

# Izaak Walton League of America Five-Year Strategic Plan (2013-2018)

DRAFT (May 20, 2013)

## Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century, uncontrolled discharges of industrial waste and raw sewage, unrestricted logging, and soil erosion threatened to destroy the nation's most productive waterways. The country's forests, wetlands, and wilderness areas were quickly disappearing. In 1922, 54 sportsmen declared that it was "time to call a halt" to this destruction. They founded our organization, the Izaak Walton League of America – one of the first national organizations with the dual mission to conserve natural resources and promote outdoor recreation.

In the decades that followed the League's founding, we made incredible progress in cleaning up our country's air and water, improving conservation on farms, and ensuring America's forests, public lands, and fish and wildlife were sustainably managed for the enjoyment of future generations. The League helped achieve these results through common-sense solutions, hard work, and bringing a reasonable voice to the policy debate.

However, the challenges to America's natural resources are far from solved – they have evolved. For example, we halted the unlimited dumping of industrial wastes and raw sewage into streams and rivers. However, we now face a tougher threat to clean water: uncontrolled runoff from yards, farms, and parking lots carries pollution and excess nutrients into streams and lakes. As technology has improved our quality of life, it has also lured youth and adults away from the natural world and outdoor recreation, and the health of our environment continues to drop as a major concern for most Americans.

To advance conservation, engage people in outdoor recreation, and ultimately safeguard natural resources for our children and grandchildren, the members and leaders of the Izaak Walton League must meet today's challenges together. We can succeed by creating strong partnerships among all levels of the League, playing to the strengths of each – from chapters that support conservation and outdoor recreation locally to a national organization that mobilizes members across the country.

With our enduring commitment to common-sense conservation and track record of "rolling up our sleeves" to get the job done, the League can achieve the goals in this plan and much more. League leaders and staff pledge to provide support, tools, and resources to chapters and members as we work together to achieve our shared goals.

The Izaak Walton League of America has a proud history and a bright future. Working together, the members of the League can defend outdoor America for many generations to come.

### **Current Mission Statement** (adopted 1998)

“To conserve, maintain, protect and restore the soil, forest, water and other natural resources of the United States and other lands; to promote the means and opportunities for the education of the public with respect to such resources and their enjoyment and wholesome utilization.”

### **Proposed Mission Statement** (*purpose of the organization*)

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

### **Vision** (*how the world will be different when the organization achieves its mission*)

Through the efforts of the League,

- Conservation is “second nature” to all Americans
- Everyone enjoys sustainable outdoor recreation
- Healthy lands and waters support thriving fish and wildlife populations

### **Goals: Summary**

1. Connect more young people to conservation and outdoor recreation.
2. Conserve and restore habitat to support healthy, sustainable fish and wildlife populations.
3. Ensure America’s streams, rivers, lakes, and other waters are safe for fishing, swimming, and other uses.
4. Engage more people in sustainable outdoor recreation.
5. Raise the profile of the League as a leading voice for common-sense conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation.
6. Strengthen partnerships among all levels of the League to advance the League’s mission.

### **Goals: Details**

1. **Connect more young people to conservation and outdoor recreation.** Young people today spend less time outdoors than any generation in American history – and are losing their connection to the natural world. By some estimates, the average middle- and high-school student spends more than 7 hours every day in front of electronic devices but only 30 minutes each week of unstructured time outside. There is growing concern that, as adults, these youth may not care as much about conservation or be interested in recreational shooting sports, fishing, watching wildlife, hunting, hiking, and other outdoor recreation activities. In turn, this could reverse conservation gains, undermine our quality of life, and weaken the outdoor recreation economy.

The League, our chapters, and our members across the country can play a positive and meaningful role in reconnecting children and their families to the natural world,

conservation, and outdoor recreation. To connect more young people to conservation and outdoor recreation, the League will:

- a. Provide chapters with training, support, and programs to engage young people in conservation and outdoor recreation activities
- b. Expand the range of League programs, activities, and membership opportunities for youth and families to engage more of them in outdoor recreation
- c. Utilize technology and social media to engage youth in outdoor recreation and conservation
- d. Connect youth with recreational shooting sports, fishing, hunting, and other outdoor recreation activities at League chapters

2. **Conserve and restore habitat to support healthy, sustainable fish and wildlife populations.** Just 100 years ago, fish and wildlife populations across the nation were badly depleted. Many factors – including destruction of forests, wetlands, native prairie, and other habitat – contributed to bringing seemingly endless wildlife populations to the brink of extinction.

The abundance of many fish and wildlife species today is due in no small part to efforts by hunters, anglers, and others to restore and conserve habitat. However, threats to quality habitat remain – and in some cases are accelerating. Wetlands and grasslands essential to healthy waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife are increasingly at risk in a perfect storm of rising commodity prices, counter-productive federal farm policies, and weakened Clean Water Act wetland protections. Invasive species are crowding out native plants, fish, and wildlife at an alarming rate.

