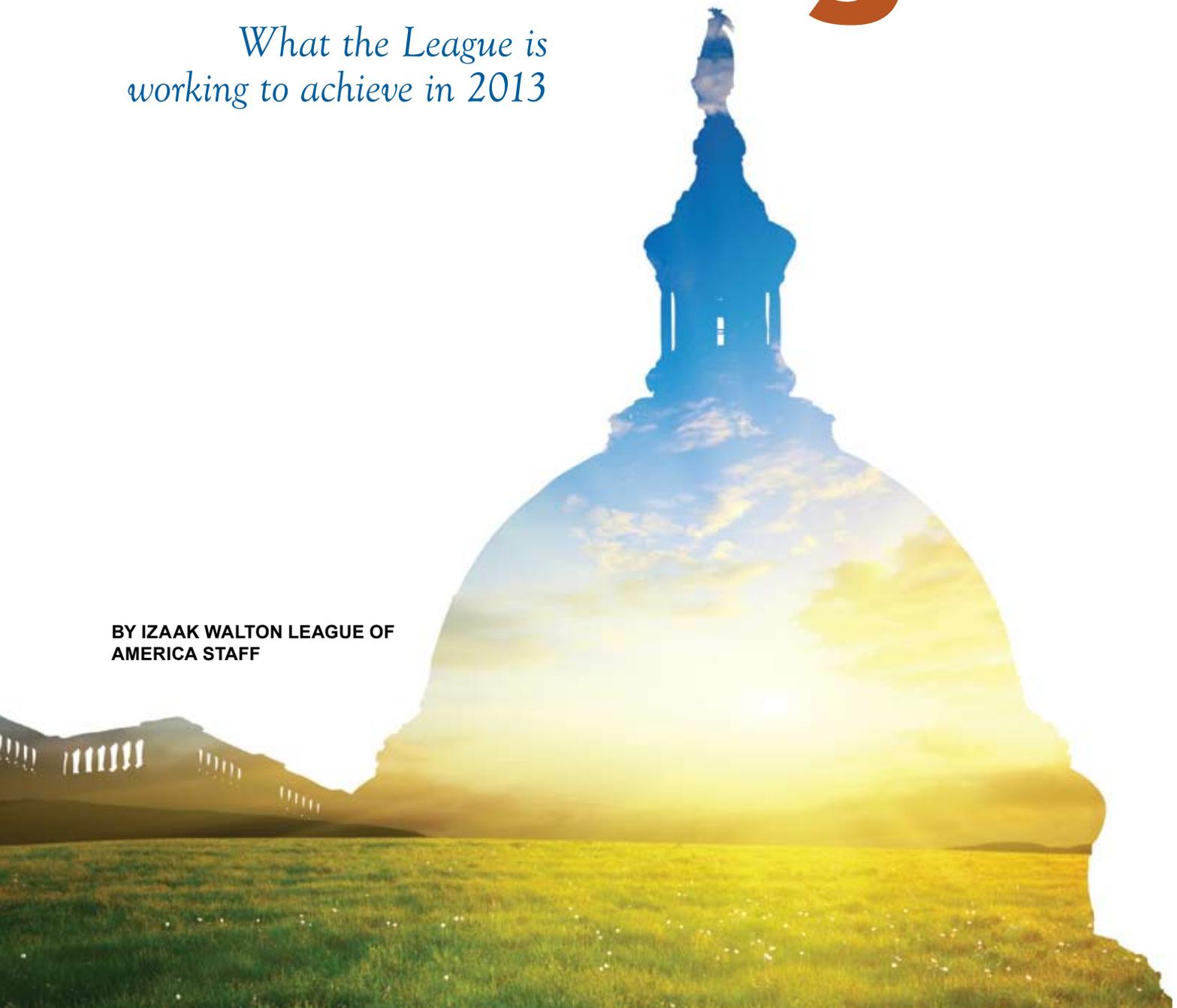


Today's conservation challenges

*What the League is
working to achieve in 2013*

BY IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF
AMERICA STAFF



Some conservation problems can be solved locally. Others require national or state action. That's why the Izaak Walton League was founded — to end the destruction of natural resources across America and conserve resources for the future.

Every two years, a new Congress is sworn in. Every two years, the Izaak Walton League sets an agenda for conservation challenges that require action at the national and state levels — and works with our members across the country to achieve the goals we set. Some of these goals are new. Some are ongoing. All require persistence and a collaborative approach.

