



## **Winter Salt Awareness Week Event Highlights Environmental and Health Impacts of Road Salt Pollution**

On January 31, the Izaak Walton League of America, in partnership with the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) and the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, hosted a Winter Road Salt Awareness Week open house at the League's national headquarters in Gaithersburg, Maryland. The event, attended by over 60 attendees, brought together policymakers, environmental professionals, and community members to examine the growing environmental and public health consequences of road salt overuse and to promote solutions that protect water resources while maintaining winter safety.

"Most people are surprised to learn how little salt it actually takes to keep sidewalks and roads safe," said Jared Mott, Interim Executive Director of the Izaak Walton League of America. "Winter Salt Week is about giving people the knowledge they need to reduce pollution and protect local waterways. The League is proud to be a national leader in stopping road salt pollution at the source and we're grateful to all our partners and especially want to thank everyone that participated. Together, we can make our community a cleaner, healthier place to live and work while still protecting the safety of all that travel here in the winter months."

Across the United States, an estimated 20–30 million tons of road salt are applied each year, and while it improves winter safety, excessive use causes lasting harm. Salt does not break down in the environment and accumulates in waterways and groundwater—just one teaspoon can contaminate five gallons of water—threatening ecosystems, drinking water, and infrastructure. These impacts were especially evident this year following an unprecedented snowfall that led to widespread oversalting and shortages, underscoring the need for smarter, more efficient winter maintenance practices.

ICPRB Executive Director Michael Nardolilli shared data showing that chloride levels in the Potomac River—the primary drinking water source for millions in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area—are steadily increasing. Alarming, elevated salt levels persist even during summer months, long after winter applications have stopped. This persistence demonstrates that road salt has become a chronic pollutant, raising concerns for aquatic life, drinking water treatment, and long-term public health.

Speakers from local, state, and regional organizations explored how data, policy, and on-the-ground practices can reduce road salt pollution while protecting public health and equity. Maryland Delegate Linda Foley highlighted state leadership on the issue and presented the Izaak Walton League with a legislative citation recognizing its work to educate Marylanders about smart salting practices, noting that while waterways like the Chesapeake Bay have improved, water quality remains fragile and far easier to degrade than to restore.



Additional speakers, including WSSC Water Director Priscilla To, Ph.D., P.E., and Montgomery County Councilmember-At-Large Laurie-Anne Sayles, emphasized the importance of source water protection, regional collaboration, and environmental justice, while hands-on demonstrations and water testing activities showed how individual actions and reduced salt use can help safeguard waterways and community health.

One attendee described the open house 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.

### **About the Izaak Walton League of America**

Founded in 1922, the [Izaak Walton League](https://www.iwla.org) fights for clean air and water, healthy fish and wildlife habitat and conservation of our natural resources for future generations. The League plays a unique role in supporting community-based science and local conservation and has a long legacy of shaping sound national policy.

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