



IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Going Forward with Conservation — Today and Tomorrow

BY DAWN MERRITT



IKES FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY gathered in South Dakota this July to explore the theme, “Going Forward with Conservation — Today and Tomorrow.” League members have been fighting to conserve outdoor America for tomorrow — and future generations — for more than 90 years. At our 2015 national convention, we celebrated our achievements and explored how League members can restore and conserve America’s soil, air, woods, waters, and wildlife.

Our action-packed convention started with a fishing trip on the Missouri River and tours of the Dakota grasslands (plus the state capital of Pierre) and ended with an insider’s perspective on managing Mount Rushmore and other national monuments. In between, attendees enjoyed interactive workshops and nationally renowned speakers, held officer elections, and voted on resolutions to establish League conservation policies.

If you missed the action, you can catch up with these highlights. And be sure to mark your calendar for next year’s convention in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. (See page 37 for dates and more information.)



2015 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Destry Jarvis, President Outdoor Recreation & Park Services LLC

America's conservation challenges have changed, as has our access to outdoor places. Destry Jarvis, who has spent 44 years working in the parks, recreation, historic preservation, and youth engagement fields, including as Assistant Director of the National Park Service, discussed how those changes could shape the future of conservation and outdoor recreation in America.

When Congress enacted the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, "it set in motion a mechanism for federal and state governments — and local governments, to a great extent — to enact new conservation measures," said Jarvis. "The Act was intended to complete the conservation estate of America."

By any account, it has succeeded. Over the past 50 years, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has allowed federal agencies to acquire 5 million acres of public lands and helped states acquire 3 million acres and build 29,000 recreation facilities in virtually every county in the country.

When LWCF expired on September 30, what actually expired was the state grant program, explained Jarvis. Given that LWCF is funded by oil and gas leasing royalty payments, not tax dollars, why would Congress not reauthorize the legislation? Opposition comes in part from western states, where an average of 47 percent of the land is federally owned. However, 95 percent of land acquisitions today occur in eastern states, where only 4 percent of the land is publicly owned.

There is also a push to direct these funds to "backlog maintenance" projects, Jarvis said — even though half the maintenance backlog involves

repairs to roads and bridges, which are paid for out of the Highway Trust Fund. In addition, explained Jarvis, 98 percent of the maintenance backlog is for sites that are more than 50 years old. "They've got worn out facilities. Adding a new area does not add to the backlog."

So what does the future hold for LWCF? Jarvis predicted that before the end of the year, Congress will extend LWCF for a year or two and work on changes to the legislation in 2016. "They may or may not get the votes together to pass a comprehensive reform, and it may get kicked off to the next administration." Hear more details from Jarvis on our YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/izaakwaltonleague).



Casey Kruse Missouri River Coordinator U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Casey Kruse and his staff at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have developed one of the most comprehensive and geographically challenging endangered species monitoring and recovery programs in the nation. In fact, Kruse noted that the most recent five-year review for the interior least tern — a river bird added to the Endangered Species List in 1985 — recommended delisting the bird because populations along the river have increased.

When asked about current threats to the Missouri River, Kruse said there is a "building body of evidence to suggest that we have a building nutrient



problem.” But don’t rush to blame agriculture production for the nutrient problem. Kruse said small, municipal runoff is also a factor. “We all need to be aware when we put fertilizers and pesticides on our lawns” of the impact on water quality.

“We need a local constituency for the Missouri River,” he said, “but it will also take national awareness to fix the river before there is a crisis.” Although some residents may criticize the Army Corps of Engineers for how the agency manages the Missouri River, Kruse pointed out that the Corps does very good work as tasked by Congress — a reminder that the Corps’ management of the river is based on laws passed by Congress. To do it differently, he said, “we need to have a ‘revolution’ and think about a sustainable river policy” and take those new ideas to our members of Congress.



Lynn Scarlett
Managing Director of Public Policy
The Nature Conservancy

Throughout a distinguished career in the public and private sectors, Lynn Scarlett has been an innovative thought leader on conservation issues. At our convention, she discussed factors that will influence future conservation policy and projects. (You can watch her full talk on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/izaakwaltonleague.)