The League's agenda for the next two years includes saving America's wetlands and native grasslands, restoring our most iconic waterways, and providing a clear path toward a clean energy future.

A Farm Bill That Saves Wetlands, Grasslands...and Your Tax Dollars

More than half our country's private land is being used for agriculture. The choices farmers make in managing those lands affect the quality of our waters, the health of fish and wildlife habitats, and our outdoor recreation opportunities. And those choices are heavily influenced by the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill covers everything from farm support to food assistance to rural development. Usually the Farm Bill is updated by Congress every five years to reflect changes in the country's needs. Today, we're caught in a waiting game — waiting for Congress to move on legislation it should have written and passed in 2012.

The League's Farm Bill focus is to protect natural resources and ensure Americans get a fair return for their tax dollars. We believe in supporting farmers. We believe just as strongly that agriculture policies must also conserve wetlands, protect water quality, and reduce soil erosion. So

the League is working to accomplish several goals in the next Farm Bill, including:

- Reconnecting conservation standards with crop insurance premium subsidies
- Implementing a nationwide Sodsaver program to protect prairie and grasslands

Conservation or Consequences

There is growing urgency to ensure conservation remains a priority in federal farm policy. Wetland drainage is sweeping across the Midwest at rates long-time residents have never seen before. Even the lands least suited to crop production — too wet, too dry, too prone to erosion — are going under the plow to take advantage of record-high crop prices. These lands are often important for wildlife and water quality — values that are diminished as soon as the plows start to roll.

The "conservation compliance" system that has acted as check on such damaging farm practices is being whittled away — and could



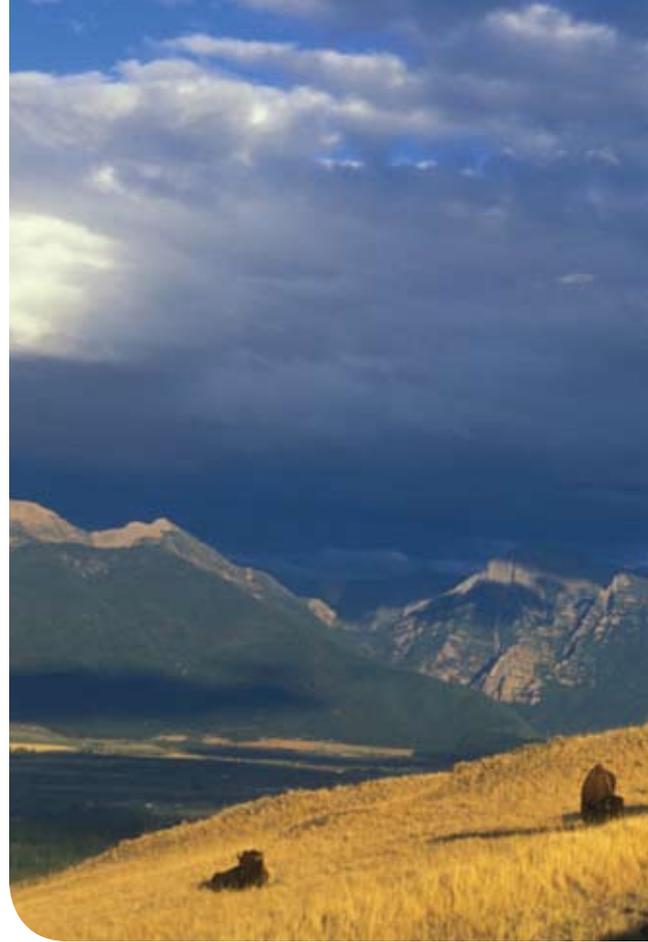
disappear altogether due to policy changes in Congress. This system, which dates back to the 1985 Farm Bill, asks farmers to implement basic conservation practices to reduce soil erosion and protect wetlands when they receive financial support from taxpayers.

The largest taxpayer-provided benefit that most producers receive today is subsidized premiums for crop insurance policies. The average subsidy is 62 percent of the cost of crop insurance premiums, although subsidies can cover as much as 80 percent of the cost. In 2011, these subsidies alone added up to more than \$7 billion in taxpayer support for farmers. However, taxpayers are not receiving conservation benefits in return because the 1996 Farm Bill exempted crop insurance subsidies from basic conservation requirements.

