

Angler Activist: Kenneth Reid, the Izaak Walton League, and the Crusade for Federal Water Pollution Control

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The whole theory and practice of pollution is one evasion of responsibility. It involves also a flagrant disregard for the rights of others and is in every sense an improper and unsocial practice.¹

Kenneth Reid

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is not generally associated with environmental activism, but the state has actually made enormous contributions to the structure of American environmental policy and attitudes. In the 1930s and 1940s, national debates over the role of the United States government in water quality issues focused on Pennsylvania problems. Pennsylvania native Kenneth Reid, the vigorous leader of the Izaak Walton League of America, advocated a shift from local to national pollution authority—a shift that has sparked debate across the country for the balance of the century.

The Izaak Walton League, a national sportsman's club with many Pennsylvania chapters, alerted its members and the public to the destructive power of water pollution and agitated for solutions. Reid served as the organization's voice, promoting national pollution control. As editor and foremost writer for the League and other conservationist publications, Reid generated broad and influential grassroots support for federal authority and pollution abatement programs. In addition to his writing, Reid served on state water pollution boards, organized national pollution conferences, was among the first to use radio for resource issue discussions, and clashed with the country's highest political leadership over policy. Although he is not recognized as a prominent environmental activist—his declining health and death in 1956 prevented him from assuming the role of an environmental elder statesman during the 1960s and 1970s—Reid is nonetheless a person worthy of recognition in Pennsylvania as well as in the nation's conservation history.

Kenneth Alexander Reid encountered the destructiveness of stream pollution early in life. Born in 1895 at Connellsville, Reid grew up fishing along the Youghiogheny River and its tributaries. He witnessed first-hand the destruction of several area streams, especially on the Indian Creek drainage where acidic water from local coal mines ruined one of the state's most pristine recreation areas. After graduating from Yale (1917) and serving in the army air-corps as a gunnery pilot, Reid operated an auto-supply business in Fort Worth,

Texas, where he organized an Izaak Walton League chapter. In 1930, he returned to Connellsville and entered the family business that manufactured and sold mine pumps and supplies. There he formed a local League chapter and began participating in clean streams activities, which "did not mix too well" with the family business.²

Reid began his political conservation activities in 1930 by successfully appealing to the West Virginia Public Service Commission to stop power development at Black Water Falls and Gorge and the proposed damming of the Upper Cheat River. In the early 1930s, he enlisted in the Izaak Walton League's national management and rose quickly in the organization's ranks. He was elected national director in 1936 and general manager in 1938. In addition, he became involved in state resource politics when Governor Gifford Pinchot appointed Reid to the Pennsylvania Fish Commission. As Fish Commissioner he played an important role in the passage of Pennsylvania's 1937 Pure Streams legislation.³

Reid's environmental awareness, energy, and great communication skills fit well with the Walton League, an organization already devoted to water issues. Although conservation groups existed prior to the era and articulated differing views of Progressive conservation, in the 1920s their focus of concern was primarily local, not national. The Sierra Club, for instance, founded in 1892, advocated the creation of national parks and wildlife refuges, but focused its attention on the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. The first group to address the problems of pollution on a national scale was the Izaak Walton League of America. The group's existence and interests represented the shifting social and economic currents in American society.

The organization was named after the seventeenth-century English philosopher and writer whose work, *The Compleat Angler, or The Contemplative Man's Recreation*, is considered one of the most famous pastorals in the language. Formed in 1922, the League brought together angler and hunter groups from around the country into a central organization that reflected the nation's growing interest in outdoor recreation. By 1927, the Waltons maintained 2,900 local chapters with nearly 200,000 members, mostly consisting of business and professional men.⁴

The Waltons' interests presented a combination of preservationist and conservationist ideals. The organization emerged in an era that placed greater value on hunting and fishing as recreation rather than a food source. Between 1910 and 1920, for example, the number of licensed "sportsmen" in the country doubled from six to twelve million. This expansion corresponds with the growing affluence of the country, the beginning of a shorter work week and paid vacations, the personal mobility furnished by the mass production of the automobiles, and the yearnings of a growing urban population for outdoor recreation beyond the cities.⁵

Outdoor recreation became big business during the period. An industry emerged devoted to hunting and fishing that also became a focus of government regulation. States had established fish and game commissions as early as the late nineteenth century to manage wildlife resources, control vermin, and establish hunting and fishing bag limits in order to guarantee wildlife populations. State legislatures passed hunting and fishing licensing acts to fund such departments. In 1913 Pennsylvania became one of the first states to enact such a regulation with passage of the Residential Hunters' License Act. Sportsmen's clubs formed at this time to share outdoor pursuits and promote their interests.

