



SAVE OUR STREAMS

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

ADVOCACY GUIDE



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ADVOCATING FOR CLEAN WATER

Advocacy, by definition, is the support or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. With federal, state, and local governments as integral players in the protection of natural resources, it is vital that individuals advocate for what matters to them.

Our water resources, such as wetlands, rivers, and streams, are constantly at risk of becoming polluted with everything from factory discharge to urban runoff. This pollution threatens not only the health of the environment we share with fish and wildlife but also the health of communities that rely on these waters for drinking water and recreation.

Community advocates, like volunteer monitors, are vital to keeping our rivers and streams clean. Using volunteer-collected data, advocates can encourage community leaders and local and state governments to change their practices, like zoning and land use or road salt application, to ensure the waterways we so heavily rely on will be protected for future generations.

This **Save Our Streams Advocacy Guide** is designed to teach and empower stream monitors and non-monitors alike to become effective clean water advocates. In this guide, you will find information on effective ways to make a difference for water quality in any community across the nation. By exploring this guide, you are taking the first steps towards becoming a change-maker for our nation's waterways!



IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEM



IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEM

You've read the [Monitoring Manual](#), monitored your stream using best practices, and you've discovered there's a water quality issue. Now what? To be an effective clean water advocate, you need to be thoughtful and passionate to create positive change.

The biggest challenge for advocates once you've found a problem is identifying who can help solve it. Depending on the water quality issue you've found you may need to engage with a neighborhood homeowners' association, local government, state government, or even federal agencies.

Explore the next two pages for some ideas of what authorities may be best to engage with depending on your water quality issue.

Remember: Every community is different, and the organization or agency responsible for clean water issues varies between towns, cities, and states. When in doubt, start asking questions!

Haven't found a problem at your stream? That's great! Healthy streams need advocates, too. Build a sense of community pride through educational events. Keep an eye on potential threats to your stream, like housing or industrial developments. Most importantly, regularly monitor and share your data to make sure you catch any changes in water quality early!



IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEM

Advocacy Audiences

Private Business or Landowner

If you suspect a water quality issue is coming from a private home or business, reaching out to the owner can be the most efficient way to affect change. Threats from private business or landowners can include oil spills, excessive salting, fertilizer runoff, significant land change and more.

Neighborhood Association

Some neighborhoods are governed by a local homeowners' association (HOA). Rules regarding landscaping and road maintenance may be set by a residential board, and engaging with HOAs is a great opportunity to educate and inform homeowners. You don't have to live within the HOA to contact their board about land use concerns that impact the greater community. Plus, HOAs work to protect their members' property values - contributing to clean water in the neighborhood is a great way to do just that!

Municipal Government

Issues around permitting, construction, and land protection often fall under the purview of local government. Attending committee meetings and hearings or talking to town staff about best management practices can make a significant difference for clean water protection. Every city or town government is slightly different, but a good place to start might be a city council or planning board meeting. If you have a specific practice you want to recommend, like smarter road salt use, you can directly contact the relevant municipal department, such as the Department of Public Works.



IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEM

Advocacy Audiences

State Agency

State environmental agencies are meant to enforce federal water quality protections, list impaired waterways, and document restoration needs. Depending on your state, that agency might be the Department of Natural Resources or the Department of Environmental Protection, for example. Some states have both and they divide these responsibilities. Reporting monitoring results or sending comments to these agencies can provide important information for how they can best protect your waterway.

For example, if you find poor water quality in your stream over time, you can share your monitoring results with your state's environmental agency to try to get it listed as an impaired waterway. This is often a way for states to get funding for restoration and protection. Your data may also encourage the agency to conduct their own stringent testing at your sites going forward.

Federal Agency

Federal rules and regulations, like the Clean Water Act, can be enacted or amended over time. Commenting on federal regulations can be the best way to have your voice heard at a federal level. It can be hard to know when commenting periods are open for regulations important to you, so [sign up for IWLA action alerts](#).

State or Federal Lawmakers

If you want to influence new laws being written or make sure the state or federal budget includes appropriate funding for your cause, you should contact your representatives. Call or write your state legislators or members of Congress to let them know which environmental issue you are concerned about!