The League is working to tie crop insurance premium subsidies back to conservation



Current farm policy – especially costly subsidies for producers’ crop insurance premiums – is actually a disincentive to conservation.



compliance requirements. Last year, the U.S. Senate adopted an amendment to its Farm Bill that would achieve this goal, and we hope Congress will do so again this year. However, large agriculture and commodity groups and some insurance companies strongly oppose reconnecting insurance premium subsidies with conservation requirements. This issue is likely to be among the most hotly contested in the Farm Bill debate.

Where Buffalo (and Cattle) Used to Roam

Pockets of native grassland still dot the country – prairies filled with plants and wildlife that evolved over thousands of years. One of the most productive areas left intact is the “prairie pothole” region of the northern Plains, where grasslands and wetlands support more than half the North American duck population and provide rest stops and nesting habitat for many other bird species. Prairie grasslands that stretch from the Dakotas to Texas and from Kansas to the Rocky Mountains are critical to our nation’s ranching economy and dramatically reduce soil erosion and nutrient runoff that pollute America’s waterways.

USFWS (2), ISTOCK PHOTO (2)



These lands are disappearing today as more and more acres are plowed under to plant row crops. Current farm policy – especially costly subsidies for producers’ crop insurance premiums – contributes to this problem.

The League has long championed a nationwide “Sodsaver” program. This program would change policies that subsidize the conversion of native grasslands – in particular, by dramatically cutting crop insurance premium support when prairies are plowed under. These changes shift the risk and costs of land conversion from the taxpayer back to the farmer. Producers can still plow under native prairie – but they will forfeit a significant portion of taxpayer-supported subsidies if they make that choice. It’s common-sense conservation that could also save taxpayers as much as \$200 million over 10 years.

We made progress last year when a national Sodsaver provision was included in the Senate’s 2012 Farm Bill. We will work to replicate the victory this year, but we are starting back at square one with a new Congress.

It will be equally important to oppose efforts to limit Sodsaver to certain areas of the

2013 Public Policy Priorities

More than 90 years since our founding, the Izaak Walton League of America continues to bring persistence and a collaborative approach to natural resource issues. This year our public policy priorities at the national and state levels include:

Agriculture

- Reconnect conservation standards with crop insurance premium subsidies
- Implement a nationwide Sodsaver program to protect prairie and grasslands
- Limit cuts to Farm Bill conservation programs that conserve wetlands, grasslands, and wildlife habitat
- Ensure new wetland determination rules from the U.S. Department of Agriculture do not weaken wetland protections

Water

- Expand the geographic scope of the Upper Mississippi River Restoration-Environmental Management Program
- Halt efforts to limit long-range planning and scientific assessment needed to manage and restore the Missouri River
- Protect taxpayers from fiscally irresponsible barge industry navigation proposals
- Ensure the approval process for Corps of Engineers infrastructure projects balances economic, environmental, and other factors.
- Update and strengthen regulations that define the waters covered by the Clean Water Act to restore protections lost since 2001

Energy

- Modernize energy policies in Minnesota – which can serve as models for the rest of the country – to support more widespread development of small-scale solar and wind projects.



country. Under a regional approach to Sodsaver, producers in the same state – sometimes even in the same county – could be treated differently based on whether or not their land is within an arbitrary, Congressionally defined region, such as the prairie pothole region. A regional approach was included in the 2008 Farm Bill and was not implemented, largely because of the way it affected producers differently. The problem is national in scope and demands a national solution.

Restoring America's Great Rivers

The Mississippi and Missouri Rivers battle for the title of America's longest river (the Missouri wins by 21 miles). But both rivers are equally important to our nation's legacy of clean water, healthy fish and wildlife populations, and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Mississippi River corridor is home to more than 200 fish and mussel species and more than 300 varieties of birds. It serves as the migratory pathway for 40 percent of North America's waterfowl. More than 12 million people enjoy outdoor recreation on and along the Upper Mississippi alone each year, spending \$6.6 billion and supporting 143,000 jobs.

