



# Izaak Walton League of America

## STAFF REPORT

### 2021 National Convention

### Overview

A robust array of chapter activities, volunteer events, advocacy and other League activities continued to thrive under pandemic restrictions in the first half of 2021. Like much of the nation, our headquarters office has now transitioned back to close-to-normal, in-person operations in what we hope is a truly post-pandemic era.

More bright notes:

- Nationwide, member numbers are up.
- We are seeing record numbers of participants in our community science programs, like Salt Watch.
- On the policy front, we have notched progress toward a range of better policies at both federal and state levels aimed at conserving our soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife.
- Our outreach to the public, the media, policymakers and potential donors is growing to keep pace with the urgent need for our vital work ahead.

There is always more to do, but the League staff is proud of its accomplishments so far this year.

### To Keep in Mind in the Months Ahead

As we look ahead to the rest of 2021 and beyond, here are few things to keep in mind.

**Get ready for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.** More than a milestone, our centennial year will be a huge opportunity to remind members and inform the public about our remarkable legacy of leadership on conservation and outdoor recreation. Each member, chapter and division can play an important role in that. **Our second century will be no less important than our first.** Let's share the good news, our commitment to the future and have some fun along the way.

**More is better.** Not always, but more is definitely better when it comes to **members, volunteers, stream monitors, advocates and donors.** We will achieve more of our goals with more people and resources. Keep our many chapter resources in mind and join us in our advocacy efforts as our alerts appear on your radar.

## Finance and Administration

**2020 audit and financial results.** Based on a draft audit for 2020, the organization ended 2020 with a modest surplus from operations when calculated on a cash basis. Revenue slightly exceeded budget while expenses overall were lower than budget largely due to significant reductions in travel, meeting expenses and some supplies and materials. These reductions were driven almost entirely by restrictions associated with COVID-19 pandemic. We expect the final audit will provide a “clean opinion,” which means the auditors conclude the League maintains accurate financial records and follows Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

**Annual chapter and division nonprofit compliance process.** League bylaws and Internal Revenue Service regulations require chapters and divisions to annually submit specific information to the national office. These submissions are needed to comply with those bylaws and to allow the League to continue **to provide 501c3 tax-exempt status to chapters and divisions** covered by the League’s group exemption. The **deadline to submit information to the national office is August 18, 2021**. A detailed letter explaining the process and all materials necessary for submitting information are available on the League’s website at [www.iwla.org/501c3](http://www.iwla.org/501c3).

**Midwinter meeting:** The 2022 Midwinter Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for February 18-19 in Fort Myers, Florida. This will be an in-person meeting. Registration will open in late fall.

## Development

**Members weigh in.** The League values feedback from members to help define priorities and shape engagement on issues. To that end, we included in the Spring Appeal a survey for members and supporters, and more than 900 people responded. The survey is timely as we prepare to embark on a second century. Our work is certain to focus on concerns that motivated our founders but also on newer challenges they never envisioned. The survey asked respondents to rate the importance for the League to work on specific issues using a five-point scale from “not at all important” to “very important.”

In the survey responses, **outdoor recreation and water quality remain top of mind**, consistent with the League’s long focus on these matters, dating back to 1922. Eighty-seven percent say it is more important or very important to help people participate in outdoor recreation, and 86 percent say the same about improving water quality. Connecting young people to the outdoors has always been a priority for the League and a strength for chapters nationwide. It’s no surprise that 88 percent of respondents say it is more important or very important to **engage young adults in conservation**.

More than **80 percent prioritize advocating for common-sense conservation laws** as more or very important going forward. While there is overwhelming support for engagement on these longstanding League priorities, members and supporters also believe it’s important to work on a more expansive range of issues. For example, **70 percent of respondents say it is important to expand and diversify participation in conservation**.

In their day, our founders tackled the most pressing conservation challenges of those times, and in fact they were ahead of the times in some respects. Today, climate change is the most serious of the many threats to our soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife. The science is overwhelming and **the urgency to act grows annually**. Respondents were more divided on this issue, but a majority (55 percent) agree it is important for the League to work to reduce the impacts of climate change.

**Board giving:** Board member giving is an important metric, now more than ever. As many foundations tighten purse strings and limit the number of grant recipients, it is important for the League to show that 100 percent of Board members contribute. That demonstrates Board support in a very public way and can encourage giving from the general membership.

