

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE

THE OLDEST CONSERVATION VETERAN

By
Court Van Clief

Outdoor enthusiasts - the kind that tote shotguns or rifles to field and forest or fishing tackle to river, lake, and bay - are instrumental in the support of many conservation organizations. Seems like a natural fact. The people who live to spend cherished time outdoors participating in the time-honored sports of hunting and fishing comprise the very group who are most intensely motivated towards preserving that special way of life for future generations. They well understand the values developed through an association with the wild places and the creatures that reside there.

In 1922 a group of 54 avid sportsmen met in Chicago to discuss the degradation of American fishing streams. Unharnessed raw waste was

already being released into many of the nation's waterways, and these men of foresight recognized an impending disaster. Realizing the most effective way to turn the heads of decision makers would be to approach them in unity, the first American group for the protection of outdoor resources was formed. The new assemblage would need a respectable moniker. The name of 17th century English angler and conservationist, well known for authoring the timeless work *The Complete Angler*, was chosen. The Izaak Walton League of America officially came on line that sultry August evening, the first pioneer in the struggle to preserve the great outdoors.

For over 80 years this time-tested conservation warrior has been a stalwart in the battle to rescue

America's wild places from a steady barrage of potential invaders. Created for the protection of fishing streams, in modern times the Izaak Walton League fights the conservation battle on many fronts because the battle has become immensely more complicated.

The League often takes the fight forward by involving its membership, 50,000 strong and affectionately nicknamed *Ikes*. For example, political advocacy policy is set when League members meet annually at national conventions. Once policies are formed, staff members converge on Capital Hill working independently and in partnership with other conservation groups, delivering information and testimony to members of Congress.



IWLA Executive Director Paul Hansen, national staff, and members of the Arlington-Fairfax Chapter pose with former EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman after a signing ceremony at the chapter in Centreville, VA. In January, 2003 the League and the EPA signed an agreement outlining lead management practices for League shooting facilities nationwide. Whitman shot a round of skeet following the ceremony



The IWLA Arlington-Fairfax Chapter in Centreville, VA holds an annual charity shoot called Crush N Clays For Kids to benefit the St. Jude's Children's Hospital. Former Redskin Dave Butz hosts the event.

Across the country League members hit the field in the Save Our Streams program initiated 30 years ago. Through this effort, 300 chapters are involved in monitoring stream health, restoring degraded stream banks, and protection of diminishing wetlands. This is especially true in Virginia, as the Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League supports and maintains the highly recognized Virginia Save Our Streams program statewide. Joining together to support such an important cause is fun, educational, and a prime example of a grass-roots endeavor making a real conservation impact through the leadership of the Izaak Walton League.

In 1998, the Izaak Walton League, in partnership with the Southern Environmental Law Center, initiated a campaign to reduce the intense air pollution created by coal fired power plants across the South. The National Parks Conservation Association joined the fight in 2001. The plan calls for power plants in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee - those belching the largest level of power plant pollution in the

United States - to lose the grandfather position that allows them to continue functioning in an outdated and detrimental manner. The goal: cleaner air and reduced acid rain falling on forests, streams, and lakes.

Wetlands protection is a



IWLA members monitor water quality using a kick-seine net. The net is used to collect aquatic insects, which are excellent indicators of stream health.

IWLA members plant trees around a stream to create a "riparian buffer zone." The zone helps control runoff and stream bank erosion.



major conservation issue across our land. In response to this critical issue, the Izaak Walton League annually designates May as American Wetlands Month. The event offers communities an opportunity to become involved in the important and interesting process of restoring and conserving their local wetlands. The league provides information and guidance pertinent to the cause. The educational benefits for all ages are excellent and provide another wonderful opportunity to be involved in conservation at the grass-roots level. Each year Wetlands Month is kicked off with a theme such as invasive species in wetlands or wetlands no longer under protection of federal policy.

The Izaak Walton League, in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, recently announced the USDA Forest Service's publication of *A Guide To Creating Vernal Ponds*. This excellent publication instructs private landowners, teachers, and biologists in methods for building a vernal or sea-



Many of Virginia's League chapters has hunter safety classes, angler and boaters education courses, advanced outdoor skills training, and other youth mentoring programs at the local level."

sonal wetland that functions in the same manner as a natural one. It provides another wonderful way we can all be part of the essential effort to preserve precious wetlands that are so needed for their filtration qualities and as habitat for abundant and diverse wildlife.

There are nearly two dozen League chapters throughout Virginia – from Roanoke to Virginia Beach, along the Shenandoah Valley, and throughout the Northern Virginia region – that are involved with much more. They offer their local members many outdoor recreational opportunities including shooting, angling, camping, hunting, boating, and wildlife watching. Further, they host a variety of outdoor skills educational courses, offer firearms safety and marksmanship classes and sponsor on-the-ground conservation projects for their communities.

By intensely involving its members and by promoting a policy for protection of wildlife and fish, the Izaak Walton League places its highest priority on protection of habitat such as wetlands, streams, and forests. Its

second priority is sustaining the wildlife and fish resource itself, and third in importance is accommodating the needs of the user of the resource.

Through these initiatives the Izaak Walton League believes we can enjoy sustained coexistence with wildlife and wild places for all time.

The battle is intense, ongoing, and of utmost importance. The Izaak Walton League is the oldest of all the conservation groups and remains an integral-soldier in the fight to preserve America's wild places for the future.

Visit the Izaak Walton League's excellent, informational website at www.iwla.org to learn how you can enjoy the education and satisfaction of participating in the effort to preserve the outdoor resources we so cherish.

Court Van Clief resides in Albemarle County and has a second home in Mathews, Virginia.



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