Budget constraints at the local, state, and national levels present a challenge for conservation program funding, said Scarlett. However, these fiscal challenges also offer opportunities to rethink traditional “gray” infrastructure in favor of greener solutions. “Cities across the nation are looking for better, cheaper, and smarter ways to meet their infrastructure needs,” she said, including investments

in floodplain and wetland restoration, permeable surfacing in cities, and watershed protection. With a surge in the number of natural disasters comes a dramatic increase in the costs to address these disasters. The magnitude of such disasters has also increased due to degraded natural systems, which is encouraging leaders to look to green solutions.

When Americans are asked generally about issues that concern them, “conservation” does not rise to the top of most lists, Scarlett said. However, when they are asked about specific issues, support for conservation or concern for the environment is high. For example, 80 percent of Americans are concerned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about river, lake, and reservoir pollution and water supply issues, and 76 percent are concerned “a great deal” or “somewhat” about air pollution. Even plant and animal extinction rated concern among 65 percent of Americans. “These concerns, while they don’t rise to national headlines, do translate into votes to protect lands, waters, and wildlife,” said Scarlett. However, these interests could be affected by the dwindling connection children and families have with nature. “This underscores the key role of League’s community-based conservation endeavors” and youth outreach programs, she said. “These are the future of conservation.”

The combination of collaboration and large-scale conservation is now a centerpiece of 21st-century conservation, explained Scarlett, who recommends focusing conservation messaging around community needs for health, safety, and more. “People are coalescing in partnered problem solving, in conservation in communities,” said Scarlett. These efforts “reflect a key pillar of 21st-century conservation: the opportunity for all to participate.”



Cheryl Schreier, Superintendent Mount Rushmore National Memorial

Cheryl Schreier manages the day-to-day operations of Mount Rushmore National Memorial, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would become the first female superintendent of Mount Rushmore,” she told Ikes at our closing banquet. She likens the work to being the conductor of an orchestra made up of park interpreters, maintenance workers, law enforcement personnel, a “Friends” group, and even the wild animals that call the park home. (Big horn sheep often “lamb up” behind the heads on Mount Rushmore!)

Schreier offered a few insider tidbits about the famous faces. The four presidents were not the first vision for Mount Rushmore. Originally the developers considered carving the images of iconic westerners, such as Wild Bill Hickok, into the granite. But sculptor Gutzon Borglum’s vision was much larger than that: “The purpose of the memorial is to communicate the founding, expansion, preservation, and unification of the United States,” he declared, with carvings of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. Originally Borglum started with Thomas Jefferson on the far left, but the granite would not hold, so Jefferson’s half-finished face was blasted off the mountain and started again to the right of George Washington.

Mount Rushmore also offers a wealth of natural resources, said Schreier. The developed area covers only 40 of the memorial’s more than 1,200 acres. Staff are actively engaged in managing the park’s resources, including treating the forest for mountain pine beetle, especially in areas with old growth pine. Schreier said that the biggest opportunities for the

future of the National Park Service and Mount Rushmore are getting more youth into this park and parks across the country. “The next generation is the key to conserving our resources and enjoying what they have to offer.”

THE VOTES ARE IN

Election of volunteer leaders is an important part of the League’s national convention. In July, members elected Ikes from across the country to lead the League through the coming year.

National Officers

President: Shawn Gallagher (Ohio)

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Region I: OPEN

Region II: OPEN

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Region IV: Dean Knight (Iowa)

Region V: Rick Sommer (South Carolina)

Region VI: Bill Gordon (Maryland)



2015 POLICY RESOLUTIONS

What do nuclear energy, wetlands, wilderness, conservation funding, and water trails have in common?

League members adopted policies on each of these important issues at convention. Any League member can propose a resolution. Adopted resolutions become part of our Conservation Policies and guide League members and staff in our mission to conserve, restore, and promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of our natural resources.

