushes along the riparian area “would probably still help that stream become even better.”

The stream bed was scoured by the storm, washing away the macroinvertebrates and the debris that the macroinvertebrates feed on and shelter in, leaving a significantly reduced habitat.



A Larger Story of Erratic Weather

Hurricane Helene was not just a one-off event. It's part of a larger story of erratic weather patterns. As Edmunds has observed, "we seem to be going through a cycle of very heavy rains, or hurricanes. Lots of flooding, lots of damage, and then, within a very short period of time, you're back down to no rain. The water levels get very low. The water warms up a lot, which is bad for trout. It's also potentially bad for the macroinvertebrates that are in the rivers."

According to Edmunds, the macroinvertebrates "seem to be doing better than the trout this past year."

The impact of extreme weather has stressed trout populations in Virginia like the native brook trout and stocked rainbow trout, shown by Alan Edmunds here.



Hurricane Helene left a path of extreme flooding destruction in the mountains of North Carolina.

“There are two kinds of trout fishing in the Rose River—native and stocked. There are several areas where the state stocks it, typically with rainbow trout. And then if you go up into the Shenandoah National Park area, there’s brook trout. The brook trout are native, and they’re always there, but they have been pushed back a bit in certain areas because the rivers are getting smaller, and that makes the water hotter. Both are tough on the native brook trout.”

Normally, the state stocks the streams east of the Blue Ridge where Edmunds fishes. But, according to Edmunds, none of the streams were stocked in Fall 2025 and as of January that was still the case. “The water levels have been too low for them to put fish in. They’re worried that due to the low water the trout will all die.”

Hurricane Helene was not just a one-off event. It’s part of a larger story of erratic weather patterns.

Edmunds is hopeful that the macroinvertebrates will start to rebound. “I’m really looking forward to spring, because I expect that in the spring, I’ll see that those scores start to come back up again. My hope is that the leaf litter from this last fall

will build up in the river bottom at our test site, settling into the rocks, and giving it time to kind of become part of the bed of the river. And the macroinvertebrates

will have a chance to munch on all that stuff and get bigger. And since the stream above is still very healthy, I suspect some of the macros will come down through the stream to the lower areas of the Rose River and populate it over the next year or so.”

IMPACT OF EXTREME PRECIPITATION ON STREAM ECOSYSTEMS

Seasonal flooding is a natural phenomenon that serves an important purpose in the stream ecosystem, providing benefits like nutrient cycling and habitat creation to stream dwelling creatures. In recent years, however, climate change has caused more frequent and intense flooding. Of the top 10 years with greatest number of single-day extreme precipitation events in the U.S., 9 have occurred in the past 30 years. 2025 had the highest number of flash flood warnings ever issued in a single year across the U.S. And it is only expected to get worse—extreme rainfall events are predicted to become three times more likely and up to 20 percent more severe in the next 40 years, according to the National Science Foundation.

Extreme flooding causes a host of problems. In a stream ecosystem, all that excess water over a relatively short period of time can scour the bank, destroy vegetation along the stream, and wash out in-stream

habitat. The increased precipitation that is the source of the flood can also carry pollutants from across the watershed into the stream, causing a rapid change in water quality. In the short term, critters that live in the stream, such as fish and macroinvertebrates, can be displaced or killed. In the long term, the reduced habitat complexity that results from the rocks, plants and streambanks being washed out means that the stream can’t support as many species.

These changes particularly affect benthic macroinvertebrates, small creatures that live on the stream bed, since they depend on the stream bed for habitat and food sources. They also have limited mobility, so they may not be able to relocate to a more suitable habitat after a disturbance. Macroinvertebrates serve as an important food source for other aquatic life, so impacts on their populations affect the entire food web.



SOIL MATTERS

USDA Program Helps St. Joseph County Chapter Tackle Invasive Plants

By KATE HANSEN, Agriculture Program Director



Members of the St. Joseph Chapter in Indiana use USDA funds to help control invasive plants in the Chapter's forest land.

Conversations about conservation are often about how we treat and manage the land. What practices are being used? What can we do to improve soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat? Who has the power to make those decisions?

In regions of the country with significant Izaak Walton League membership, like the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, most land is privately owned. In my home state of Indiana, that share is 95%, a mix of agricultural land and forest. Here, prioritizing conservation means working with individual landowners to steward their land.

Making a change in land management is never simple and

rarely free. However, doing so can have a big impact on water quality, wildlife habitat, soil health and more—outcomes that benefit us all.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers programs that help landowners implement new conservation practices. If their application to participate is accepted, landowners receive financial assistance to help cover costs and technical assistance to improve chances for success.

In this column, we often talk about the Izaak Walton League's advocacy efforts to support and improve USDA programs. Working with farmers over the years, I have seen countless

examples of these conservation programs in action. Some will use the programs to establish wildlife habitat on marginal lands that are less suitable for agriculture. Others begin planting a cover crop, which will armor the soil in the off-season and protect against erosion. The list goes on.

