

Saving Outdoor America:

The Izaak Walton League Vision for a Second Century of Conservation

Not long ago, America's environmental problems were stark. Industrial pollution and soil erosion threatened to destroy many of our nation's waterways. Wetlands were being drained at an alarming rate. And the country's forests and wilderness areas were disappearing.

Aware that action was necessary to solve these problems, concerned sportsmen and women created the Izaak Walton League of America in 1922 to combat water pollution and protect the country's woods and wildlife. The League's founders rallied around the cause of conservation, not only because it was inherently important but because the traditions they loved—fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation—were in jeopardy.

As the League embarks on its second century, our members—and every American—can take pride in very real progress over the past 100 years to clean up our air and water, restore fish and wildlife and conserve national parks and other public lands that are the envy of the world.



However, our environmental problems have not been solved—they have evolved.

Today, threats to America's soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife are less obvious than in the past—but not less dangerous.

Polluted runoff from farm fields, parking lots, industrial sites and back yards flows unchecked and untreated into our streams and rivers, carrying animal waste, bacteria and cancer-causing chemicals through our communities. The overarching goals of the Clean Water Act—water safe for drinking, fishing and swimming—seem simple, but they continue to elude the nation.

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Draining wetlands—one of the issues that so concerned League founders—has accelerated again. Today, priceless topsoil in our heartland is eroding away at a rate 10 times faster than it can be replaced.

Popular game species, including deer, turkey and some waterfowl, are thriving—thanks in no small part to the hard work and funding from hunters, anglers and shooting sports enthusiasts. But many other wildlife species—from backyard birds to bees and many coldwater fish—have been decimated or face an uncertain future.

And today we face challenges that dwarf those early League leaders confronted a century ago. No challenge is greater than climate change. The accelerating rise in global temperatures threatens natural resources, public health, our economy and way of life unlike any previous conservation problem. We see the consequences of a warming planet in our communities and in the wild places that make outdoor America so special. The world's scientists agree urgent action is needed to reduce emission of greenhouse gases and to store more carbon from the atmosphere in our soil, wetlands and forests.

The threats to America's lands, waters and wildlife also jeopardize outdoor recreation across the country. The outdoor recreation activities that League members and tens of millions of Americans enjoy—from hiking, camping and boating to fishing and hunting—depend on healthy natural resources. If these outdoor experiences are diminished by pollution and resource loss, it will not only affect the people who are active today but also make it harder to get future generations outdoors.



The Future

As the Izaak Walton League prepares for its second century of leadership on conservation and outdoor recreation, we reaffirm and renew our commitment to defend outdoor America. We are realistic about the challenges ahead and unwavering in our resolve to tackle them head on.

A century ago, League founders confronted an alarming array of threats by declaring it was “Time to Call a Halt”—and then they got to work building an organization and a grassroots movement to ensure future generations would benefit from a healthy environment.

**We reaffirm and renew
our commitment to
defend outdoor America.**

Today, League members and millions of Americans who share our goals have the opportunity to secure the future we all want. **A future where:**

- *Every community enjoys clean air, water and other healthy natural resources.*
- *We are winning the fight against climate change with clean energy, healthy soil, protected landscapes and abundant wetlands, forests and grasslands.*
- *Americans rediscover their love for nature beginning in their local communities.*



- *The conservation movement reflects the diversity of America—where conservation becomes part of everyday life for everyone.*
- *Traditions of hunting, fishing and target shooting endure through growing participation by people of all backgrounds.*

By building on our strengths from local community action to national policy advocacy, the League can make this vision of the future a reality.

Achieving our vision for conservation and outdoor recreation in America will take hard work and time.

With the long-term outcomes firmly in sight, the League, our members, volunteers and partners will use the following **Second Century Action Plan** to drive our collective efforts over the next five years.

Building on Our Strengths: **Community-based Conservation and Volunteer Science**

In our second century, the Izaak Walton League will continue to draw upon the power of people united by purpose. The belief that individuals play a large role in conservation is the foundation of our Action Plan. Whether in volunteer science, policy advocacy or engaging people in outdoor recreation, individuals make all the difference. Moreover, the League amplifies the impact of every individual by fostering connections between many people across the country.

To help make conservation a part of everyday life, the League will engage more Americans to tackle the serious challenges ahead.

Leveraging Volunteer Science –

Using technology and a crowd-sourced model, the League will mobilize more people to test for pollution in local waters.