Habitat protection and maintenance of species populations represented the initial concern of these groups. Sportsmen worked for preservation of certain recreation areas, but employed multiple-use arguments in the articulation of proposals. For example, they did not reject wood harvesting in National Forests as long as the production was accomplished in such a way as not to destroy fisheries or hunting grounds. In this regard, most sportsmen adopted a more "conservationist" or "multi-use" approach to environmental issues along the lines established by one time United States Forest Service Chief and Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot and his good friend, the country's most famous sportsman/conservationist, Theodore Roosevelt.

Water pollution as a threat to fisheries came under early scrutiny of wildlife-conservationists. In 1901, Major W. Austin Wadsworth, President of the Boone and Crockett Club and head of the New York Forest, Fish, and Game Commission, identified industrial water pollution abatement as a pressing matter not only to the nation's public health, but to natural health as well. Wadsworth wrote:

It is not necessary to destroy or hamper any industry in order to prevent the pollution of water courses. What is really needed is to check the criminal selfishness of those who would rather poison their fellow citizens with their offal than to spend a few dollars to take care of it.⁶

State governments responded to questions regarding water pollution and fisheries by passing legislation designed to protect recreational waters. In 1917 Pennsylvania revised its first water pollution act of 1905 with an amendment designed to protect fisheries. It stated:

No person shall allow any substance of any kind or character, deleterious, destructive, or poisonous to fish, to run or flow into any waters within this Commonwealth, unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Fisheries, or to the proper court,

that every reasonable and practicable means has been used to abate and prevent same. Penalty for violation is one hundred dollars.⁷

Though laws like Pennsylvania's existed in several states, all included exceptions or loopholes that prevented strict enforcement. Pennsylvania exempted coal mines from such regulations on the grounds that no satisfactory method existed to control acidic discharges from entering streams.⁸ Pennsylvania coal mines also received protection from regulations provided by the common law precedents of a 1886 state Supreme Court decision that guaranteed the mines the right to extract coal as a "natural use and enjoyment of property," even if that meant the pollution of streams. In *Pennsylvania Coal Company v. Sanderson and Wife*, the state high court recognized mining pollution as a nuisance, but allowed it as an economic trade off: "the trifling inconveniences to particular persons must give way to necessities of a great community." The decision reflected the ideology of the day that embraced industrial productivity and growth. The Sanderson decree directly influenced state water quality statutes such as Pennsylvania's 1905 Purity of Waters Act, which specifically exempted coal mine discharges from regulatory control.⁹ However, allowing the free use of the state's streams for industrial waste sinks created a multitude of health and economic problems. Twenty-five years following the Sanderson case, another Pennsylvania justice remarked that the decision's broader consequences had "resulted in the pollution of nearly every stream in the western end of the state, and it has become a serious problem how to obtain pure water sufficient to supply the inhabitants."¹⁰

These decisions facilitated industrial growth, but at the same time introduced enormous levels of pollutants into the state's streams. By 1920, for instance, the United States Public Health Service estimated that between two and three million tons of sulfuric acid from coal mines entered the Ohio River at Pittsburgh every year. Acidic water cost municipal and industrial water users nearly ten million dollars a year. Damages included destruction of pipes, pumps, boilers, domestic appliances, clothing, and imparted a "decidedly acid taste to the flavor of food." Mine drainage along with a multitude of other industrial pollutants devastated water recreation, especially fishing.

The national importance of Pennsylvania's industrial might, combined with the desire for outdoor recreation, made the environmental destruction of the state's water resources a perfect focus for national reform. The coalescence of economic interests and environmental concern created lasting dilemmas. Though state political leaders, like Pinchot, attempted to find a delicate solution which might balance the economy and protect water users, few practical answers emerged. Failure to institute successful statute policy motivated the Waltons to push for national legislation.¹¹

Though water pollution became a topic of concern for most outdoor groups, it became a hallmark of the Izaak Walton League. The League's founder, William H. Dilg, was a successful Chicago advertising executive, who, in the early 1920s, championed the federal purchase of the Upper Mississippi Wild Life Refuge, primarily in northern Minnesota. According to William T. Hornaday, conservation writer and turn-of-the-century wilderness advocate, Dilg was the "John the Baptist" and "Billy Sunday" of wildlife issues. In January 1922, Dilg began consolidating various local sportsmen's clubs and created new ones across the country in a central organization that would address common concerns. Chief among these were the restoration of fish and wildlife resources and the promotion of clean water programs. In March of that year, the newly formed Izaak Walton League opened a Chicago office and hired agents to organize chapters throughout the United States. Within five years, Walton chapters existed in 43 states.¹²