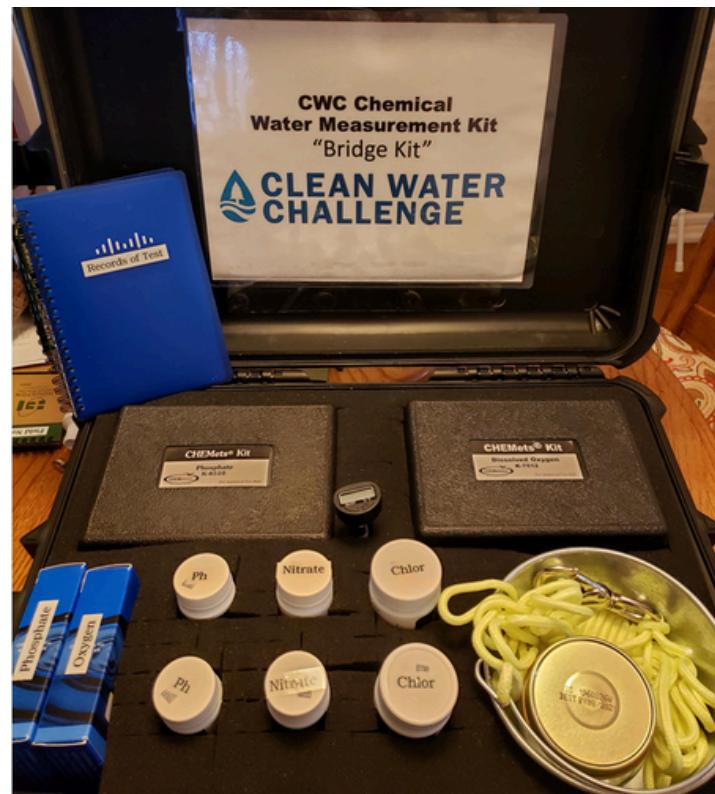
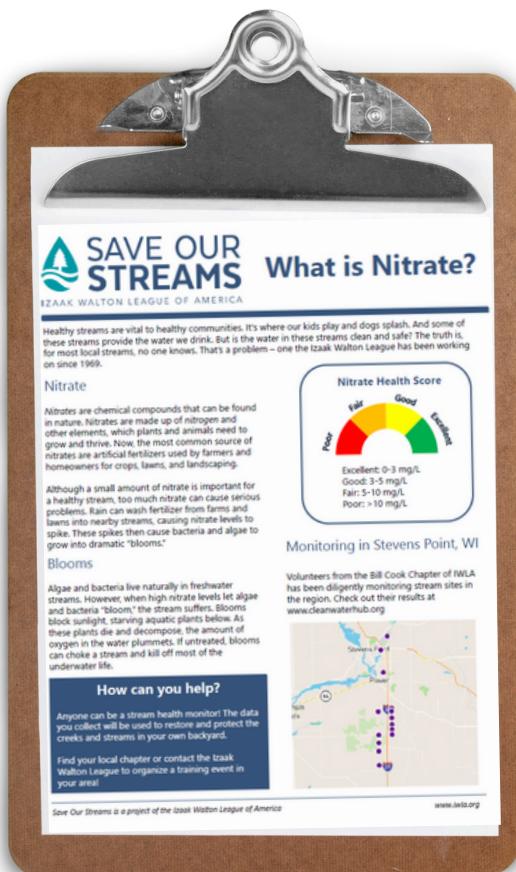
USING YOUR DATA



USING YOUR DATA

The water quality data you collect can bolster your cause. Being transparent with your data gives you credibility - manipulating or hiding data will harm that credibility. The [Clean Water Hub](#) allows you to easily visualize your data and identify water quality problems. Most importantly, you should use best practices when collecting and reporting your data! See the [Save Our Streams Monitoring Manual](#) for guidance on data collection best practices.

Sharing your data in a clear and easy-to-understand way will help effectively promote your work and educate your community. Take time to make flyers, posters, or presentations that are approachable and understandable to a general audience.



UNDERSTANDING NEEDS



UNDERSTANDING NEEDS

Listening to Stakeholders

Clean water matters to all of us. It's what we drink and where we swim, fish, and play. We all care about clean water for different reasons, and monitoring and advocating for clean water might not be a top concern for everyone. More urgent environmental, economic, or personal concerns might take precedence.