Over the next five years, we will:

- *Expand Salt Watch to include at least 5,500 volunteers in 300 communities submitting 35,000 chloride test results annually.*
- *Implement new crowd-sourced water quality campaigns focused on the most dangerous and persistent water pollutants, beginning with Nitrate Watch.*
- *Grow Nitrate Watch to engage 3,000 volunteers and collect more than 10,000 nitrate pollution test results annually.*
- *Proactively facilitate volunteer monitoring on a regional scale, beginning in the Mid-Atlantic and upper Midwest, with a priority on watersheds where an insufficient amount of data currently exists to accurately assess water quality.*

Turning Data into Action – Testing for water pollution is a means to an end. Today, League volunteers are turning the data they collect into action to improve water quality in their communities. Those actions range from requesting local park authorities stop overusing harmful pesticides to testifying in front of city councils urging limits on road salt application.

In our second century, the Izaak Walton League of America will continue to draw upon the power of people united by purpose.

But the League can, and must, do more to leverage test results from volunteers to reduce pollution at its source, clean up degraded waters and mobilize a new generation of clean water advocates. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- *Transform the Clean Water Hub website into the go-to resource for timely information about water quality at the community level by:*
 - > *providing easy-to-understand maps and reports showcasing water quality and sharing this information with the public via social media and outreach campaigns; 50 percent of organizations submitting data to the Hub will promote the Hub as a public education resource locally,*
 - > *increasing the number of sites with water quality test results from 5,000 to 18,000,*

- > growing the base of volunteers submitting test results from 100 to 300 groups and as many as 10,000 individual volunteers,
- > augmenting advocacy resources, training and tools to facilitate public communication with policymakers about water quality issues in local communities.
- Stand up robust STEM education (emphasizing science, technology, engineering and math) programs using Save Our Streams biological and chemical water quality monitoring in at least 10 high schools in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest. These become self-sustaining programs educating hundreds of future scientists, teachers and clean water advocates annually.
- Facilitate volunteers' engagement with private companies that apply salt and other chemical deicers to request these companies reduce chemical use by at least 25 percent.

- Expand advocacy among Salt Watch volunteers so that at least 30 percent of all volunteers submitting test results take at least one other action to reduce salt use, including contacting their local government when they observe excessive road salt use.

Driving Change from the

Bottom Up – To change policies, behavior and land uses that contribute to pollution, the League will help local groups develop and execute strategies to solve environmental challenges. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- Support development and implement of grassroots advocacy campaigns in 10 to 15 communities to reduce use of road salt and chemical deicers by at least 25 percent across the entire community.
- Work with five states to create and implement "smart salt" applicator training for state and local departments of public works and companies that perform most of the winter maintenance for large private property owners.
- Actively engage historically underserved communities, including communities of color, low-income neighborhoods and marginalized populations, in advocacy campaigns to ensure every American benefits from a healthy environment.



Building on Our Strengths: **Advocacy for Common Sense Conservation**

Saving outdoor America requires sound public policy to protect clean water to drink and air to breathe, fish and wildlife and other resources for future generations. The genuine progress improving our environment over the past 100 years is in due, in part, to the adoption of public policies advanced by the Izaak Walton League and other organizations. As we look to the future, policy advocacy will be one of the ways the League achieves our broader mission.

Comprehensive Approach to Conservation – Climate change, polluted runoff and the spread of invasive plants and animals are not localized problems—they affect entire landscapes. The League will shape national and regional policies to protect natural resources and public health. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- *Safeguard drinking water supplies and wildlife habitat—by pressing Congress to amend the Clean Water Act to reaffirm it protects all natural streams and wetlands in the United States.*
- *Expand conservation and restoration efforts to priority regions, including the Mississippi, Ohio and Missouri River basins, modeled after successful efforts in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay.*
- *Increase advocacy for public policies and funding to address the urgency of the climate crisis, with priorities focused on:*
 - > *expanding large-scale storage capacity for electricity generated by solar, wind and other renewable resources,*

- > *modernizing the electricity grid,*
- > *improving energy efficiency throughout the economy, especially in transportation, buildings and manufacturing and opposing efforts to reduce current efficiency standards,*
- > *reducing emission of greenhouse gases from electricity generation, transportation and fossil fuel production,*
- > *conserving and restoring natural resources, especially wetlands, native grasslands and healthy soils that maximize carbon capture and storage.*