In the League's first year it addressed stream pollution as the "most important problem" threatening the American people. The lead article in Volume One of the organization's newsletter (later the magazine, *Outdoor America*) exhorted the membership to "call a halt" to the destruction of the nation's streams and woods. In an ardent appeal, editor Emerson Hough scolded federal and state resource departments as "agenc[ies] of destruction, and devoted to commercial gain," that had led the nation to "ruin and despair." Citing the unquestioning selfishness of commerce, government, and for the most part, sportsmen, Hough offered a prayer to stop the environmental devastation stemming from human behavior:

Spirit of the Great Angler; all spirits of patriots and gentle men look down upon us and have pity upon us! We are weak. Give us of your calm and serene strength, your eternal youth, your cleanliness of soul, your lofty aristocracy of thought. Help us set aside material motives. Help us work out the great miracle, in a land now almost beyond the aid even of miracles.¹³

With that appeal the Waltons, using the motto "Defenders of Woods, Waters, and Wildlife," established an unrelenting campaign to influence state and federal governments to solve the nation's water pollution problems.

In 1927, the League sponsored a national pollution survey, using local chapters as research bases. The survey received initial encouragement from a most unlikely source, President Calvin Coolidge. A member of the League's Executive Committee had approached Coolidge in the 1920s and asked that he sponsor a comprehensive federal inquiry. Coolidge apparently told the official to "do it yourself." The League did.¹⁴

The survey accumulated various types of data on a number of pollution problems. This included the names of rivers and sources of contamination, but much of that research simply restated the work of state and federal health agencies. The League also began tracking and influencing pending legislation in the states and in Congress by marshaling the membership into action. Through a well-developed legislative news service, information and opinions helped enlighten the membership and encouraged letters and telegraphs to appropriate representatives.¹⁵

Outdoor America, the League's primary information source, carried articles relevant not only to recreation, but to water pollution. Subjects included the impact from various pollutants, current theories on pollution abatement, the legal and political aspects of pollution, and the police power under current law. Industrial selfishness and inept government were consistent *Outdoor America* themes. The editors and authors praised industries that "have seen the light" and made an effort at treatment, and chastised others that had "not turned . . . heart and soul toward an honest attempt to solve its waste problems."¹⁶

A frequent topic of editorial and research interest concerned the damage inflicted by coal mine drainage. In the 1920s, Pennsylvania licensed more hunters and fishermen than any other state and maintained several chapters of the Walton League. Since coal mining took place in rural areas and subjected fishing streams to acidic discharges, producing large kills, local chapters considered the problem of major importance. In the 1920s, the League began tracking state attempts to deal with the problem and maintained a key interest in a lawsuit involving acid drainage contamination of a water supply owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad, a major polluter itself. The case pitted polluter vs. polluter when the railroad sought legal protection from the discharges of thirty small mines located above one of its reservoirs. The decision in *Pennsylvania R. R. v. Sagamore Coal Co. et al.*, (1924) favored the Railroad and forced the state to take a more active role in water pollution issues. The lawsuit involving the Indian Creek Reservoir near Connellsville represented for the Waltons a crucial action and turning point for the propagation of effective state water policy.¹⁷

As concerned as the League was for the preservation of fishing streams, it had the political savvy not to address pollution purely as a recreational issue. Couching arguments in public health terms gained the serious attention of government policy makers. This was only one half of a tricky balancing act. The executives of the Izaak Walton League needed to address the primary interest of the membership, hunting and fishing. Since many members worked for industrial interests, this meant avoiding positions that seemed too economically threatening. Yet, promoting pollution abatement as a means to safeguard good trout fishing seemed superfluous to the economic needs of the

nation. By demonstrating public health concerns with wildlife preservation, the League addressed human needs in both the built and natural environments.

Beyond its written appeals to the membership, the League also sponsored a series of national conferences centered on the topic of stream pollution. Among the speakers, representatives of the federal government, most often from the United States Public Health Service (PHS) or Bureau of Mines, informed the gatherings of the ongoing work of the federal government. High-ranking PHS officials, including the Surgeon General, recognized the Walton League as an "organization of considerable influence." While the group was not powerful enough to lobby decisive legislation successfully through Congress in the 1920s, it did have the force to compel greater federal appropriations for research investigations. Needless to say, the agencies involved took the activities of the Izaak Walton League very seriously. State health departments also received similar pressure and revenue enhancements because of the local pressure of the League. The Waltons, therefore, involved government to a large degree and built a base for future environmental activism.¹⁸