Nuclear Energy Research

Nuclear power contributes about 20 percent of America's energy supplies and does not emit significant greenhouse gases or other air pollution. However, waste byproducts require specialized storage for generations. To date, the United States has not developed a long-term storage solution. Emerging technologies and those used in other parts of the world for decades can reuse waste to generate electricity and further reduce waste and storage fines. Recognizing this progress and the potential of nuclear energy, longstanding League policy to "drastically reduce" nuclear energy and limit future development, at least until a solution has been found for high-level waste disposal and storage, was amended.

The League now supports continued research into nuclear energy, including reactors that use uranium, thorium, or nuclear waste to generate energy.

Land and Water Conservation Fund Reauthorization Resolution

The Izaak Walton League played a pivotal role in establishing the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 1965. LWCF was the result of a comprehensive review of national conservation and

outdoor recreation policy. The League's conservation director played a leading role in this work — and in convincing Congress to implement many of the review commission's recommendations. League policy sums up the purpose of the Fund nicely:

The primary mission of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is the acquisition of the land base for outdoor recreation and the preservation of our natural heritage.

LWCF is a critical funding source for local and state governments and federal agencies to acquire and consolidate land for public use and benefit, including recreation and natural resource conservation. It is funded through royalties from federal offshore leases of publicly owned oil and natural gas and authorized by Congress to distribute \$900 million of those revenues annually to conservation.

Although it has only been fully funded by Congress once (and usually funded at less than half the authorized \$900 million), the Land and Water Conservation Fund has created tremendous opportunities for outdoor recreation, from community parks to large public lands. It provides matching grants to states and local communities to create parks and recreation spaces. More than 41,000 projects across the nation have received more than \$3 billion in funding through LWCF, and nearly 5 million acres of public lands have been protected for public use.

The law expired at the end of September 2015. (It was originally authorized through fiscal year 1989, then reauthorized by Congress through fiscal year 2015.) The League had policy supporting LWCF but nothing on extending it. League members approved new policy to continue LWCF at \$900 million, adjusted for inflation in future years.



The Duck Stamp

Before you go waterfowl hunting in America, you must purchase a federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (commonly referred to as a “duck stamp”). For almost 80 years, this pioneering program has raised money from hunters for the conservation of wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Many of the Waterfowl Production Areas, National Wildlife Refuges, and other public wetlands you may hunt or enjoy bird watching were made possible through these funds.

Congress recently raised the duck stamp fee from \$15 to \$25. Fifteen dollars of the purchase price can still be used to purchase migratory bird habitat, such as wetlands purchased by federal or state agencies for public use, or to pay for conservation easements protecting wetlands on private lands. However, Congress restricted the \$10 increase to paying for easements on private lands.

League members adopted a resolution urging Congress to protect the sportsman’s contribution to conservation by giving local land managers greater flexibility to use all duck stamp money to protect America’s dwindling wetlands through whatever means they see as most fiscally appropriate.

National Water Trails System

One of the League’s goals is to encourage people to get outside and develop an understanding of and appreciation for nature. National Water Trails are a new way to make it easier, safer, and more fun for people to experience America’s incredible network of rivers and streams.

League members adopted a policy supporting the National Water Trail System, which was established

by the National Park Service in 2012. Our policy addresses best management practices, including public access, the support of neighbors and nearby communities, and educational opportunities. This nationwide policy grew out of the support of the League’s Indiana Division for a proposed National Water Trail along the entire 133-mile Kankakee River, which flows from South Bend, Indiana, to Wilmington, Illinois, and still provides excellent fishing and hunting.

Maintaining the Integrity of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

The League has been intimately involved with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northeast Minnesota since well before its wilderness designation in 1964. It is the most visited wilderness area in America, encompassing more than one million acres of forest, lakes, rivers, and bogs. Minnesota owns more than 80,000 acres within the wilderness — land granted to the state by Congress in the 1800s to generate funds for public education — and would like to log some of that land. A working group recommended that the state swap one-third of this land for federally owned land in Superior National Forest and sell the rest of the wilderness acres to the federal government.

League members passed a resolution opposing a land swap and instead supporting a full federal buyout of the state’s lands to protect the integrity of the wilderness area while compensating Minnesota fully for those lands.

— Mike Leahy

The complete text of resolutions adopted at the 2015 national convention is available on the League’s Web site at www.iwla.org/2015resolutions.