Finding Common Ground

If there is a community that you would like to partner with as clean water advocates, it is essential that you approach with an open mind, identify community leaders, listen to stakeholders, and collaborate.

For example, if a community is concerned about litter, organize a stream clean-up and discuss how trash can affect water quality.

Environmental issues aren't isolated events - be creative with partner communities in identifying the ways that clean water is tied to other areas of concern.



UNDERSTANDING NEEDS

Land Use

We all need clean water, but the issues affecting our waterways differ between individual communities. One of the biggest differences between two communities is population size and density. Rural, suburban, and urban communities each face unique challenges with regards to clean water. Read on to find the description that most closely matches your community and that can help you design effective outreach efforts.

In rural communities, individual landowners, agricultural practices, land management, and potential development are often the largest threats to water quality. Engaging with individual land and business owners through conversation and community events can make a significant impact on water quality.

In more densely populated areas, single home and business owners have less individual influence. Non-point source pollution is often the largest water quality threat - neighborhoods, HOAs, and business centers collectively impact water quality. In these communities, you may need to focus on community-wide campaigns, like gathering signatures, petitioning local government, and organizing community meetings.

These are generalizations of the potential differences in land use between rural and urban areas. Get to know the specific watershed you're working in by conducting a watershed survey. Utilize resources like the U.S. Geological Survey, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, agricultural extensions, and local zoning and planning offices to learn more about land use in your watershed.



UNDERSTANDING NEEDS

Acknowledging Injustice

Pollution issues and environmental threats disproportionately affect underserved communities. Discriminatory practices in cities, like redlining, siphon resources away from minority-populated neighborhoods, while biased regulations allow bad actors to pollute poor and rural areas.

It is impossible to separate environmental issues from societal injustices. Underserved communities have been historically shut out of critical conversations, from the establishment of environmental "sacrifice zones" to the placement of highways. Now, many of these communities are suffering from environmental threats like poor drinking water quality, polluted air, heat islands, and more.

When you engage with your community, it is essential that you take proactive steps to educate yourself about its history with racial, economic, and societal injustices. Most importantly, listen to community stakeholders and respect their concerns and boundaries. Ask how you can help, rather than imposing your mission on the community.

Learn more about environmental injustice in our [Environmental Justice & Water Quality Toolkit](#)



IDENTIFYING ASKS



IDENTIFYING ASKS

Not every campaign or action is appropriate for every audience. Figure out what actions your audience can take and what actions they can't. This will help you engage in advocacy actions in your community that will result in real change.

- **Know the scale of the problem.** Are you trying to tackle runoff from a single, small-scale landowner, or an entire state facing extraordinary nitrate levels? Depending on how large the problem is, and how easy it is to solve, you will have to engage different actors and stakeholders.
- **Be realistic.** In your first few months of advocating for better water quality, you should not expect to solve all the non-point source pollution problems in your community. Start small and let those small successes lead to bigger actions!
- **Understand what is too much to ask - but don't get discouraged!** An individual landowner can't singlehandedly stop a salt truck, but they can sign a petition to reduce road salt use and attend public meetings.



IDENTIFYING ASKS

Engaging Landowners

Creeks, streams, and rivers flow across both public and private land before reaching their final destination. Engaging private businesses and landowners is a great way to build a coalition of clean water allies. You may be interested in a business because of its proximity to a sensitive stream, or you may suspect that pollution is coming from a specific neighborhood. If you decide to approach a business or landowner, these are some best practices that you can use to present your findings.

Initiating a Conversation

You should never monitor on or enter private property without obtaining permission from the owner. When you've made contact, introduce yourself and explain your water quality monitoring activities to the person. Keep the interaction friendly, conversational, and casual. Describe what you've been doing and why you'd like to talk with them. It may be helpful to discuss why you monitor or why you care about clean water. Avoid making assumptions and accusations.



IDENTIFYING ASKS

Respecting Boundaries

Navigating a conversation with a landowner or business owner about water pollution can be a tricky task. If possible, you should attempt to speak privately with the property or business owner before moving on to other parties. Be transparent about your monitoring activities and your own level of understanding of the issues. Utilize facts, but remember to be kind, as sudden accusations may cause the other party to become defensive and withdraw from the conversation.