The League did claim involvement in one early legislative success. The 1924 Oil Pollution Control Act had received a strong Waltonian endorsement. The editors of *Outdoor America* cited the act as a real political achievement for conservation, though the legislation only applied to coastal waters. They also praised Secretary of War John W. Weeks for his support of the legislation, despite his department's refusal to include acid drainage in the bill.¹⁹

Political figures drew upon the League as part of their power base. Pennsylvania Attorney General and later Governor, James Duff, enjoyed great support from local chapters as well as from the national organization. Duff contributed several articles to *Outdoor America* where he detailed Pennsylvania's pollution dilemmas. A United States Senator from Connecticut, Augustine Lonergan also benefited from relations with the Waltons. In the 1930s Lonergan was a principal architect of several federal water pollution control measures. In 1936, *Outdoor America* praised Lonergan: "Thank God we have gained a leader in the congressional halls like Senator Lonergan to fight for the cause we know is right."²⁰

Kenneth Reid was a natural fit into the Walton agenda. An avid fly-fisherman, he spoke with great conviction for wildlife and environmental protection. Like other noted outdoor writers of the day, Reid considered himself a conservationist, but objected to government and business preoccupation with resource development. In *Water-The Orphan Step-Child of Conservation*, Reid challenged conservationist notions of "wise use" and "the greatest good for the greatest number," as being pretexts for wasteful economic expansion. Development, as in the case with dam construction, made use of a natural

resource, but government conservation policy devoted little attention to preserving or protecting water quality after its use for irrigation or power generation.²¹ He complained about the enormous federal expenditures for hydroelectric and reclamation projects and the relatively small amount spent on pollution abatement. He chided the Federal Power Administration and Corps of Engineers as extensions of corporate America, willing to sell off the nation's resources and heritage. The "government," he wrote in 1947:

has contracted from private power companies of the past that dangerous waterborne disease of 'hydormania' which see in a running stream only so many kilowatt-hours, or 'reclmania' which blinds those afflicted to all values except acre-feet of water for irrigation, or 'navigamania' which similarly sees only a potential avenue for boats.²²

Reid believed that conservationist notions applied to pollution could protect water resources for variety of uses and it made economic sense to do so.

Working on the state level convinced Reid that federal control over stream pollution was the only viable answer. His experience in Pennsylvania state government as a member of the Fish Commission offered a frustrating experience. Industry's economic power and political influence not only blocked pollution abatement programs, but aggravated the situation. He stated that the Pennsylvania regulations had met with subterfuge from industrial interests, creating an endless round of debate and pointless investigations. Recognizing the economic interests of individual states and the competition between the states for industry as the fundamental roadblock to local pollution reform, he argued for federal jurisdiction on the grounds "it eliminates this competitive disadvantage." A state that would pass effective legislation created an economic disadvantage for its own industries in comparison with neighboring states that did not. Federal jurisdiction would create a level playing field. Pennsylvania's attempts to find a balance, according to Reid, always resulted in a shortsighted pro-industry stance to protect jobs and corporate profits.²³

Reid's ire was directed especially at government agencies, both state and federal, responsible for pollution control: "A study is all they recommended—nothing beyond that." Pollution studies presented the problems in sufficient detail, but also served as a means to defer action. It meant that government was responding to public concern, validating the obvious, but failing to enhance the quality of life, and, often times, acting in a deliberately careless manner to shirk its duty to promote clean streams. Specific criticism was directed at the PHS, who had a "fine time for years, studying and investigating this problem, piling up voluminous records." But if the Service attempted any "virile" approach, they backed down for fear of "offending somebody." Pollu-

tion investigators "seem[ed] more bureau-minded than action-conscious." Reid recognized the need for information, but, by the mid-1930s, investigations produced nothing but more investigations:

If there is anything in the world that has been investigated to death it is the subject of water pollution. I am opposed to any proposals for appropriations for more investigation because the motive behind them is not sincere. It is really just another way to delay the thing, and that is just what the opponents want.²⁴

The only effective solution was national regulation enforced by a determined agency.

Reid's criticisms were not taken lightly. Able Wolman, the renowned twentieth-century sanitarian, clashed repeatedly with Reid over the merit of federal vs. state authority. During the 1930s, President of the American Public Health Association Wolman also served as Chairman of the National Resources Board's Water Resource Committee, the group charged with making national pollution investigations and recommendations. The Committee's multi-year national study produced the report, *Water Pollution in the United States* (1939) and identified stream pollution as a growing menace to the entire nation, noting particular dangers in the industrial Northeast.