The Missouri River is part of the Central Flyway, another critical corridor for migratory birds. Millions of birds utilize the area for wintering and breeding, including waterfowl, eagles, and songbirds. Two bird species – the interior least tern and the piping plover – are on the federal Threatened and Endangered Species List due to loss of nesting and foraging habitat along the river. The Missouri is also home to a wide range of native fish species, many of which are now rare or declining (and the pallid sturgeon is listed as endangered) due to habitat loss. Healthy fish and wildlife populations are important to the basin because recreation on the Missouri River has an annual economic impact of hundreds of millions of dollars. Outdoor recreation provides a better quality of life for people in the river basin and is a major economic engine for many communities and states along the Missouri River.

Both rivers have long been priorities for the Izaak Walton League. Today we are working to build on and strengthen programs to restore habitat and the natural environment along the Upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

We will advocate for restoration policies through the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) – a multi-year bill that affects every aspect of Army Corps of Engineers operations,

navigation projects, and natural resources impacted by those projects. This legislation offers the best chance to achieve our conservation priorities along the two rivers. The League's priorities within WRDA are to:

- Expand the geographic scope of Upper Mississippi River Restoration-Environmental Management Program
- Halt efforts to limit long-range planning and scientific assessment needed to manage and restore the Missouri River
- Protect taxpayers from fiscally irresponsible barge industry proposals
- Ensure the approval process for Corps infrastructure projects balances economic, environmental, and other factors.

Expand Upper Mississippi River Restoration

Nearly 90 years ago, members of the Izaak Walton League dived into action to protect thousands of acres of fish and wildlife habitat along the Upper Mississippi. In what the League called the "Drainage Crime of a Century," the War Department (which included the Army Corps of Engineers) approved a plan to drain Winneshiek Bottoms – 15,000 acres along the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River. The League convinced Congress to protect critical fish and wildlife habitat by establishing the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Today, the refuge covers more than 240,000 acres stretching 261 miles through Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

In the 1930s, the federal government proposed a massive navigation project that would run straight through the heart of the refuge. The Corps of Engineers developed a system of 29 locks and dams stretching from Minneapolis to St. Louis, transforming this section of the Mississippi into a series of large pools maintained primarily for barge transportation. Backwater habitat critical to fish and wildlife largely disappeared, and many portions of the river filled with sediment.

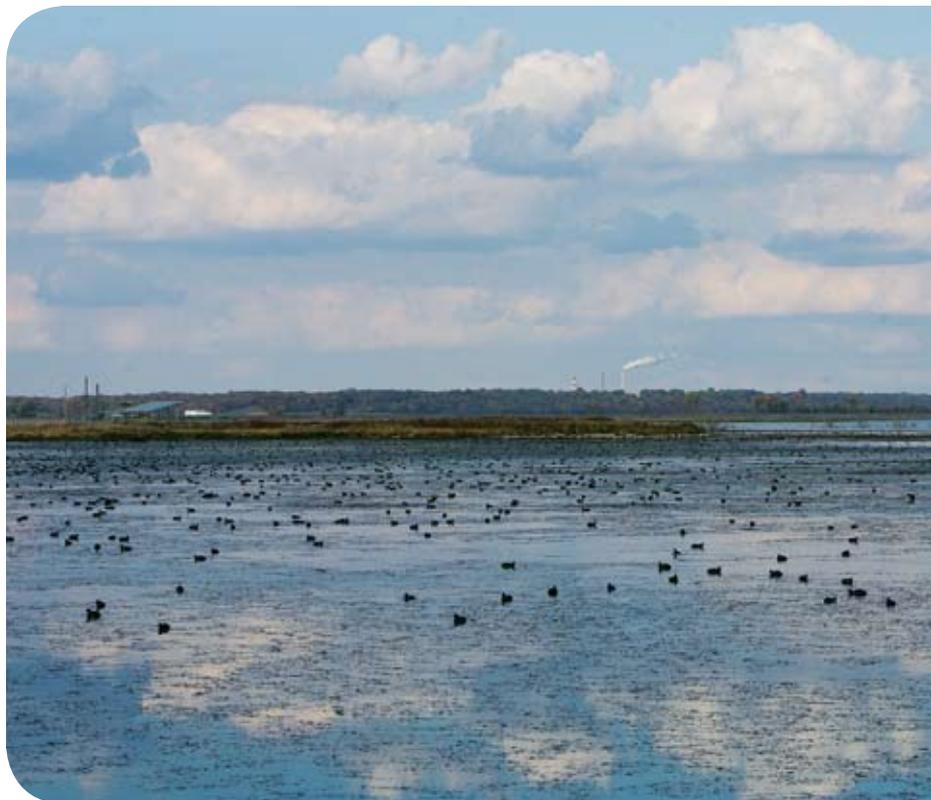
In 1986, Congress established the Upper Mississippi River Restoration-Environmental