You may not create a change in attitude or behavior at first. Be patient if the person is open to talking to you and working with you.

If conversations are not fruitful, leave legal action or enforcement to the proper authorities. You should feel free to share your data openly and objectively, but try to avoid personal opinionated attacks meant to tarnish the reputation of a business or individual. People should be aware of what's happening in their watershed, but acting as a vigilante can tarnish the reputation, credibility, and trust of both you and the Save Our Streams program. Generally, people are not malicious in their intent, but rather unaware of the issues - this will take time and energy to change.



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Taking action as an individual or small group can seem daunting, but you're not alone! Local and regional non-profits and watershed organizations are probably already working on environmental issues in your area. Reach out to these organizations to share ideas and find ways to collaborate. These groups likely have contacts and connections with local decisionmakers. By sharing data and resources you can help bolster one another's cause!

Engaging Your Community

Advocacy is rarely effective if a single voice is doing all the talking. In order to pursue change, especially when it comes to state and federal action or policy change, community support is vital. Ensure that spreading the word and gaining allies is part of your advocacy plan!

Here are a few tips when it comes to rallying your community:

- **Do your homework.** Research your issue and bring proof of your concerns. Use fact sheets and flyers to summarize your findings.
- **Know your audience.** Make sure to frame the issue so that others will care about it as well. Just because you care about aquatic macroinvertebrates doesn't mean everyone will – consider appealing to concerns about public health or even pet safety.
- **Have a clear ask.** Do you need folks to call their city councilor? Show up to a meeting? Sign and share a petition? When people learn about an issue, provide them with a tangible action to take, as opposed to just giving them one more thing to worry about.
- **Meet people where they are.** Where is the community you are trying to rally? They might be in a town Facebook group, at the farmers market, or in their homes. Be ready to post, canvass, or knock on doors!
- **Reach out to existing groups.** There are often existing community groups or advocacy groups that are prepared to mobilize around an issue. If you can share your concerns with them, they might be willing to use their resources to help you.



TAKING ACTION



TAKING ACTION

Education, not Confrontation

Science is meant to be objective by nature - that's why we follow standardized monitoring protocols across all of our sites and monitoring events. Objectively presenting your data to partners and stakeholders is essential to building trust and rapport. Focus on solutions more than problems. Presenting or pursuing solutions is more productive than pointing fingers. If the conversations are particularly unfruitful, you can ask those other organizations and resources for help!

Many people don't know about local threats to clean water. Don't assume that everyone has the same level of knowledge as you - but don't assume that they are uninterested or don't care. No matter where you are, you're a resident of a watershed, with neighbors both upstream and downstream!



TAKING ACTION

In urban and suburban areas, individual homeowners have less influence over water quality - it's a community-wide issue. In these instances, engaging with local policymakers to address non-point source pollution is often the most effective way to advocate for clean water.

Influencing Local Policy

Get in touch at a local level

Your local elected officials and government agencies are there to work for and listen to you. Their job is to listen to concerned residents and respond accordingly. You can write or call your local leaders, or you can show up to a meeting like a city council or a local planning board. In towns and small cities, decisions are often made by the few people who put in the effort to be involved in local politics and decision making. Showing up to meetings in person can give you the opportunity to have your voice heard.

Advocate for your cause

Many local policymakers are dealing with a wide range of issues. If you can come and clearly share why a water quality issue is important to you, it can make a big difference. They might not know about local water quality, and educating them can help them make more informed decisions.

Are they still not listening to you?

If you get brushed off or boxed out, you can put in the work to become one of those decision-makers yourself! While you might not want to become a local government employee, there are often openings on local boards that always need more people involved. You could become one of those people and amplify your voice on water quality.



TAKING ACTION

Sometimes the environmental protection or funding you need for your community or watershed does not exist under state or federal law. In that case, you need to get the attention of your representatives.

