



Conservation **TODAY** for a Better **TOMORROW**

BY DAWN MERRITT



likes gathered in California this summer to explore the theme of “Conservation Today for a Better Tomorrow.” League members have defended outdoor America for more than 90 years, working to ensure healthy natural resources for future generations. At our 2014 convention, we celebrated the League’s achievements and explored the path forward.

Our action-packed convention started with a sea-faring fishing trip and concluded with a banquet focused on engaging youth. In between, attendees enjoyed interactive workshops and nationally renowned speakers, held officer elections, and voted on resolutions to establish League conservation policies.

If you missed the action, you can catch up with these highlights. And be sure to mark your calendar for next year’s convention in South Dakota. (See page 34 for dates and more information.)

IZAAK WALTON: FOUNDING FATHER OF THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

Marjorie Swann
Professor of English, Hendrix College
Editor, *The Compleat Angler* (2014)

Why did our organization's founders choose to name their fledgling conservation group after Izaak Walton, a long-deceased Brit? According to Professor Marjorie Swann, our founders were inspired by what they called "Waltonism" — a philosophy of outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship that united sportsmen through a shared love of the natural world.

The legacy of Izaak Walton and *The Compleat Angler* endures because Walton's ideas were centuries ahead of their time. In fact, said Swann, *The Compleat Angler* is one of the most important and influential environmental texts ever published. Walton "promotes a keen appreciation of what we would now term *ecology* — that is, the relationships among living creatures and their environment." He advocated for fishing seasons, size limits, and restrictions on fishing methods that are now core principles of modern wildlife management. Walton also insisted that government officials be held accountable for upholding these conservation measures.

Walton's relationship with nature was both practical and idealistic, explained Swann. "For Walton, the natural world nourishes all aspects of our humanity: body, mind, and spirit." His book also changed public perception of the sport of angling. "Before Walton published *The Compleat Angler*, recreational fishing had always been regarded as a solitary pursuit. But Walton's book transformed angling into a pastime that creates and strengthens friendships. Walton's

master fisherman, Piscator, instills in his students both an enhanced love for the natural world and a new devotion to environmental stewardship."

As members of the Izaak Walton League, we should be proud of our connection to one of the most important conservationists and anglers in Western history, said Swann (who is now a member of the League as well). "When we're told by policy-makers today that conservation needs to take a back seat to economic or political realities, the life and philosophy of Izaak Walton remind us that bold visionaries not only can but *should* put their love for the outdoors front and center during tough times."



COMMUNICATING ABOUT CONSERVATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Mark Damien Duda
Executive Director
Responsive
Management

Mark Damien Duda is nationally recognized for his expertise on communicating about natural resources and outdoor recreation. He has directed hundreds of surveys and focus groups on these issues and has written four books about wildlife and outdoor recreation. He is also a life member of the Izaak Walton League.

Duda talked with convention attendees about his research findings on conservation and outdoor recreation



opinions across the country. He also shared keys to successfully reaching and engaging Americans who care about the outdoors.

“Think about communications as a process,” Duda recommended. “Don’t jump right in and develop a brochure and a message you think should be on there and start handing it out to people, because you’re just wasting your money.” Instead, start by figuring out exactly what you are trying to accomplish – your program or chapter goals – and identify the people you want to engage. “There is no such thing as a ‘general public,’” Duda said. Develop your message based on the people you are trying to reach and the specific outcome you want to accomplish.

Words matter, said Duda. To illustrate this point, he shared responses to a survey question worded two different ways.

When more than 9,200 people were asked whether they support or oppose using lethal methods to manage deer populations in Pennsylvania, only 38 percent of respondents said “strongly support” and 25 percent said “moderately support.” Yet when the same people were asked how they felt about legal, regulated deer hunting, 66 percent said “strongly support” and 19 percent said “moderately support.” It’s important to consider which messages will work best for each group you are trying to engage.

The more you can understand your audience, the better communicator you can become. “And the better we can achieve our job of conserving outdoor America,” said Duda, who advised League members to tell stories and give people a direct connection to the issue and specific actions they can take.