The report advised an expanded federal role, making the national government a cooperative party with the states in an advisory capacity through financial support for local programs and interstate compacts for regional problems. *Water Pollution* mirrored Wolman's strong concern for water quality, but also his conservative approach that adhered to "pollution abatement as a function best performed by the state and interstate agencies." Water pollution problems were the responsibility of a given community and required the attention of local authorities. In 1939, Wolman told Congress:

Regulation appears to be, on the surface, a simple, device for curing all the problems of the United States. We do not share that view. Progress has been great without it. The state governments do exist and we feel should continue to play this [pollution abatement] game.²⁵

Wolman and Reid disputed the worth of federal authority, yet both pursued the same goal—clean streams. Both judged that municipalities and industry shared the community obligation of waste treatment to ensure public safety. Wolman agreed with Reid that problems in some regions had received little attention. Nonetheless, for Wolman a shift to federal enforcement would not ameliorate problems; it liberated weak leadership. Wolman recognized

that some leaders, faced with economic pressure from industry and voter hostility, welcomed the "opportunity to allow some other official to perform the difficult task of forcing the installation of treatment works."²⁶ With federal regulations, any inconvenience suffered could, of course, be blamed on Washington.

To Reid and other proponents of federal pollution control, existing policies that rested on state authority did not work. The grim condition of the nation's waterways as described by such federally directed research affirmed this judgment. The complexity of the problem and the power of industrial interests prevented state regulations from developing effective policy. Only by centralizing authority, the argument followed, could the respective states and nation hope to solve a growing national dilemma. In the same 1939 Congressional hearings concerning pending federal legislation, Reid testified that:

It is idle to contend, as so many of the apologist[s] for pollution do, that existing agencies and present laws are entirely adequate, because present conditions are the result of existing authority—or lack of it. The disgracefully polluted conditions of our streams throughout the land stands as mute evidence of the utter breakdown and failure of the present alleged system for their protection.²⁷

The "apologist for pollution" was an allusion to Abel Wolman.

According to Reid, interstate compacts supported by Wolman to manage common pollution problems, such as the Ohio River Valley Interstate Compact, comprising principally Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, only led to endless negotiations and legislative debates on top of investigative analysis.²⁸ Yet, even if ratified, interstate laws would suffer from the same economic pressures to prevent enforcement. Reid predicted that by the time interstate compacts would actually provide some constructive result, "you and I may have long white whiskers and be drinking water imported water from Canada."²⁹

Reid's criticism of government and industry provoked vocal reactions. In the 1930s, as Pennsylvania and the federal government came under the Waltons' pressure, a noteworthy tension emerged. The group's and Reid's position that state and federal agencies were mere extensions of American business produced a profound conflict, especially with corporate and political leaders in his home state.³⁰ Corporate interests scorned the conservation group's editorializing and political actions, despite the fact that the core Izaak Walton League membership came from the corporate class. As Congress debated pollution questions in the 1930s, industry and conservationists took sides in a battle that still rages. In 1938, Robert M. Searls, attorney for the American

Mining Congress, criticized the conservation groups in a manner consistent with industrial spokespersons of a half century later. He characterized the Waltons and Reid as:

a formidable array of proponents, many fanatical in their opposition, well financed, and with ample opportunities for publicity, with which industry has to contend.³¹

Despite the criticism and frustrations to achieve the desired goals, the Izaak Walton League and Kenneth Reid persisted in different pollution initiatives. Pursuing federal control and its perceived benefits represented their ultimate goal. Lobbying Congress, state legislatures like Pennsylvania's, and promoting pollution abatement programs across a broad front consumed massive time and energy.

Efforts to obtain federal authority required proving its value. Raising support among the Walton League membership as well as a critical mass of the public required the leader to approach the subject in different ways. In 1934, Reid and the Walton League arranged a Washington pollution conference with the assistance of Secretary of War George H. Dern and Connecticut Senator Augustine Lonergan. Lonergan long had favored federal pollution activities and enjoyed support from the Waltons. He later introduced federal legislation along the lines promoted by the group. At the so-called Dern-Lonergan conference "opponents of pollution" from across the country spoke, but it was criticized by business because "not a single representative of industry was present or even invited."³²

The testimony and proposals heard at Dern-Lonergan served as the basis of the strongest pollution control proposal submitted to Congress up to that time. Though Secretary Dern did not endorse the plan, Senator Lonergan, citing a "National Emergency," proposed Senate Bill 3958, known as the Water Pollution Control Act. Lonergan's proposal directed the National Resources Committee to take charge of overall management of the nation's pollution problems by forming a board required to "devote their whole time to this pollution subject."³³