Influencing State and Federal Policy

Get in touch

Your elected officials may seem hard to pin down, but they are meant to listen to your needs. They often have staff and at least one local office in your district if you cannot get in touch with them directly. You can write or call your representatives, and potentially get a meeting with a staff member, if not the representatives themselves. To learn who represents you, and how you can contact them, check here:

<https://myreps.datamade.us/>

Advocate for your cause

There is strength in numbers. One comment or one letter about a cause from one person may not make much of an impact, but working with others can amplify your efforts. Find out if there are people already advocating for your interests and join them! If you are the first to care, or the most driven, you can start to organize like-minded people. Get a group to call or write to your representatives' offices. Specific legislation that you support or oppose can make advocating simpler by defining a clear ask for your representatives: a vote.



TAKING ACTION

Making Contact

One of the biggest challenges for advocates is knowing when to take action. Comment periods and special sessions can be difficult to track, but organizing collective action at the wrong time can be a waste of effort. Luckily there are several ways you can track current legislation and find out when your voice will be the most powerful.

Who to Call

Simple phone calls or emails to your representatives can make a huge impact, but it's critical to contact the correct representative, be it local, state, or federal. Find out who your elected representatives are:

<https://myreps.datamade.us/>.

Action Alerts

The Izaak Walton League sends out Action Alerts when your voice is needed on federal and regional decisions. Local watershed groups and non-profits may also have action alerts for even more local issues. Sign up now to make sure you stay up to date with current issues:

<http://members.iwla.org/news>.

IWLA Chapters

The Izaak Walton League has over 200 chapters nationwide. Chapters work on local conservation initiatives and programs, host community events, and can provide support and guidance on local issues. Find your local chapter: <https://www.iwla.org/local-chapters>.



TAKING ACTION

Taking Action as a Community

A group of united voices is more powerful than a single voice. Mobilizing your community to take action for clean water is one of the best things you can do to protect your local waterways. Once you have worked with a community and gotten community buy-in, you can use your collective voice to effect change.

- **Make it fun!** The best and most engaging advocacy groups engage new people at events that are meant to be fun, such as state fairs, public events, brewfests, and more!
- **Build community partnerships!** Partnerships with local businesses and organizations can help make an event more attractive and reach a new audience. Think outside the box! Diverse partners will help reach a diverse audience and strengthen community buy-in.
- **Don't forget to ask.** With busy lives, many folks are hesitant to commit to a cause or event unless explicitly asked to do so. Make sure to ask folks for their support or participation, and clearly set expectations for what you are asking them to do.
- **Collect signatures.** Gathering signatures and testimonials from your community will amplify your message and gather more attention from decision and policymakers.
- **Get involved with outreach events.** Host or attend public events to educate the community.
- **Get boots on the ground.** Some people prefer to commit to a one-time tangible action. Activities like trash cleanups, restoration days, invasive species removal, or water quality monitoring provide a chance for people to contribute to the cause, and it gives you a platform to engage them in discussion and education. You could develop long-time community partners!



LEAGUE ADVOCACY TOOLS



LEAGUE ADVOCACY TOOLS

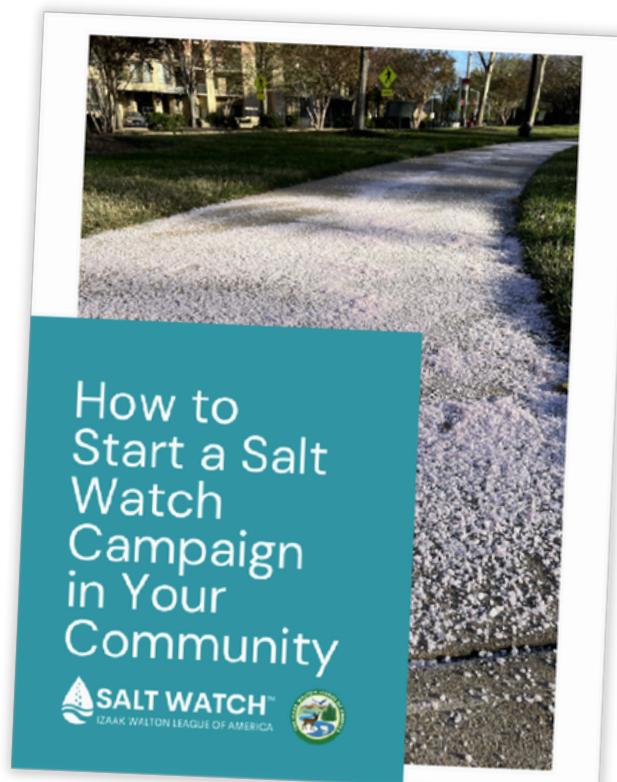
The Izaak Walton League is committed to helping volunteers turn water quality data into action. Explore the advocacy tools designed to support the League's crowd-sourced water monitoring programs.