THE NATURE CONNECTION

Kenny Ballentine Founder, Nature Kids Institute

Award-winning filmmaker Kenny Ballentine founded the Nature Kids Institute in 2013 to bring the wonders of the natural world into the lives of children. Ballentine shared tools that Ikes across the country can use to engage youth and families in the outdoors.

From park systems to nature programs, Ballentine said, “everyone is scratching their heads and asking the same questions: Where have all the children gone? And how can we get kids back outside and actively engaged in our programming in a way that is meaningful?” He offered three tools to engage youth.

1. Connect Across the Nature Spectrum:

There are so many ways people can connect with nature. It’s what Ballentine called the “nature connection spectrum.” At one end of the spectrum are extreme sports; at the other end, backyard activities such as gardening and even star gazing. “And here’s the important part: there are countless points in between, and every one of them is equally valid.”

Ballentine said the biggest roadblock to engaging youth and families in nature is thinking that there is one right way to do it. Instead, we need to meet people where they’re at right now. “Not every parent or child is able to transition directly from the PlayStation to the trail or canoe. Having a spectrum of activities to draw from gives you the ability to provide safe and comfortable baby steps between the indoor world and the outdoor one.”

2. Get Hands-On: A child’s world is defined by rules, Ballentine said. One of the main reasons teenagers spend so much time online is because they can do whatever they want in the virtual world. “Unfortunately, the natural world can often come across as the complete opposite: Stay on the trail. Stay off the grass. Stay off the rocks. Don’t get dirty. It turns the nature experience into a museum experience – a place where you



WLA: ISTOCK (2); KENNY BALLENTINE, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

may look but not touch. There is no learning and there is no fun.” Instead, he said, kids need opportunities to get off the trail, get dirty, scrape a knee, and climb a tree.

3. Use Tech, But Keep It in Check:

Incorporating technology can help kids make the nature connection. However, Ballentine cautioned, “you need limitations to keep technology from hijacking the magic of the real world.” He suggested several ways to let kids use technology outdoors:

- **Plan photo and video projects:** Consider a nature scavenger hunt using phones to “collect” pictures of items. Or ask kids to make a video on why a certain place should be protected. “You will be shocked at the kind of passion activities like these unlock.”
- **Encourage social media sharing:** “There is no better marketing than kids telling other kids, ‘Look how much fun I’m having in nature!’” So let them Tweet and post their photos online.
- **Download nature apps and guides:** There are apps that can help kids identify plants, animals, tracks, even constellations. These apps are fun and easy to use. “And the coolest part is that they require kids to go out and find something real first.”
- **Use GPS:** Although knowing how to use a map and compass is critical for outdoor survival, it may be daunting for children experiencing nature for the first time. Let youth navigate their way with a GPS app and a map. “They will come back different kids, and they will have had an adventure they won’t forget any time soon.”

“Children do not choose their childhood,” Ballentine reminded conference attendees. “A childhood is created by the decisions of parents, educators, and mentors in a child’s life. We make the decisions that create the world a child will grow up in. So the commitment that I make to myself all the time is that I will bring childhood back outside. Today, I invite you make that commitment with me.”

THE VOTES ARE IN

Election of volunteer leaders is an important part of the League’s national convention. In July, members elected Ikes from across the country to lead the League through the coming year, including a new national president and vice president and three new Executive Board members. Meet some of your new League leaders on page 37.

National Officers

President: Shawn Gallagher (Ohio)

Vice President: Jeff Deschamps (Maryland)

Secretary: Jim Storer (Ohio)

Treasurer: Walter Lynn, Jr. (Illinois)

Executive Board

Jill Crafton (Minnesota)

Herbert Pritchett, Sr. (Virginia)

Wes Sheets (Nebraska)

At-Large Executive Board Member (elected by the Executive Board)

Todd Gessner (Illinois) (not pictured below)

Director At-Large

John Dickel (New Mexico)

REGIONAL GOVERNORS

Region I: Pete Hillebrecht (California)

Region II: OPEN

Region III: Pat Kistner (South Dakota)

Region IV: Dean Knight (Iowa)

Region V: Pam Pierce (Florida)

Region VI: Bill Gordon (Maryland)



Pictured: IZAAK Executive Board (which includes national officers)



NEW LEAGUE LEADERS

At our national convention in July, members elected several new national leaders and Executive Board members. In addition, the Executive Board voted to add one new member-at-large to their ranks. (There are three at-large positions on the Executive Board.) Learn more about your new League leaders — in their own words.