The **amount of the donation is not as important as the percentage of Board members making a gift.** Please help us reach the 100 percent milestone this year. You can contribute at any time by donating online at [www.iwla.org/donate](http://www.iwla.org/donate) or by mailing a check using the envelope in every issue of *Outdoor America* magazine.

**Second Century Fund campaign:** As we move closer to this centennial milestone, we are gearing up to launch a major fundraising campaign League-wide. We have put together a committee of dedicated Ikes to help champion this effort, and we plan to unveil the program at this year's virtual convention. Funds raised from this campaign will be earmarked directly to strengthening our programs and legacy as we begin our second century.

## Membership

After ending 2020 on a high note with a total of **41,162 members – the highest membership since 2016** – the challenge for 2021 has been keeping these members engaged and creating an environment in which they are motivated to renew. So far, we are on target with membership totals running ahead of where we were this same time last year. A copy of the June membership report will be available for download along with other convention-related reports and documents.

It's important to remember that **only about 50 percent of first-year members renew, so it will be doubly important to focus attention on this group as chapters ramp up for 2022 renewals.**

To help **look ahead at recruitment and retention for 2022**, the Membership and Chapter Relations departments will offer webinars, best practices from chapters, additional billings and individual assistance as needed. As part of the 2021 virtual convention, staff will conduct a workshop focused on membership retention.



Member swearing-in ceremony at Suffolk-Nansemond Chapter, Va., May 2021

**The 2022 billing year:** We are gearing up for the fall billing for the 2022 membership year and are on target to release it to chapters in early September. Follow-up second notices will go out in December. Now is the time for chapters to make a concerted effort to wrap up any late renewals and outreach to lapsed members. Chapters looking for reminder notices or lists of lapsed members should contact Maia Nkansah in the Membership department ([maian@iwla.org](mailto:maian@iwla.org)).

## Chapter Relations

**National Shooting Sports Month:** The League continues work with the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) to promote firearms training and target shooting in August. We urge our many chapters with shooting facilities to host such an event to introduce the public to shooting sports and recruit new members ([www.shootingsportsmoonth.org](http://www.shootingsportsmoonth.org)). With 8.4 million reported first-time gun owners in 2020, many are looking for training on marksmanship and safety as well as places to try shooting sports.

NSSF offers support to chapters through its First Shots education and promotion program ([www.nssf.org/ranges/first-shots](http://www.nssf.org/ranges/first-shots)), and the League encourages chapters to incorporate that into their August events. The League will highlight chapter National Shooting Sports Month events on the national website. Chapters can share event details here:

[www.iwla.org/outdoor-recreation/shooting-sports/national-shooting-sports-month](http://www.iwla.org/outdoor-recreation/shooting-sports/national-shooting-sports-month)

**Chapter Resources:** The League offers a wide variety of **resources, tools and services to help chapters** manage operations, conserve natural resources and promote outdoor recreation ([www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/marketing-tools](http://www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/marketing-tools)). For assistance creating and managing a website and social media presence, visit: [www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/chapter-communications](http://www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/chapter-communications).

In October 2021, staff will conduct the annual “Resources for Chapter Officers” webinar to present the support services and materials available to every chapter. Access the recording of a previous webinar from 2020 at: [www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/chapter-management](http://www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/chapter-management).

**100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at chapters:** The League’s anniversary in 2022 is a great opportunity for chapters to increase their visibility. This fall, the national organization will provide a variety of resources for chapters to use next year to enhance the Izaak Walton League brand and name recognition. They include support materials and assistance to chapters for member communications, conservation projects, 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary events and local media outreach (refer to the section below on Communications, “100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary resources for chapters”).

We challenge all chapters to be active partners in the promotion, participation and celebration of this historic milestone. Centennial promotional items and merchandise will be available in the fall of 2021. Visit [www.iwla.org/100years](http://www.iwla.org/100years).

**Support for chapter fishing events:** The League continues its popular partnership with Zebco Brands, which offers a **50 percent discount off Zebco fishing equipment**, restricted to gear used or given away as prizes at youth fishing events at chapters. To request a discount code, email [chapters@iwla.org](mailto:chapters@iwla.org).

**Member recognition and awards:** In March, 53 chapters and two divisions submitted nominations for the Judge John W. Tobin Chapter Volunteer Appreciation Award, while 43

chapters applied for the annual Defenders Chapter Achievement Award in recognition of their efforts in 2020.