Salt Watch

www.SaltWatch.org

On the Salt Watch website, volunteers can find numerous advocacy resources on the 'What You Can Do' page. These resources include:

- Letter to the Editor templates
- Letter to Your Legislator templates
- Flyers to educate neighbors and business owners about salt pollution
- Fact sheets explaining best practices and the impact of chloride pollution
- [How to Start a Salt Watch Campaign in Your Community](#)
- a guide to starting your own Salt Watch advocacy campaign
- And more!



LEAGUE ADVOCACY TOOLS

Nitrate Watch

www.NitrateWatch.org

On the Nitrate Watch website, volunteers can find several advocacy resources on the 'What You Can Do' page. These resources include:

- Letter to the Editor templates
- An 'Action Alert' to contact your elected officials
- A link to sign the Nitrate Watch petition
- Fact sheets explaining the impact of nitrate pollution on the environment, human health, and the economy
- And more!

HEALTHY SOIL, CLEAN WATER

Soil health and water quality go hand in hand. Healthy soil contains an ecosystem of bacteria, fungi, and microbes that help plants to thrive. These organic components create pores, allowing the soil to soak up water like a sponge.

Luckily, there are solutions!

LOW OR NO TILL

Tilling can destroy beneficial fungi and increase erosion. "No-till" and conservation tillage leave plant material on the surface to protect the soil from erosion, improve water retention, and feed soil microbes.

COVER CROPS

Cover crops nutrients, it would cover the soil and enjoy improved soil conditions.

EXTENDED CROP ROTATION

Planting additional crops beyond corn and soybeans helps to feed a diversity of soil fungi and bacteria and break up pest and disease cycles. Like cover crops, extended rotation retains soil and nutrients on the field, all while increasing yields and making a profit.

Nitrate in Drinking Water

Chemical fertilizers, animal waste, and leaky septic tanks are just a few sources of elevated nitrate levels in many public water systems and private wells. The impact of nitrate on human health is an area of ongoing research, but there are several health risks that are known to be linked with nitrate in drinking water.

DRINKING WATER STANDARD

The drinking water standard for nitrate is 10 mg/L, as established by the US Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 (over 30 years ago). Current evidence suggests that prolonged exposure to nitrate at 10 mg/L can still lead to increased health risks.

WELL WATER IS...

Approximately 43 million Americans get their drinking water from private wells, which are not regulated by the EPA. Well users are responsible for testing their own water. Most states recommend testing at least once every year.

THYROID DISEASE

BIRTH DEFECTS

COLON CANCER

BLUE BABY SYNDROME (METHEMOGLOBIN)

WHAT TO DO

If your drinking water contains nitrate levels above 10 mg/L, take the following steps:

- Contact a licensed well contractor or your public system operator to identify next steps.
- Obtain drinking water from a safe source, such as bottled water. Boiling water will not remove nitrate.
- Consider installing a reverse osmosis, ion exchange, or distillation water filtration system. Well users may also consider drilling a new well.

JOIN NITRATE WATCH

Want to find out how much nitrate is in your water? Visit nitratewatch.org to request your free nitrate test kit!

NITRATE WATCH
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NITRATE WATCHSM
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

The Cost of Nitrate Pollution

The contamination of surface water and drinking water with nitrate is dangerous to human health and harmful to the environment. But what is the economic impact of nitrate pollution?

WATER TREATMENT COSTS

When nitrate is present in drinking water sources, water utilities must remove the excess to meet the EPA standard. Specialized nitrate removal infrastructure is required, which is expensive to install and operate.

MEDICAL COSTS

Health conditions associated with nitrate pollution - like thyroid disease, birth defects, and some cancers - are costly to treat.