The bill continued the existing research activities of various federal agencies, encouraged the development of uniform state laws, and mandated the formation of compacts between the states. Under National Resource guidelines, sanitary water districts would be formed on a watershed basis, and not under the control of "arbitrary, political-made boundaries" such as state lines. The bill provided federal appropriations for the continuation of sewerage treatment facilities and other public works projects then operating under the New Deal. But its real distinction was the introduction of federal enforcement powers. It declared the discharge of any waste into "any of the navigable waters of

the United States . . . in violation of the public policy of the United States. An action to prevent or abate any such nuisance may be brought in the name of the United States by any United States Attorney."³⁴

Congress debated the provisions of this and subsequent bills for the remainder of the decade. It passed a diluted water pollution control measure in 1939 that provided for continued research assistance and grants-and-aid to states, but it was vetoed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The President disapproved of a provision of the law that administrated disbursement of grant money through the PHS, avoiding normal budget procedures. The law included federal enforcement powers, but only at state request. By 1940, foreign affairs and wartime production so occupied Congress and the President that pollution control legislation—essentially a word-for-word restatement of the 1939 bill—only came into law in 1948 as the Water Pollution Control Act.³⁵

Even then, Congress compromised the original Loneragan bill under pressure from business and state health authorities, who defended their authority on the basis of state rights. Pollution legislation involved the national government in a prolonged debate, but despite compromises, the federal government assumed a greater role in the environmental and public health concerns of the nation through larger appropriations to pertinent agencies. This was the result of decades of congressional contemplation, the strength of the growing power of political interests such as the Izaak Walton League, and the changing sentiment of the country.³⁶

Lobbying for federal water legislation was the primary aim of the Walton League and Reid during the 1930s. They approached the ultimate goal by supporting a number of important ancillary issues and programs. The Walton League championed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Federal Mine Sealing project. Both programs functioned under the guise of New Deal work relief. The CCC introduced more than two million young men, especially urbanites, to the American countryside. Located mostly in western states and houses in military style camps, the men built Forest Service cabins, mountain trails, and campgrounds, dug firebreaks, cleaned streams, and worked on a host of other conservation projects. The program proved to be beneficial as a work relief measure and as a means of improving access to the country's outdoors recreation areas. Of all the New Deal endeavors, the CCC is generally considered a success story.³⁷

Support of varying conservation programs broadened the Walton League's and Reid's interests beyond pollution control. Although it remained the principal issue, the task then became one of combining New Deal work relief with pollution abatement strategies. The sealing of abandoned coal mines provided a perfect context for integrating such programs into larger federally guided conservation and public works ventures.

The Social Security Act of 1935 carried provisions to encourage state health agencies with financial aid and technical expertise. This made the national government into a more active participant in water pollution control programs. Federal funds allocated through the Social Security Act financed construction projects of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA). The WPA, for example, supplied funds for the construction of two million sanitary privies between 1935-1940. PWA funds constructed nearly 2,500 sewage systems and treatment plants at a cost of close to \$800 million. These projects, like other New Deal programs, embraced many objectives. Aside from improving health, the projects provided employment.³⁸ Such actions represented a major change in federal involvement, but the government continued its long-standing policy of allowing state control of programs whenever possible. Financial aid produced the physical construction of plant and equipment, but the government also compelled state governments to bolster state health agencies and pollution abatement activities.

The first federally-sponsored industrial pollution abatement program, the sealing of abandoned coal mines, illustrated this point. Like many social welfare programs, it resulted from years of previous investigation by the federal government in conjunction with state authorities. Sealing abandoned coal mines to abate acid water pollution had been considered since at least the early 1920s. Prior to that, sealing had been used for other purposes such as sealing shafts and other openings as a safety measure. Bulkheads also served as underground dams to harness mine water and prevent it from flooding working areas; it also helped pumping systems by forming reservoirs. Efforts to extinguish mine fires also included sealing as well as attempts to block the infiltration of mine gases. Sealing coal mines to prevent the creation of sulfuric compounds and the entry and/or the release of contaminated water offered a tempting solution to an acute pollution problem.³⁹

As a pollution control measure, mine sealing emerged briefly as a topic of debate in the 1921 Congressional water pollution hearings. Mining corporations had been pressured for three decades into alleviating their discharges, and sealing offered a method of pollution control with "some hope." It was especially attractive if paid for by government, therefore not raising production costs significantly.⁴⁰

Water officials in the Ohio Valley states believed mine sealing an effective solution to the pollution problem, but did not want to, or could not finance such an undertaking. The per-mine cost was normally small, but thousands of abandoned mines and exposed outcroppings represented a major appropriation. In addition, individual states hesitated to launch projects on the grounds that if other states did not follow suit, overall benefits were limited and funds wasted.