Management Program (UMRR-EMP) to coordinate restoration and recovery efforts. The Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state governments, and other partners have restored more than 100,000 acres of aquatic and floodplain habitat, re-creating backwater areas critical to juvenile fish and waterfowl, deepening portions of the river once choked with sediment, and restoring floodplain habitat. Many of these areas are popular hunting and fishing spots for League members near the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Some of our members have even participated in project design.

The League strongly supports this program but also recognizes that its effectiveness has been constrained by artificial limits on where



The League is working to address the root causes of problems that continue to plague the Upper Mississippi River.





American taxpayers are heavily subsidizing barge transportation, despite steady reductions in barge traffic each year.

projects can be conducted. For example, restoration cannot extend beyond the river's floodplain or be conducted in tributaries that flow into the river. However, these areas are significant sources of pollution. Tributaries are a source of sediment that clogs waterways. They also carry nitrogen and phosphorus from fields, housing developments, and roads down into the Upper Mississippi River. Although reducing pollution from these sources is vital to restoring the Mississippi, current law prohibits projects focused in these areas.

The League is working to expand the geographic area in which Upper Mississippi River restoration projects can be conducted to include bluffs and tributaries. This simple, common-sense change will help address the root causes of problems — such as nutrient runoff and erosion — that continue to plague the river, damaging fish and wildlife populations as well as outdoor recreation.

Resume Restoration Planning for the Missouri River

The Missouri River was once a free-flowing, natural wonder that carried Lewis and Clark across half the continent. However, following massive flood events in the 1940's, demands for

flood control permanently altered the river's natural character — at great cost to fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. Today, one-third of the river has been channelized and another one-third impounded in a series of dams and huge reservoirs. These changes removed or altered more than 3 million acres of river-side habitat, and 51 of the river's 67 native species are now rare, uncommon, or declining.

Although the river has been dramatically altered, the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, states agencies, and others are working together to restore habitat in and along the river. This restoration is already providing benefits for fish and wildlife, outdoor recreation, and local economies in the basin as well as improving water quality and flood protection — a successful model for future restoration work.

However, successful restoration requires ongoing assessment and long-range planning, which are now in jeopardy. Barge industry allies in Congress have amended annual budget bills to prohibit the Corps from spending any money on long-range planning or evaluating the authorized purposes for which the Missouri is managed. These short-sighted limitations undermine restoration and efforts to develop a more balanced approach to managing the river.

Opponents of river restoration could use a new Water Resources Development Act to permanently derail essential river assessments. The League will actively combat such efforts as well as work to restore annual funding necessary for the work to be successfully completed.

Protect American Taxpayers

American taxpayers are heavily subsidizing barge transportation while barge traffic in many parts of the country, including the Upper Mississippi River, is declining. The barge industry contributes a modest \$.20/gallon fuel tax to cover part of the construction costs for navigation projects — about \$80 million annually — which is placed into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund.



That leaves America taxpayers to cover the rest of the construction costs and the cost of maintaining navigation systems — about \$800 million annually.

In spite of this very generous taxpayer contribution, the barge industry has proposed shifting even more of the costs for navigation projects to the American people, including effectively all construction project costs and all project cost overruns (which routinely run as high as 100 to 200 percent). When cost overruns are the rule rather than the exception, this proposal guarantees taxpayers would be saddled with ever increasing bills for navigation projects.

The League strongly opposes these industry proposals, and our priority is to ensure that they do not become law. In the current fiscal environment, the barge industry — not American taxpayers — should step forward to pay its fair share for projects that primarily benefit industry.



Ensure Public Participation in Corps Decisionmaking

A version of the Water Resources Development Act passed by the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in March 2013 proposes to transfer final approval authority for Corps projects from Congress to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (the civilian position that oversees the Corps of Engineers). The League has serious concerns about this switch.





Historically, the Corps process for studying and proposing projects has not been transparent to the public. Moreover, purported economic benefits — which often prove wildly inflated — trump the negative impacts that large navigation, flood control, and other infrastructure projects can have on the environment, fish and wildlife, and other users of the waters. If Congress transfers final project approval authority to the Corps, the League will push to ensure the process is transparent, provides for meaningful public participation, and evaluates economic benefits on equal terms with impacts on natural resources and other water uses.