The Awards Committee reviewed 44 nominations and selected 28 recipients of national awards. All National and Membership Awards, including Defenders Chapter Achievement Awards, will be distributed to the nominating chapters and divisions this summer.

**National Conservation Scholarships:** With generous funding from the IWLA Endowment, the League awards **two \$2,500 college scholarships** to undergraduate students majoring in natural resource fields. One scholarship was available to a previous chapter or division scholarship recipient, with another to a student who is a League member or the child or grandchild of a member ([www.iwla.org/scholarship](http://www.iwla.org/scholarship)).

The League's Scholarship Review Committee recently selected the following recipients for 2021:

- Elijah K. Hoar, a rising senior at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) who is studying Crop and Soils Science; and
- Jacob S. Hill, a rising senior at Stephen F. Austin State University (Texas) who is studying Forest-Wildlife Management.



Jacob Hill

## Conservation Policy

**Clean Water Act update:** Last year, the Trump administration finalized a rule that changed the definition of Waters of the United States (WOTUS) in a way that would remove Clean Water Act protections for many small streams and about half the wetlands in the U.S. The League has asked the Biden administration to begin the process of repealing that rule, and then **apply a definition of WOTUS that protects all streams and wetlands.**

**Recovering America's Wildlife Act reintroduced:** In April, one of the League's highest priorities moved forward when U.S. Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.)



introduced the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. This bipartisan bill, H.R. 2773, would redirect \$1.3 billion per year to state wildlife conservation efforts.

With more than 12,000 wildlife species in need of conservation efforts to stabilize or restore their populations, this legislation would provide resources to state and tribal managers with the goal of preventing these species from declining to threatened or endangered status. The bill has more than 80 co-sponsors in the House. The League is working to get a Senate companion bill introduced. To learn more or contact Congress, visit

[www.iwla.org/advocacy](http://www.iwla.org/advocacy).



**The Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act** was introduced in April by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.). Since the 1920s, the Izaak Walton League has worked to conserve this cherished fishing and canoeing destination in the Superior National Forest. The bill, HR 5598, would ensure permanent protection for the Boundary Waters from any future copper-nickel mineral leasing in its watershed. To urge your U.S. Representative to co-sponsor this bill, visit [www.iwla.org/advocacy](http://www.iwla.org/advocacy).

## Clean Water

2021 has seen banner growth for the Clean Water Program, from hybrid-approach Save Our Streams training to more than doubling Salt Watch participation compared to last season. Assisting the Clean Water Program starting in July will be the new Mid-Atlantic Save Our Streams Coordinator, Kira Carney, and we are bidding farewell to our Midwest Save Our Streams Coordinator, Zach Moss, as he moves on to a role with a county conservation board. We wish him all the best.

**Salt Watch:** The Clean Water team wrapped up its fourth Winter Salt Watch season, the biggest ever. The League sent volunteers in 33 states more than 2,600 test kits (each with multiple test strips). The Salt Watchers have sent back nearly **2,700 test results** so far. Staff hosted two webinars about testing for chloride and explaining how volunteers can help curb salt use in their community. Staff created summary and regional maps showing the chloride pollution measured by volunteers (see [www.iwla.org/saltwatchresults](http://www.iwla.org/saltwatchresults)).

Salt Watch **participation increased significantly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan**, as well as in the suburbs around **Philadelphia and Washington DC**, due to successful partnerships with local watershed groups and regional programs. In Minnesota, the League built a formal partnership with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to collect data in the Twin Cities and in less populated regions. There was significant success incorporating Salt Watch into middle and high school programs in many states. The program earned good press coverage in Minnesota and Pennsylvania and was **featured in the *Washington Post*** this year. See a round-up of press coverage at [www.iwla.org/salt-watch-news](http://www.iwla.org/salt-watch-news).



Salt Watch team demonstrates monitoring to a *Washington Post* reporter.

One new dimension this season was providing Salt Watch volunteers with specific guidance about how to advocate for change locally in response to high pollution levels. Collaborating with community groups, we provided **sample letters to state**

**legislators calling for snowplow driver training to reduce excessive road salt usage.** Working with Wisconsin Salt Wise, we also developed fliers about smarter salt application that volunteers can share with neighbors and local property managers. See [www.iwla.org/saltaction](http://www.iwla.org/saltaction). We expect to expand this suite of next steps and actions volunteers can take in the 2021-2022 winter season of Salt Watch.