IMPACT ON THE FISHING INDUSTRY

Algae blooms that harbor toxic cyanobacteria can contaminate fish and shellfish, meaning the commercial fishing industry suffers.

DECLINING PROPERTY VALUES

Unsightly and dangerous algae blooms affect the value of waterfront property.

LOSS IN RECREATION

Nitrate pollution can lead to unsightly and dangerous algae blooms. It makes sense that this would negatively impact recreation activities, like fishing and paddling.

ESTIMATED U.S. ECONOMIC IMPACT: \$210 BILLION/YEAR¹

1. Sobola, D. J., Compton, J. E., McCrackin, M. L., & Singh, S. (2015). Cost of reactive nitrogen release from human activities to the environment in the United States. *Environmental Research Letters*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/10/2/025008>



LEAGUE ADVOCACY TOOLS

Action Alerts

www.iwla.org/actionalert

On the Izaak Walton League of America website, you can find Action Alerts for current issues. These Action Alerts make it easy to contact your representatives about timely conservation issues.

If you'd like to be notified when new Action Alerts are created, you can subscribe to email updates at <http://members.iwla.org/news>.

Federal/National Issues

Support the Clean Water Act of 2023!

The Clean Water Act of 2023 would ensure that wetlands and streams are protected water resources. It would also reaffirm our nation's commitment to safeguarding water quality. Urge Congress to support H.R. 5983 today!



[TAKE ACTION](#)

[182 SENT](#) [LEARN MORE](#)

Support healthy food, clean water, and a stable climate!

The Farm Bill has enormous impacts on resources that are important to all of us, like healthy food, clean water, and a stable climate. Ask your three members of Congress to support a Farm Bill that improves day-to-day life for every American!



[TAKE ACTION](#)

Ask Your Representative to Co-sponsor the Agriculture Resilience Act!

The Agriculture Resilience Act would help farmers rebuild healthy soils, reduce polluted runoff, and harness agriculture to put atmospheric carbon back in the soil and fight climate change. Ask your Members of Congress to co-sponsor HR 2803 or S 1337, the Agriculture Resilience Act.

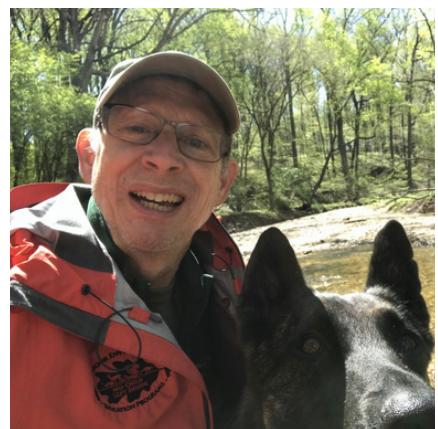


LOOKING AHEAD

Thank you for taking the first step in becoming a clean water advocate! Our nation has over 3 million miles of streams and rivers, and it will take each and every one of us to ensure they are protected for years to come.

Becoming a successful advocate takes time, dedication, and practice. Every community is unique, each with its own stakeholders, challenges, and opportunities. By reading this guide, you have started the process of becoming an effective advocate. But don't stop here! There are many excellent resources to help you become a clean water expert and deep-dive into specific advocacy strategies.

Explore some of our favorite resources on the next page. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, don't hesitate to contact the Clean Water Team at sos@iwla.org.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

More information on the Clean Water Act and the laws that protect our water:

<https://www.rivernetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CWA04-FINAL-DRAFT.pdf>

More information on your drinking water:

https://www.rivernetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/drinking_water_guide.pdf

More guidance on coming up with an advocacy plan for your community:

https://50can.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/10/Guidebook_PDF_download-1.pdf

Advocacy tips from the conservation community:

<https://www.outdooralliance.org/advocacy-101>

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Justice Resources:

<https://www.rivernetwork.org/resource/equity-diversity-inclusion-resources/>

Find out about current federal conservation legislation and take action:

<https://www.iwla.org/congressweb>

Free communication and outreach resources from the Center for Environmental Science - Integration & Application Network

<https://ian.umces.edu/>

How to conduct a watershed survey:

<https://archive.epa.gov/water/archive/web/html/vms31.html>





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