

Virginia Save Our Streams Coordination

A Request for Support to the Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League of America

Summary

The Izaak Walton League of America requests a contribution of \$10,000 to support the Virginia Save Our Streams program. Virginia Save Our Streams (VA SOS) engages more than 500 volunteers across Virginia in monitoring water quality of hundreds of streams. VA SOS provides valuable data to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality that allows the agency to identify and address pollution problems in a cost-effective manner. VA SOS volunteers also use their own data to prioritize sites for restoration, educate the public about pollution sources and prevention, and to evaluate the success of restoration projects. Support from the Virginia Division will allow the Izaak



Walton League to hire a highly qualified contractor to train and certify both volunteers and regional trainers. In addition, it will support League staff in continuing to promote and coordinate the program, manage the database of volunteers and of water quality information, work with agency partners, secure necessary scientific collection permits, update the quality assurance plan for the program, and seek opportunities for program expansion.

History

Virginia Save Our Streams is lauded as one of the most successful and scientifically rigorous volunteer monitoring programs in the country. It has achieved the holy grail of most volunteer monitoring programs - acceptance of the data by the state agencies responsible for water quality improvements. It serves as a model for other monitoring programs across the United States and the world. The Virginia Division should be proud of this legacy, as the program was initiated by Virginia Izaak Walton League members in the mid-1990s and was directly managed by a Virginia chapter and supported by the Virginia Division through late 2010.

At the request of Virginia members, the Izaak Walton League's national Clean Water Program took over management of VA SOS in late 2010. At the time, the program had been without a statewide coordinator for two years. A strong network of regional coordinators was keeping the program going, but it was struggling to keep up with the requests for training and support from new groups interested in monitoring training and services to program volunteers were dwindling. Since that time, the League's national staff have been able to bring in new sources of funding, staff time, contractual support, and expertise to support and expand the program. Volunteers are pleased with the level of support they have been receiving. Trainings are scheduled as requested, volunteers receive their certificates and wallet cards on time, a more user-friendly website has been launched, new training videos are available on-line at www.vasos.org, data are made available to the public more quickly than ever before, and there has been renewed interest among IWLA chapters in participating in the program.

The program is currently at a crossroads. Support from traditional sources, such as the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, is decreasing and regional trainers who have volunteered for the program for nearly two decades are retiring. We need to step up support of the program in

order to maintain it at current levels, let alone continue to meet demand for expansion. Support from the Virginia Division will close the gap in other funding and allow us to provide the support the program needs at a time when there are many exciting opportunities on the horizon.

Exciting Opportunities for Virginia Save Our Streams in 2015 and Beyond

- League chapter involvement in VA SOS is growing rapidly. Members from the Christiansburg-Montgomery Chapter and Roanoke Valley Chapter were trained over the summer as new VA SOS monitors. Members from Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter and Loudoun County Chapter also have expressed interest in additional training and we are working with them to select training dates in the coming months.
- The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality is poised to accept VA SOS data at an even higher level than ever before. Currently, VA SOS data are considered Level II, which means that data can be used for reports to Congress on water quality, for watershed management purposes, and to identify waters that require further testing by DEQ staff to determine whether they are impaired. However, the League is working with DEQ to conduct a side-by-side study of VA SOS and VA DEQ methods to prove that our volunteers can collect accurate data and that our VA SOS protocol can accurately identify impaired waters. We are gearing up for that study in 2016 and hope to have VA SOS data accepted at the highest level - Level III - following that study.
- The League and its VA SOS program are engaged in an exciting new project to incorporate volunteer data and other sources of water quality information into the database used by the Chesapeake Bay Program to better target restoration efforts and track progress of restoration under the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The League is working with Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Chesapeake Bay Program, and several other partners on a 6-year project that will identify volunteer groups and other sources of data, develop a quality assurance system to allow this data to be used by the Bay Program, and recruit and train additional volunteers as needed to ensure the Bay Program has adequate information to track and target restoration efforts. The League is in the process of hiring a Chesapeake Bay Monitoring Coordinator to manage this effort, and that person can direct some time toward Virginia Save Our Streams management as needed, especially if we have some additional VA SOS program funding to supplement the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant funds that are allowing us to hire the new position.
- Interest in the League's Creek Freaks environmental education program is growing in Virginia. Creek Freaks is a nationwide program that empowers children in grades 4-8 to become experts in local streams through a hands-on stream ecology curriculum and direct experience with biological, chemical, and physical water quality monitoring. The League has funding and staff available to provide Creek Freaks trainings as requested in Virginia and can also direct some of these resources towards supporting, training, and equipping VA SOS volunteers who can assist teachers and non-formal educators with engaging students in biological monitoring and data analysis.