Jeff Deschamps National Vice President Laurel, Maryland

My first encounter with the Izaak Walton League came in 1998, when I went to a cleanup with my wife, Meo Curtis. Through her job, Meo had made contact with the League's Wildlife Achievement Chapter in Maryland. After the cleanup, Bill Kelly, then chairman of the chapter's conservation committee, invited us to visit the chapter. The combination of conservation work plus ranges was interesting. I had a rifle my father sent me and no place to shoot it. I joined the chapter in January 1999 and became a regular at meetings of the conservation committee.

My involvement with the chapter grew over the years. Some of the high points include participating in a Forest Stewardship Workshop put on by the Mid-Atlantic Council, writing the first environmental stewardship plan for a League chapter to receive EPA approval, being a guest on a local cable TV show to talk about our chapter's American Elm Tree project, and attending my first national convention.

I have held a variety of positions at the chapter and division levels and still edit the Maryland Division's newsletter. Nationally, I have served on and chaired the League's Outdoor Ethics and Resolutions Committees. I look forward to working with our Executive Board and national staff.

Jill Crafton Executive Board Member Bloomington, Minnesota

I had never heard of the Izaak Walton League until 1995, when someone suggested I join because the mission of the organization was in line with my environmental concerns. I joined the Bush Lake Chapter in Bloomington, Minnesota. The more I learned about the role the League played in improving water quality, advocating for wastewater treatment plants, establishing the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, and supporting the protection of the Boundary Waters, the more impressed I was by the leadership of these citizen conservationists.

Within about two years, I was elected state director and started attending division-level meetings. I was hooked! I have served as the Minnesota Division treasurer for more than 10 years and as Bush Lake Chapter treasurer for even longer. I help organize the division's annual summits to address water quality issues and helped form the League's Great Lakes Committee. Recently, I joined the Nicollet Island Coalition, filling an IWLA seat in the group to address Upper Mississippi River issues. I am also a member of the League's new Hydraulic Fracturing Committee, which comprises Ikes from New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Minnesota.

During my time on the Executive Board, I would like to get to know more League members and their concerns and work for greater collaboration across League divisions and chapters to share resources. IWLA is needed now more than ever to ensure conservation protections in place today are not weakened and that these laws — many from our IWLA resolutions process — move us to successful solutions at the local, state, and national levels.

Herbert Pritchett, Sr. Executive Board Member Fredericksburg, Virginia

I joined the Izaak Walton League in 1978 but took a pause after six years for family, life, and career progression. I returned in 2007 to become a committed member. I used my teamwork and leadership skills

to perform a major chapter conservation and dam renovation. Last year, using IWLA Endowment resources, I led the continuation of a watershed protection program through erosion control and rehabilitation of critical infrastructure. I have served on multiple chapter committees, served as chapter secretary, and provided leadership in planning and managing the IWLA national convention held in Fredericksburg in 2013. I currently serve as Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter vice president and as a national director.

I am excited about joining the Executive Board! My goals include involving younger couples in the League and providing youth programs to engage families in learning what nature has to offer. I would also like to find innovative ways for increasing IWLA members' involvement in local and state-level activities. A sincere "thank you" to the spouses of those who serve the IWLA at the national, state, and local levels for their understanding and support, as these efforts take time away from those we love.

I am a native of Fredericksburg, Virginia, where I retired after serving the community for 35 years on the Fredericksburg Fire Department. I have been married for 41 years to my lovely wife Barbara Anne and we have 8 children (all boys), 18 grandchildren, and 5 great grandchildren.

Todd Gessner Executive Board Member-at-Large Mount Vernon, Illinois

I am truly honored to be selected to serve as an IWLA Executive Board member. I have spent my entire life learning about and loving the outdoors. For the past 30 years, I've been very fortunate to be able to make my living showing and sharing the outdoors as a professional fishing and hunting guide.

My passion has been encouraging young people to experience and enjoy the outdoors. I am really looking forward to working with folks who share my love for the outdoors and are willing to work tirelessly to conserve our natural resources for generations to come.