Programs for private forest land

These conservation programs are also important for privately-owned forests. One example can be found close to my home.

The **St. Joseph County Chapter** of the Izaak Walton League was founded in 1924 and offers ample recreation opportunities for its members in

northern Indiana. The chapter owns three properties, primarily forested, totaling 130 acres. They include fishing ponds, hiking trails, an archery range and a 30-target archery course that has attracted shooters from across the country.

Recently, the Chapter has used the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to reduce invasive plant species and improve the quality of the habitat of its property.

Japanese honeysuckle, Asian bittersweet and privet are among the top invasive species the Chapter is trying to control. Their five-year CSP contract will provide financial resources and a plan to achieve their goals.

Invasive species, like the ones targeted by the Chapter, tend to take over, rapidly spreading and crowding out native trees, shrubs and forbs. The loss of native vegetation reduces the natural populations of insects and other critters that make up the wild food web for wild animals and reduces the land's health and biodiversity. For instance, the absence of native plants creates a food desert for a nest of fledgling birds, which requires insects—and they depend on native plants.

"CSP is helping a lot and has allowed us to purchase supplies and machinery to remove invasives. Work is done by our volunteers, and the resources have also helped us purchase safety equipment to ensure safety is our top priority," said Mike Hay, Chapter president.

So far, the effort is working

and bringing new volunteers into the fold. Part of the work is also educating participants about invasive species and conservation management more broadly. Even after their contract expires, the volunteers will be more equipped to manage the property in the future.

Hay is a third-generation League member. At the St. Joseph County Chapter, he can point out the areas his father and grandfather helped build. When asked why the project is important, he says, "you can't do everything, but we can all do something. We've got to chip away at it. That's why we're enthusiastic about doing this in our community."

Japanese honeysuckle, Asian bittersweet and privet are among the top invasive species the Chapter is trying to control with a five-year Conservation Stewardship Program contract.

USDA conservation programs like CSP, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Reserve Program are some of the best tools we have to drive conservation on privately owned lands across the country. Combined each year, their impact affects hundreds of thousands of acres in Indiana and tens of millions of acres nationwide.

It has never been lost on me that some of the founding members of the Izaak Walton League were well-acquainted with my home

state. While they first met in Chicago in 1922, many founding members spent time hunting and fishing in Indiana. They enjoyed the bounties of wildlife-rich areas like the Grand Kankakee Marsh, a half-million-acre area once known as the "Everglades of the North" before it was drained.

At the League, we continue in the footsteps of our founders to protect our natural resources. In that mission, we advocate for USDA conservation programs and more—their funding, their improvement and their further success. In Indiana, they are making a difference one contract at a time, including in our own backyard.

A version of this article appeared on the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership blog, a national coalition of which the League is a member.

Examples of CSP practices available for forestland

- Biological suppression of brush, weeds and invasive species
- Forest soil quality improvement
- Forest stand improvement
- Integrated pest management
- Pine straw raking for wildlife habitat
- Pollinator and beneficial insect habitat
- Prescribed burning
- Riparian forest buffer
- Tree planting for wildlife food and cover
- Upland wildlife habitat management



**Congratulations to the
celebrating big milestones**

100 YEARS

100th Anniversaries
Chartered in 1926



Alexandria Chapter
(Indiana)

Des Plaines Chapter
(Illinois)

Minnesota Valley Chapter
(Minnesota)

North Manchester Chapter
(Indiana)

Oil City Chapter
(Pennsylvania)

Owatonna Chapter
(Minnesota)

**Roanoke Valley
Chapter** *(Virginia)*

Rome Chapter
(New York)

York Chapter #67
(Pennsylvania)

These Izaak Walton League chapters celebrate one anniversaries in 2026.

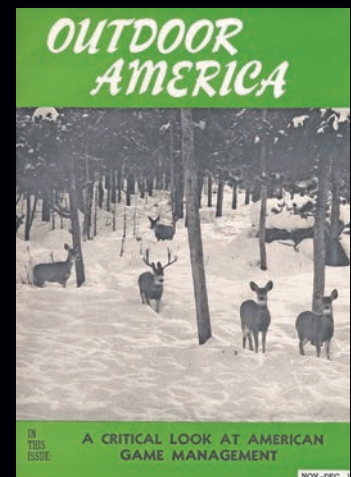


75th Anniversaries Chartered in 1951

Loudoun County
Chapter (*Virginia*)

Medina Chapter (*Ohio*)

Wabash Chapter (*Indiana*)



50th Anniversary Chartered in 1976

Fairfield Chapter
(*Ohio*)

West Central Chapter
(*Iowa*)





A good Ike is easy to find.

But only you can help us find the best of the best.

Make sure your fellow Ikes get the recognition they deserve, for:

- Defending clean water
- Organizing a conservation project
- Engaging youth in the outdoors
- 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



LAST LOOK

"A sustainable future is not guaranteed—if we want it, we need to create it."

— Dr. Hannah Ritchie

"Not the End of the World" 2024



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