



SAVE OUR STREAMS

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

ADVOCACY GUIDE:



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Staff

Clean Water Program Director - Samantha Briggs

Chesapeake Monitoring Outreach Coordinator - Emily Bialowas

Save Our Streams Coordinator, Midwest - Zach Moss

Photo Credits

Front Cover: Thad Yorks

Interior: Izaak Walton League of America, Jay Butler, Michael Delaney, Stan Danielson, Karin Warren, Bill Roberts, Thad Yorks, Steve Linberg, Matt Felperin, Canva

Back Cover: Goose Creek Association

Special Thanks

Conservation Director - Jared Mott

Chesapeake Conservation Corps Fellow - Yanoua Koné

Former Save Our Streams Coordinator - Rebecca Shoer



ADVOCATING FOR CLEAN WATER

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

Our water resources, such as 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 live in with fish and wildlife but also the health of our 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 Save Our Streams 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 streams and rivers 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 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 education events. Keep an eye on potential threats to your stream, like housing or industrial developments. Most importantly, regularly monitor your stream to make sure you catch any changes in water quality early!



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 effect change. Threats from private business or landowners can include oil spills, excessive salt, 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 using smarter road salt use, you can directly contact the relevant municipal department too, like the Department of Public Works.



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 them 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 do 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!



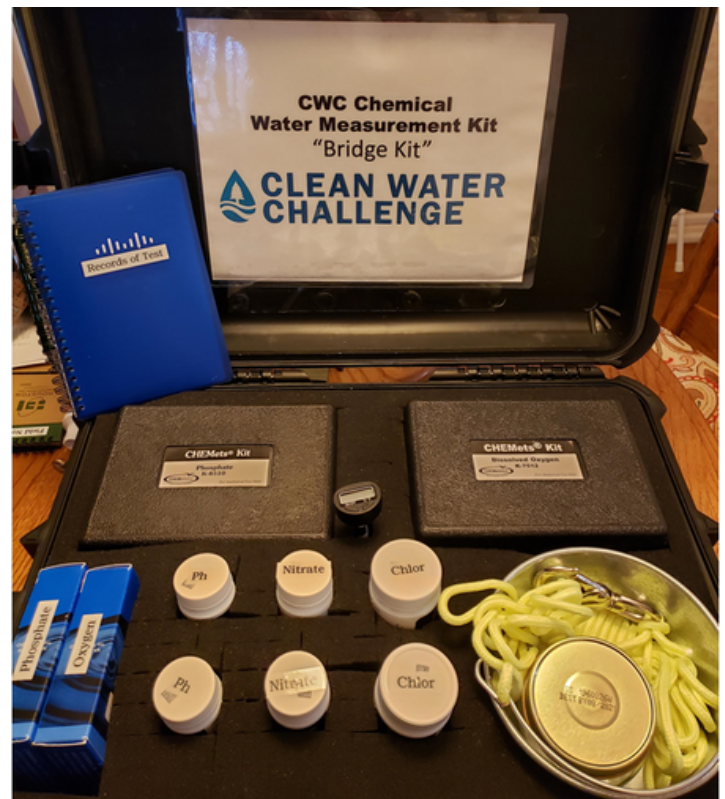
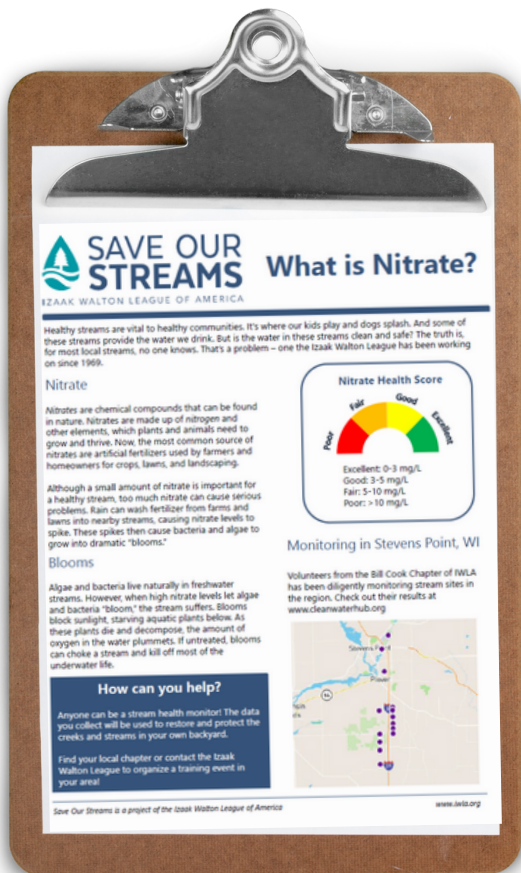
USING YOUR DATA



USING YOUR DATA

The data you collect can bolster your cause. Being transparent with your data gives you credibility - but 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 **Monitoring Best Practices** addendum 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

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 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.



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.



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 in 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 the 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 stop a salt truck, but they can sign a petition to reduce road salt use and attend public meetings.



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 Save Our Streams 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 with them why you monitor or why you care about clean water. Try to avoid making assumptions and accusations.



RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

Navigating a conversation with a private property 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 unfruitful, 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 - which will take time and energy to change.



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

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 backing of a particular issue is vital. Ensure that spreading the word and gaining allies is part of your advocacy plan! Luckily, when it comes to clean water issues, allies are easy to come by. Here are a few tips when it comes to rallying the community behind you:

- **Do your homework.** Bring proof of your concerns in the form of handouts or flyers, or post on social media.
- **Know your audience.** Make sure to frame the issue in a way that others will care about it as well. Just because you care about macroinvertebrates doesn't mean everyone will – appeal 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.