**Online Save Our Streams training:** Online SOS training has continued successfully since its inception in May 2020. To date, more than 380 people have participated in the online training, with over 120 completing the online process and passing the test to identify macroinvertebrate species, which serve as indicators of water quality in streams. Visit [www.iwla.org/workshops](http://www.iwla.org/workshops) to begin online certification or training.

**In-person SOS training:** With COVID precautions in place, the staff and volunteers conducted trainings in Virginia, Pennsylvania and Iowa attended by nearly 100 participants. In-person sessions complement online training to round out the full SOS training. This fall, the League hopes to host even more training sessions to continue to grow the volunteer network in more regions.

**Creek Critters engagement:** In partnership with the Audubon Naturalist Society, the League continues to promote the new Creek Critters mobile app, which guides users through collecting and identifying macroinvertebrates. See [www.iwla.org/creekcritters](http://www.iwla.org/creekcritters). The Creek Critters app can be used nationwide by educators, families and potential SOS monitors and is a great learning tool for youth and scout groups. To help volunteers easily collect insects from streams, which is the first step for using the app, the League is providing small aquarium nets to chapters. Quantities are limited. Email [sos@iwla.org](mailto:sos@iwla.org) to request nets.

## Agriculture

**National Soil Health Initiatives:** Two legislative concepts developed by our staff were included in federal agriculture and climate change legislation this year. A state and tribal soil health grant program and crop insurance discounts for farmers who adopt soil health practices were included in

a bill re-introduced by Representative Chellie Pingree (D-Maine). In the Senate, a companion to the Pingree bill was introduced for the first time by Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM).

In good news for cover crops, which provide water quality and soil benefits, the Biden administration announced it would use Pandemic Assistance funds to **implement a targeted version of our crop insurance discount idea**, providing a \$5 per acre discount on federal crop insurance for farmers who planted cover crops during the pandemic. The move provides an opening for implementing an expanded program in the future.



**Advocating for better conservation funding:** As Congress considers major infrastructure and climate change legislation, the League is working to double federal funding for farm and ranch conservation from \$6 billion to \$12 billion per year. In the next six months, we have a **once-in-a-generation opportunity to obtain a significant increase in federal farm conservation dollars**. League members can support the effort by contacting members of Congress, publishing letters to the editor and spreading the word.

We also lobbied Members of Congress to support key programs that conserve water quality, wetlands, grasslands and wildlife on private lands. The League applauds proposed 2022 budget increases in USDA conservation programs and regional programs focused on the **Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Florida Everglades and the Gulf of Mexico**.

**Restoring conservation payments:** In recent months, USDA announced it would increase rent and incentive payments for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, undoing a 2017 decision to reduce payments. The **changes should help reverse the continued loss of acres enrolled in these land conservation contracts**. Last year, 69 IWLA chapters and divisions joined in a letter to USDA asking it to restore and increase CRP payments to re-kindle landowner interest in the program.

**Iowa soil health legislation:** League staff worked with legislative leaders and the state's soil and water conservation districts to set up a soil health program, and legislation to accomplish that was introduced in 2021. While the bill was not passed this year, the League plans to continue this push in



2022. The League will also continue efforts to fund the Iowa Water and Land Legacy initiative (IWILL), approved by Iowa voters but never funded by the legislature.

We are hiring a replacement for Tim Wagner, who retired in May as our agriculture outreach coordinator for Iowa and Illinois.

**Illinois conservation funding:** This year, the League and allies obtained dedicated state funding for the Illinois nutrient management program. At the same time, we maintained funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the state's \$5-per-acre crop insurance discount for farmers who plant cover crops and an effort to implement soil health practices on wildlife areas the state leases to farmers. These important successes were achieved in spite of the economic fallout from the pandemic, which significantly pinched the Illinois budget.

In June we learned that the USDA and state of Illinois reached agreement to reinstate the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This program has been languishing at USDA despite successful efforts in 2018 and 2019 to set aside \$57 million for the state share of the program. The League led an effort to have influential members of the Illinois congressional delegation ask USDA to re-start the Illinois CREP. In a few months, the program is expected to begin enrolling land in 10- to 15-year contracts to restore wetlands or plant buffer strips. State funds will provide for conservation easements to maintain the conservation into the future.