League members today believe as strongly as our founders in the importance of conserving and restoring habitats that support healthy fish and wildlife and the outdoor recreation activities that depend on them. To conserve and restore habitat to support healthy, sustainable fish and wildlife populations, the League will:

- a. Carry out and support habitat conservation and restoration projects at the local and regional levels
- b. Advocate for policies and funding to support habitat conservation on private and public lands
- c. Advocate for policies to reduce the negative impacts of energy use and production on fish and wildlife and the habitats on which they depend
- d. Build a larger grassroots network of hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreationists who will work to conserve habitat for healthy fish and wildlife populations

3. **Ensure America's streams, rivers, lakes, and other waters are safe for fishing, swimming, and other uses.** Less than 50 years ago, waters across America were so polluted that they caught fire, were declared “dead,” and were unsafe for fishing, swimming, or boating. Since then, our country has made tremendous progress in reducing pollution flowing from industrial sources, improving water quality, and

making more waters safe for outdoor recreation. However, the fight for clean water is far from over. More than half our country's streams are in poor condition, due in large part to pollution running off farms, lawns, and parking lots.

A hallmark of the League's decades-long commitment to clean water has been empowering citizens to protect and restore waters in their own communities. The fight for clean water – and the pivotal role citizens play in it – remains as important as ever. To ensure America's streams, rivers, lakes, and other waters are safe for fishing, swimming, and other uses, the League will:

- a. Engage more citizens in Save Our Streams water quality monitoring and use the resulting information for advocacy, public education, and conservation
  - b. Support and implement stream and watershed restoration projects
  - c. Use Creek Freaks and other water-based activities to connect youth with the outdoors, conservation, science, and technology
  - d. Demonstrate best management practices that improve water quality
  - e. Advocate for agriculture, energy, and other policies and practices that protect grasslands, water quality, wetlands, and other water resources
4. **Engage more people in sustainable outdoor recreation.** People who enjoy outdoor recreation are more likely to understand the connection between quality outdoor experiences and healthy natural resources – and advocate to conserve these resources for use by future generations. With community-based chapters across the country that provide outdoor recreation facilities and mentors who can connect people with the outdoors, the League is uniquely positioned to boost participation in a range of outdoor recreation activities. To engage more people in sustainable outdoor recreation, the League will:
- a. Develop and promote outdoor activities that engage families
  - b. Provide opportunities for a growing number of people to safely and responsibly participate in recreational shooting sports
  - c. Mentor youth and adults interested in hunting
  - d. Use fishing as a gateway to outdoor recreation and conservation
  - e. Provide opportunities for new audiences to participate in hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation activities
  - f. Foster a commitment to outdoor ethics among outdoor recreationists
  - g. Develop communication tools that highlight the connections between conservation and outdoor recreation activities
5. **Raise the profile of the League as a leading voice for common-sense conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation.** As Americans have become increasingly polarized in their opinions about many issues, the League has maintained its pursuit of practical, common-sense solutions to evolving challenges. The League and our members are working hard every day to conserve and restore natural resources, connect kids to the outdoors, and provide opportunities for people to enjoy outdoor recreation. These efforts provide reasonable solutions to pressing

problems and demonstrate that average citizens are often the driving force behind those solutions. We need to do more to tell this story and empower a growing number of people to advance common-sense conservation and enjoy outdoor recreation. To raise the profile of the League as a leading voice for common-sense conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation, the League will:

- a. Provide ongoing communications support for chapters seeking to raise public awareness locally
- b. Connect with the news media at the local, state, and national levels to publicize League conservation and outdoor recreation achievements
- c. Improve our Web presence at the national and chapter levels and utilize social media to promote the League
- d. Strengthen and develop partnerships with like-minded organizations and government agencies at the local, regional, and national levels
- e. Establish mechanisms for chapters to easily provide information to the national office about accomplishments tied to League goals

**6. Strengthen partnerships among all levels of the League to advance the League's mission.** The League connects conservation and outdoor recreation at the local, state, regional, and national levels. Each component of the organization has unique strengths and capabilities, and the organization is most effective when members, chapters, state divisions, and the national headquarters combine those strengths to achieve common goals. By working together, the League can – and will – achieve our conservation and outdoor recreation goals. To strengthen partnerships among all levels of the League to advance our mission, the League will:

- a. Improve communication among all levels of the League, including by placing greater emphasis on in-person contact
- b. Support chapters and members by providing training, tools, and project ideas that are easy for volunteers to implement
- c. Use technology to link members together to share best practices
- d. Explore options to automate the membership process to the greatest degree possible within the current system of chapter-based billing and member signup
- e. Expand direct electronic communications with League members

### **Establishing Baselines and Measuring Results**

The League understands the importance of measuring progress toward achieving each of these goals and the long-range vision. One of the top priorities during the first six months of plan implementation will be gathering information from chapters and other sources as relevant to each goal. This information will be used to establish baselines such as the number of youth connected with fishing events at chapters or the number of streams being monitored nationwide. The League will measure annual progress starting from these baselines.