Additionally, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) passed by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in March would permit large Corps projects to be pushed quickly through review processes required by the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other environmental laws. These laws create a system of checks and balances to ensure federally funded projects have minimal environmental impact or

outline mitigation measures. For large or complex projects, the environmental review can take a long time, especially when the reviewing agencies are not fully staffed due to funding cuts. If acceleration rules are passed as part of WRDA, the Corps will have the authority to fine other federal government agencies that cannot meet Corps-designated deadlines. The prospect of fines as high as \$20,000 per week could pressure environmental and natural resource agency leaders to approve projects that are not fully vetted. Accelerated review timelines could also be used to justify reduced public comment periods. As Congress moves forward with this legislation, the League will work to ensure opportunities for environmental review and public input are not short-circuited.

Restoring Clean Water Act Protections

The Clean Water Act of 1972 is one of the most significant conservation accomplishments of the past century. By setting enforceable water quality standards, establishing a system



Wetlands play a critical role **in our country's health and security.**

to regulate pollution, and funding sewage treatment infrastructure, this legislation has arguably been the single most important factor in the restoration and recovery of thousands of miles of waterways across the nation. Yet despite 40 years of progress, Clean Water Act protections for streams, wetlands, and other waters are being weakened and undermined.

How did we get here? Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006 – and policies developed under President George W. Bush following those decisions – directly undermine protections for up to 20 million acres of wetlands that reduce flooding, recharge ground water, and provide habitat for ducks, fish, and other wildlife. The Supreme Court decisions and administrative policies also put public drinking water supplies for 117 million Americans at greater risk of pollution.

In April 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps of Engineers proposed a science-based approach to determine which waters are covered by the Clean Water Act – an approach that would restore protections to most small streams that are connected to larger streams and rivers. The new draft policy would also renew protections for wetlands immediately adjacent to waters covered by the Clean Water Act. The proposed policy was strongly supported by the League and other national hunting, angling, and conservation groups and by more than 90 percent of Americans who submitted comments on the draft.

In February 2012, the agencies submitted their final version of the policy to the White House for approval. However, the White House failed to take action and the policy continues to languish there. The next step rests squarely with President Obama. He must lead on this issue by approving the proposed policy and backing EPA

and the Corps as they implement it. The League will continue to press the Obama administration to approve and implement this important clean water policy.

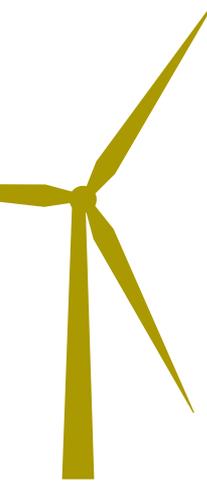
After the policy is issued, our next priority will be a formal “rulemaking” by the Corps and EPA that will update and strengthen regulations that define the waters covered by the Clean Water Act. This will provide more durable and effective protections not only for streams but also wetlands – like prairie potholes – that may not have a surface connection to a river but are vitally important to water quality, flood control, wildlife, and outdoor recreation.

Ensuring Responsible Wetlands Rules

Wetlands play a critical role in our country's health and security. Yet they receive little concern from most people – including legislators. It seems to be a case of “out of sight, out of mind.”

By the 1980s, scientists estimated that more than 50 percent of wetlands in the continental United States – about 104 million acres – had been lost. Draining wetlands for agricultural use contributed significantly to the losses. To address this threat, Congress passed what became known as “Swampbuster” as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. This provision bars farmers from receiving Farm Bill payments on any land on which wetlands are drained after a certain date, creating powerful protection for wetlands nationwide.

Under Swampbuster, a producer can request that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) evaluate wet areas to determine whether they are wetlands. Getting a determination from NRCS is prerequisite to filling or tiling a wet area and not losing Farm Bill payments. As commodity prices have increased



One of our energy priorities is making it easier for small businesses, homeowners, and communities to develop **small-scale solar and wind projects.**



dramatically, so have requests for wetland determinations, and NRCS has struggled to meet the demand. As of February 1, 2013, the agency reported a backlog of approximately 6,900 requests in North and South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa alone – the vital prairie pothole region.