MAKING CONTACT

Taking action as a single individual or small group can seem like a daunting task - but you're not alone! Local and regional non-profits and watershed organizations are probably 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, and by sharing data and resources you can help bolster one another's cause!

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 time and 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 as well as host community events, and can provide help and guidance on local issues. Find your local chapter: <https://www.iwla.org/local-chapters>.



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!



TALKING TO POLICYMAKERS

In more developed areas, individual homeowners have less influence over water quality - it's a community-wide issue. In these instances, engaging with local decisionmakers to address nonpoint source pollution is often the most effective way to advocate for clean water.

Influencing Local Policy

How to 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.

How to 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.



TALKING TO POLICYMAKERS

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 representative.

Influencing State and Federal Policy

How to 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 your representatives themselves. To learn who represents you, and how you can contact them, check here: <https://myreps.datamade.us/>

How to advocate for your cause

There is strength in numbers. One comment or one letter about a cause from one person will not make much of an impact. Research if there are already people 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 to help in your efforts. Get a group of people 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 or senators: a vote.



TAKE ACTION WITH 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!



Changing Road Salt Use in Minnesota

Some groups can make a big difference without monitoring their waterways first. The citizen group Stop Over Salting started when the Minnesota Master Water Steward Program held a class on road salt. “When we heard about salt and the damage that it did, we started thinking about all the salt that would be put down the next winter, and we couldn’t live with ourselves.” The new group started meeting with local officials in Edina, MN to express their concerns. The city started a workgroup that advocated for changes in salt use at the city and county level, as well as with private applicators and property managers. They listened to stakeholders and discovered the challenges to salt reduction, and how ingrained salt usage is not only in the minds of the public, but in the minds of the applicators and property managers.

Stop Over Salting noticed a recurring fear of liability among road salt applicators. “Limited Liability” legislation, designed to protect applicators and building managers from slip-and-fall lawsuits, had periodically been introduced in Minnesota’s legislature. Stop Over Salting advocated for passage of this legislation for two years. Although it did not pass, their advocacy started a dialogue with officials in many cities and counties and raised public awareness about the impacts of road salt across the state. Today, they are working with these cities on ordinances for improved salt storage, clean up, and contracting with companies that use best management practices for snow and ice maintenance.



SUCCESS STORIES

Making Change for Bear Trap Creek

After years of SOS biological monitoring, the Central New York Chapter of the Izaak Walton League noticed a sudden drop of stream health scores in Bear Trap Creek. County officials were informed of the change, and it was determined to have been from de-icing chemicals from Hancock Airport. The airport was then mandated to install a multi-million dollar runoff filtration system. Beartrap Creek has since improved!

Finding Jordan's Branch Pollution Problem

Monitors in Henrico County, VA discovered troubling levels of E. coli bacteria at their stream site. They and their partners at the local Soil and Water Conservation District contacted the Public Works Department and Public Utilities to see if there were any broken sewer lines upstream. None were found, and the PWD suggested that the bacteria were coming from geese and other wildlife.

The next spring, the monitors once again discovered high levels of bacteria. They contacted the local government departments a second time, and this time PWD tracked the pollution source to a local pet daycare center that was improperly disposing of pet waste! The public utilities worked with the kennel management to educate employees and establish safe waste disposal techniques to eliminate this clean water threat.



SUCCESS STORIES

Protecting Aquatic Life in Quarter Section Run

Officials in Pam Wolter's city of Denver, Iowa hired a contractor to apply pesticide to trees in a city park and prevent the spread of the emerald ash borer. Some of these trees were growing very close to the bank of a local creek named Quarter Section Run. Pam was worried that pesticide being applied so close to the stream might make its way into Quarter Section Run.

Pam is a certified SOS monitor and previously participated in a state volunteer monitoring program, IOWATER. Looking at past IOWATER data, she found that there were once healthy populations of aquatic macroinvertebrates in that part of Quarter Section Run. She wanted to see if the population had changed, so she monitored Quarter Section Run for macroinvertebrates within and upstream of the park in 2019 and 2020. She found plenty of macroinvertebrates upstream of the park, but almost none in the park - indicating that the pesticides in the park were hurting the aquatic macroinvertebrates.

Pam created an educational report of her findings and gave a presentation to the city administrator, mayor, and city council. After educating them and sharing her data, Pam swayed the council to vote to stop the application of pesticides on those trees in the future in order to protect the aquatic life in Quarter Section Run!



Making Change with Bacteria Monitoring

Members of the Austin, Minnesota chapter of the Izaak Walton League were concerned about the presence of harmful bacteria in their local streams. They developed a bacteria monitoring project in the headwaters of the nearby Cedar River. They found high levels of E. coli, indicating that fecal matter was present in the water, though they didn't know what the source was. With support from a grant, water samples were collected and sent to a lab, and tests showed that the bacteria was coming from human waste in faulty septic systems. Through further monitoring, they were able to pinpoint problem areas in the county that were in need of septic system upgrades.

The Austin Chapter then began a campaign to engage county officials on this issue. Utilizing their data, they pushed for a change in Mower County's septic system ordinance to require upgrades to failing and outdated septic systems. Now, backed by the data they have collected and a new partnership with the county, they have begun the process of seeking and allocating funds to assist landowners and homeowners with upgrades to their septic systems.



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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www.iwla.org/water | sos@iwla.org