Kenneth Reid regarded mine sealing as a "long awaited dream." When President Roosevelt announced his "New Deal," Reid pursued the program by building a diverse Washington lobbying coalition. Reid gained support from other national sportsmen's groups including the American Game Association and American Fisheries Society as well as local conservation clubs. In nearly one hundred radio broadcasts, he informed and appealed to the public's water concerns. Through an avalanche of correspondence, he requested support from the President, federal and state administrators, congressmen, governors, state representatives, and community and business leaders. For instance, with Reid's encouragement the Morgantown, West Virginia, Business Association wrote Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes urging his support. Forney Wade, Association President, wrote "[w]e feel sure you are aware of the great advantages of such public expenditures." For the business groups, as with "several of the larger real estate companies in Pittsburgh," the proposal was both a means to improve local water conditions and a worthwhile work relief project.⁴¹

The grassroots campaign assembled numerous civic organizations to whom Reid addressed the benefits of mine sealing for their local communities. Regional newspapers endorsed the program to control pollution as a measure to ease unemployment. As *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph* noted in an October, 1933, editorial, mine sealing:

best of all, provides a way of giving relief from an intolerable condition without interfering with our important coal mining industry. Indeed the coal operators should welcome it because it would tend to put an end to the reproach that is now being heaped upon them as stream polluters.⁴²

R. D. Leitch, United States Bureau of Mines associate chemical engineer and leading agency advocate of the program, warned Reid to present mine sealing as a multi-purpose program, not one for recreational purposes. In a 1933 inter-office memo regarding Reid's activities, Leitch informed his superiors that:

I asked Mr. Reid twice not to limit arguments for its possible improvements in fishing. In reality, that is a secondary consideration however dear it may be to many people. This is an economically sound and profitable investment for improving water treatment for both industrial and domestic use of a permanent nature, and a means of relieving unemployment. If it also brings fish back that is simply an additional good result.⁴³

Following this advice, Reid gathered the support of state health officials, local chambers of commerce, and industry. He also won the support of several major coal companies including H. C. Frick, Buckeye, and Pittsburgh Coal.⁴⁴

The federal bureaucracy took several months to evaluate the proposal. In that time, several proponents of the measure became increasingly frustrated. Reid wrote a number of stinging letters to federal administrators and President Roosevelt, complaining of government bureaucrats and lack of action. Leitch, in another letter to his Department of Commerce superiors, informed the agency of Reid's enthusiasm for the project and his ability to marshall political pressure from a variety of interest groups. Leitch wrote:

He is so widely and favorably known through his writings and personal acquaintances as a sportsman and conservationist and confidence in the success of sealing as claimed appears to be so generally established that, first, an unusual number of persons are or will be behind the movement and second, if favorable action is not obtained, a virtual storm of protest will result, I believe, at least from within the States of Pennsylvania and West Virginia.⁴⁵

Reid made use of current environmental conditions to support his claims. In the summer of 1933, drought conditions produced an all-time high acidity in the region's water supplies. Municipal filtration plants used more neutralizing chemicals than at any time in history. The press responded with a flurry of editorials detailing the damage of mine drainage and supporting the sealing program.⁴⁶

In November, Reid convinced Pennsylvania Governor Pinchot to pressure Washington into holding a public hearing on the sealing project. Representatives of all the states in the Ohio River watershed agreed to attend and champion the program. The *Courier* of Connellsville, Pennsylvania (Reid's residence) published the original press release on the hearing and transmitted it to other regional papers. The *Courier* described the hearing as the "biggest step yet taken in securing recognition of the importance of sealing abandoned mines. . . . and one of the most important steps ever planned for the purification of streams."⁴⁷

But the hearing never took place. The threat of a public hearing involving representatives from major industrial states along with the other pressures were effective enough to force the approval of the program without it. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) granted \$1.5 million for the project. In a confusing bureaucratic scheme, the program was assigned through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The PHS was designated project administrator, not the Bureau of Mines as requested. Evidently, the NRA determined that this was a

rural sanitation program best put under the PHS as a PWA program. The appropriation covered work mostly in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, but included other coal-producing states: Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, and Virginia. The Bureau of Mines, at the request of the PHS, supplied advisory personnel as well as laboratory and office space for a sealing headquarters at its Pittsburgh Station.⁴⁸

Pennsylvania sealed the first mine under the program—an abandoned mine on Plum Creek near Universal, which had polluted the Allegheny River. Overall, several hundred unemployed miners in western Pennsylvania and other states received temporary work relief, although the number of mines sealed is uncertain.⁴⁹ This initial sealing program lasted only a few months. The CWA budget carried a specific time limit, ending in spring, 1934. Frustrated, Reid agitated for a renewed sealing program.