In April, we asked Governor J.B. Pritzker to include agriculture in the state's Climate Change plan he released last August, which focused on electric utilities and transportation. We continue to promote a proposal we developed to include agriculture in that plan.

**Kankakee watershed:** We obtained a small grant from the Donnelley Foundation to write a joint strategy for a group of conservation organizations working to restore wetlands and grasslands and expand the use of soil health practices in the Kankakee watershed in Indiana and Illinois. The plan will include ways to leverage more federal and state funding for the Kankakee.

## Missouri River

**Advocating for effective restoration:** The League remains highly engaged with the Army Corps of Engineers' Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP). Through our seat on the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee, we advocate for actions that are vital for fish and wildlife and the health of the river system. With generous support of the Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota Izaak Walton League Divisions and a grant from the Gilchrist Foundation, **the League supports recovery efforts that use the river's natural functions to create and restore habitat.**

This year, dry conditions persist in much of the basin limiting runoff into the river system. But the League continues urging the Corps to rethink rather than just rebuild lower basin levees that have repeatedly failed during high flows.

**Reinvigorating floodplain conservation:** A League priority is getting Congress to fully fund all aspects of the MRRP and the Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Project. The Corps is authorized to acquire land or easements within the floodplain from willing sellers. **The League again authored a budget request letter this spring and enlisted sign-ons from more than 80 organizations,** that advocated for increased recovery and mitigation funding in the Fiscal Year 2022 federal budget.

**Missouri River education and engagement events:** League members and staff are pleased to engage in many outreach and conservation events this year after pandemic-related cancellations throughout 2020. These events, some with support from the IWLA Endowment, increase the public's appreciation of the river and natural resources while raising the profile of the Izaak Walton League.



**This year staff participated in:**

- Missouri River Cleanup – Omaha/Council Bluffs, May 21. This three-day event removed more than eight tons of trash.
- Missouri River Invasive Species Awareness Event – May-June. Over 880 people from 12 states were contacted at boat ramps and recreation areas in Nebraska and South Dakota.
- Missouri River-Lake Sharpe Cleanup, Pierre-Fort Pierre – July 7. Staff worked with federal, state and local agencies and partners. Volunteers removed 1.5 tons of litter and trash.

**Upcoming events:**

- Missouri River Cleanup – Yankton, September 11.
- Missouri River Outdoor Expo – Ponca, Neb., September 18-19. Members and staff will introduce people to the League's conservation programs.
- Iowa Outdoor Expo – Des Moines, September 25-26. Members and staff will introduce the League's programs. At both expos we'll help people, especially kids, build birdfeeders that they can take home.
- Central South Dakota Water Festival – Pierre, September 28. Staff will talk to more than 200 fifth-grade students about river cleanups and the importance of protecting our water.

## Communications

**Outreach to the news media.** The League has begun focused outreach to local and national reporters about the League's specific programs, like Salt Watch and soil health, and about the League's broad role in conservation and outdoor recreation. Through tip sheets and other contacts with journalists, the League will continue in the months ahead to build awareness, amplifying our 100-year legacy and the local leadership roles of individual chapters and divisions in communities across the U.S.

**Coordinated messages about wetlands:** In May, in honor of American Wetlands Month, we ran a multimedia campaign focusing on wetlands conservation as a strategy for protecting water quality, providing habitat for wildlife and combating climate change. Blog posts, videos and infographics drove strong engagement on social media channels.

**100<sup>th</sup> anniversary resources for chapters:** This summer, Chapter Relations and Communications staff are hosting two webinars to give chapter leaders tools and ideas for increasing visibility around the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. If chapters need help with websites, social media or contacting local reporters, the national staff can help. More information about the anniversary will be available online. Visit [www.iwla.org/100years](http://www.iwla.org/100years).

**100<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo.** In February, staff began incorporating the anniversary logo into the League's website, email blasts, social media channels, stationery and other materials. The logo is available for all chapters to use. Find it here: <https://www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/chapter-communications>.



**Communications benchmarks:** At the beginning of the year, Communications and Membership staff worked to submit data to a benchmarking study. At the end of May, we got the results back: Compared to other environmental nonprofits, the Izaak Walton League has a very strong email program and gets excellent engagement on Facebook. However, we struggle to drive donations and advocacy actions through online channels.