NRCS has been working for more than a year to develop a new approach to conducting wetland determinations. Yet, as of March 2013, the agency had not publicly released a proposal, and few details have been made public.

The League is closely following this issue, which has implications for wetlands nationwide. The criteria used to define “wetlands” and the process for conducting the determinations will directly influence which wet areas are determined to be wetlands. With the dramatic losses of wetlands to date and the growing pressure on them – in the prairie pothole region, in particular – the League is greatly concerned about any process that has the potential to further weaken already limited policies designed to safeguard wetlands. Our priority is to actively engage in any public process for evaluating and commenting on a determination proposal.

Promoting Clean Energy

How we extract fuels, generate energy, and dispose of energy by-products has an enormous impact on wildlife, waterways, air quality, the economy, and human health. The League has worked to ensure that individuals, communities, states, and our nation make educated energy choices – choices that ensure future generations can benefit fully from our nation’s unique natural heritage. In Minnesota, the League has played an active role in developing, passing, and implementing some of the most progressive energy policies in the country, which have often become models for other states and regions.

One of our energy priorities for 2013 is making it easier for homeowners, small businesses, and communities to develop small-scale solar and wind projects.

Thirty years ago, Minnesota adopted some of the first policies in the country concerning small, renewable energy projects and how power from these systems would flow to and from the electricity grid. Under these rules (still in place today), homeowners or small businesses with systems generating less than 40 kilowatts (kW) can receive power from and send excess power to the grid at

a predetermined price. This process is known as “net metering.” However, those policies can now work against development of renewable energy projects because today’s small solar and wind installations can generate more than 40 kW. Another barrier is the capital-intensive nature of the investment. A homeowner or small business owner is making a substantial up-front investment – typically \$5,000 to \$50,000 – in equipment that benefits themselves and the public. The short-term cost and long-term return are barriers to many.

The League has proposed recommendations to the governor for modernizing Minnesota’s policies to eliminate roadblocks to more widespread development of these renewable projects, including raising the cap on energy produced by small systems and facilitating third-party ownership of residential and community systems. The latter would enable for-profit and nonprofit groups to develop projects at the neighborhood or community level from which residents or businesses could purchase renewable power.

During the 2013 Minnesota legislative session, the League partnered with more than 30 labor, energy, faith, youth, and conservation groups on legislation to enable local power production and other policy improvements to increase the state’s renewable energy standard, establish a state-wide solar energy standard, strengthen conservation and efficiency programs, and improve local power regulations. League staff are engaging with utilities, businesses, state agency staff, legislators, and many other partners to ensure the best outcome possible for all Minnesotans.

To Succeed, We Need You!

The sportsmen and women who made the League a national force to be reckoned with understood one critical fact: Members of Congress are elected leaders who respond most readily to the people who elected them (or could re-elect them!).

You can make a difference with five simple steps:

- **Sign up for e-mail Action Alerts from the League:** It’s quick and easy. Visit www.iwla.org/alert to sign up. You’ll receive

timely e-mail alerts about policies that affect our air and water, outdoor recreation, and other issues important to League members.

- **Respond to Action Alerts:** Policy-makers are communicating more and more via e-mail, and they aren’t surprised that their constituents are doing the same. It takes only a few minutes to let your elected officials know how you feel about an issue.
- **Meet with your representatives locally:** You don’t have to travel to Washington or even your state capital to meet with legislators who represent you. Their local offices could be down the street from where you live or work. The messages you communicate to them or their staff in these meetings resonate just as strongly as they would at a meeting in Washington, DC.
- **Invite officials to visit community projects:** There’s something to the old saying, “Seeing is believing.” You can bring an issue to life by inviting policy-makers and their staff to visit projects in your community. By showing someone a habitat or stream restoration project or inviting them to an event that gets kids outdoors, you can connect the policies we’re proposing or funding efforts we support to real-world results.
- **Recruit your friends and neighbors:** Building support for an issue often requires reaching out beyond a League chapter to other people in the community. We all know people who share similar interests. Encourage them to work with us on issues important to the League and outdoor America. You’re likely to find that they are looking for opportunities to make a difference, just like you are.

League staff can help you with any of these efforts. If you’re not sure where to begin, give us a call. Once you’ve responded to an Action Alert or participated in a local meeting, you’ll find it’s easy to do, rewarding, and helps achieve our shared goals.