Transforming Agriculture –

America's farms feed the nation, but agriculture is also the largest source of polluted runoff. Meanwhile, declining soil health also jeopardizes our food supply and limits our ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere. We can make real progress to solve these problems by rapidly expanding conservation on the ground. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- *Advocate to:*
 - > *double conservation funding to \$10 billion annually in the 2023 Farm Bill, and focus the additional funding to quickly scale-up proven, measurable conservation practices that improve soil health, reduce water pollution and store more carbon in the soil, wetlands and native grasslands,*
 - > *expand use of soil health practices including planting cover crops and reducing or eliminating tillage on America's farms, ranches and other working lands with a goal of having these practices on tens of millions of acres in 10 years,*

- > *reduce water pollution and improve fish and wildlife habitat by adding buffer strips along streams and rivers, ultimately reaching two million acres in 10 years,*
- > *protect five million acres of grasslands to build strong carbon storage capabilities and provide crucial habitat for wildlife while ensuring adequate resources to meet the grazing needs of America's ranchers,*
- > *accelerate the transition to regenerative agriculture by passing targeted federal legislation, including the League's Good Farmer Discount for crop insurance and state and tribal soil health grants.*
- *Press the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to effectively enforce longstanding policies that prohibit farmers from receiving subsidized crop insurance and other taxpayer-funded benefits if they drain wetlands or fail to take common sense steps to reduce soil erosion.*
- *Partner with USDA agencies and state and county soil and water conservation districts to proactively inform producers about how to implement conservation practices on a much larger geographic scale and accelerated timetable.*
- *Work with League chapters to encourage farmers and farmland owners to expand implementation of conservation practices that improve soil health, reduce polluted runoff and store carbon.*
- *Collaborate with League divisions to pass legislation in five states that prioritizes and funds to improve soil health and expand conservation on working lands.*

Defending a Century

of Progress – Public policy, grassroots advocacy and funding from hunters, anglers and shooting sports enthusiasts have all contributed to the very real progress over the past 100 years to clean up our air and water, restore fish and wildlife and conserve public lands. Yet, these gains are not guaranteed in perpetuity—progress can be slowed, reversed or repealed altogether by policymakers. Efforts to roll back critical protections and principles aren't theoretical—they are very real.

Building on this progress starts with ensuring we don't go backwards. With our focus on a better future, the League will defend bedrock principles and policies that protect public health and conserve natural resources for all Americans.

These principles include:

- Managing natural resources based on best available science,
- Ensuring robust public participation in decision-making,
- Reducing pollution at the source.



Building on Our Strengths: Connecting People to the Outdoors

The League is uniquely positioned to reconnect Americans to the natural world and foster the next generation of conservationists, hunters and anglers.

Gateway to the Outdoors – In an increasingly virtual world, Americans are more disconnected than ever from the outdoors and nature. Through community outreach, public events like fishing derbies and local conservation projects, more than 200 League chapters will connect people to nature and grow participation in outdoor recreation. Just as importantly, the League will build on 100 years of advocacy for policies and investment to protect public lands and expand access to them for all Americans. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- *Help chapters to establish or enhance at least one partnership locally that facilitates connections to the outdoors especially for families, students or others who do not have ready access to the outdoors.*
- *Support chapters with shooting sports facilities in proactively expanding outreach to and engagement with audiences that do not have a family history of participation, including young adults and first-time firearms owners.*
- *Work to expand access to public lands and waters for hunting, fishing, hiking and other outdoor recreation through advocacy that prioritizes, among other things:*
 - > *adequate federal, state and local funding for essential infrastructure and visitor services,*

- > *targeted annual investments from the Land and Water Conservation Fund focused on expanding access to existing lands and waters and through new acquisition,*
- > *digitizing all information currently held by federal land management agencies documenting easements and other access points to public lands.*

Conservation for Everyone – From tuning in to a webinar to joining a local clean-up, the League offers many ways to get involved in conservation. By helping people appreciate that their actions have meaningful impact, we will engage future volunteers, policy advocates and League members. **Over the next five years, we will:**

- *Double downloads of the Creek Critters mobile app as the first step for people to learn how pollution affects water quality in their communities.*
- *Leverage virtual resources to more effectively inform audiences nationwide about how they can get involved in conserving natural resources.*
- *Coordinate at least one event annually at every League chapter that engages members of the community in conservation locally.*
- *Enhance grassroots impact by mobilizing thousands of volunteer scientists as advocates for a broader range of League's conservation policy priorities, including regenerative agriculture, public lands management and combatting climate change.*



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A Century of Conservation Leadership
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