IWLA: Making a Difference

By Chantal Agnew

Editor’s Note: This is the first article in a series of four that PHS Global Ecology Studies Program senior, Chantal Agnew, is writing for her senior project. She has chosen to focus her series on the Izaak Walton League of America for its dedication to preserving the environment.

Going green covers a wide variety of different definitions, whether that means driving more efficient cars, recycling, or using fluorescent light bulbs instead of regular ones, but all of these ideas are geared towards one thing: benefitting the environment by reducing our own personal carbon footprint. All around us, efforts are being started to make people more eco-conscious; however, right in the area, there’s been an organization setting an environmentally-friendly example for decades.

Since 1935, the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter of the Isaak Walton League of America has been centered in Poolesville just off of West Willard Road. It is one of the largest of six-hundred-plus chapters in the U.S. with over one thousand members. Their cause is noble and just as they strive “to conserve, maintain, protect, and restore the soils, forest, water, and other natural resources of the United States and other lands; to promote means and opportunities for the education of the public with respect to such resources and their enjoyment for wholesome utilization.” Members of the organization come from all walks of life and have their own value to add to the program: doctors, lawyers, ornithologists, farmers, students, military, government employees, and basically anyone who is interested in the conservation and preservation of the integrity of the environment. Isaak Walton himself was a linen draper and an author known primarily as the writer of *The Complete Angler, or the Contemplative Man’s Recreation*, published in 1653. The book was largely concerned about the concept of conservation of streams in wildlife and observing nature and the outdoors.

I had the opportunity to meet Steven Schwartz, the second vice president and conservation education chairman of the club, and he was willing to tell me more about what the Isaak Walton League does to meet its mission. On their 573-acre farm, the Isaak Walton League members do their best work to try and set an example for others. They demonstrate proper ways to manage soil, water, woodlands, fields, and wildlife. For instance, the Isaak Walton League restores old farmland and tries to aid succession by planting trees to try and accelerate the natural process. They even have a Hunter Safety Course to promote hunting as an effective wildlife resource management tool. They realize the importance of maintaining biodiversity and making sure that the population of species such as deer reflects the carrying capacity for that area, and they utilize the skill of hunting to make sure that populations are at a healthy balance in their environment. The Isaak Walton League sponsors events for members such as Appalachian Trail hikes, plant and bird identification, removal of invasive plant species, maintenance of natural trails, upholding of ponds and streams, and many more similar activities. Additionally, they work with programs such as the Global Ecology Studies Program at Poolesville High School to reach out to students, aid in their education, and to show the students the actual application of what they’re learning about in the classroom. The fact that they provide hands-on experience to people who are willing to learn, helps spread the idea of environmental friendliness. Those people can then apply their knowledge on their own properties or share with friends to help spread healthy methods in dealing with the environment.

The best way to help save the environment is to actually go out and do what the Isaak Walton League has been doing for over seventy years: making an active difference in the environment.