In September 1935, the WPA allocated funds for further mine sealing. Before then, several of the states financed a few projects as part of county relief measures. Local chapters of the Walton League and other sportsmen groups surveyed the coal country for sealing sites, and in some cases worked on mine openings to prove the desirability of continued funding. Between its initial funding and program termination in June 1938, the WPA disbursed \$5,495,000 for mine sealing with approximately 90 per cent charged as labor costs.⁵⁰

Sealing temporarily produced the desired effect; acid production dropped in all areas. As an abatement program it was viewed at the time as an unqualified success and a good example of the positive benefits from federal involvement in local issues. Unfortunately, mine sealing did not work over the long-term. Other than providing work relief, it led to no benefit with regard to pollution abatement. A combination of natural forces and human interactions doomed the program. Drift mines are essentially subsurface holes in the ground. As ground settled and came under atmospheric and water pressure, the seals broke and released more acid. Also, people looking for coal found the sites and opened them—often the same men who sealed them.

Despite this failure, mine sealing had a lasting political value as a political touchstone for further federal measures. Reid's lobbying, combined with his knack for building public and bureaucratic support, pushed the measure through a variety of barriers. Reid created a model for environmentalist programs in the post-war years. He laid the groundwork for more energetic federal involvement of later decades.

But World War II first intervened. It set back Kenneth Reid's crusade for expanded federal programs on several fronts. America's engagement in the global conflict relegated pollution to an inferior political and economic consideration. Massive industrial demands for war materials pushed manufacturing to extreme levels of production. With it poured an equally massive volume

of waste. Reid feared that once the war was won, the destruction of the nation's resources would produce an environmental nightmare. Again, he wrote articles, lobbied Congress and high ranking government officials, such as Harold Ickes, and generally promoted expanded federal authority over the nation's water.⁵¹ His efforts bore fruit with the passage of the Water Pollution Control Act of 1948, based on the pre-war legislation and still the basis of current federal water pollution control statutes.

Reid's health began to decline in the post-war years, sapping his strength and reducing his involvement in fighting pollution. In the years before his death, he continued the battle in limited fashion while enjoying his love of fly-fishing—a true Walton till the end. Kenneth Reid died at Connellsville in 1956.

* * * *

Kenneth Reid's life's work as a "defender of woods, waters, and wildlife" represents a focal point of a more broad-based concern for the condition of the American landscape. A century of industrial expansion had produced enormous wealth at huge environmental costs. The Izaak Walton League, though an organization devoted to recreation, came to represent a growing number of Americans questioning the long-term value of destructive industrial processes. Yet, at the same time, those same individuals—like the Walton membership—depended on industry for their way of life. The Walton membership, composed of businessmen and professionals in leadership positions, certainly did not think with one mind regarding the environmental dilemma. Most members might be described as "conservationists" who believed that technical solutions could be achieved with the proper commitment. They may have agreed more with Abel Wolman's state-based solutions than Reid's nationalism. Regardless, the group's advocacy nurtured a trend of centralizing authority involving natural resource management and environmental policy.

The crusade for federal water pollution control exposed an important segment of American society to the complexity of environmental issues beyond trout fishing. Questions concerning public health, the waste of natural resources, and the dangers posed by pollution to the country's economic base all came to the fore. Pennsylvania, an immensely polluted industrial powerhouse, offered a perfect setting for environmental reform. Kenneth Reid understood that the economic and political tradeoffs that had promoted the state's development but produced dire quality-of-life consequences. He worked to create a new conservation policy that shifted issues of local concern to a national stage. In the process, he broadened the scope of outdoor recreation to include the quality of the entire American environment and introduced a model for future environmental activism.

Notes

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2. Sources concerning the Izaak Walton League of America and Kenneth Reid are located at the League's Library and archives in Arlington, Virginia. These "historical correspondence and publication files" are hereafter cited as "IWLA Records."
3. IWLA Records, "Kenneth Alexander Reid 'Resume'," dated February 19, 1940. Also, *Outdoor America*, May-June, 1937, 11.
4. Nicholas A. Casner, "The Izaak Walton League is Formed," in *Great Events from History H: Ecology and the Environment*, Frank N. Magill, ed. (Pasadena: Salem Press, 1995), 160-164.
5. James B. Trefethen, *An American Crusade for Wildlife* (New York: Winchester Press, 1975), 174-175. John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (New York: Winchester Press, 1975), also presents an excellent historical perspective on the role sportsmen had in the conservation movement and influence of hunting and fishing magazines.
6. Quoted in Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 158.
7. Act of May 1, 1909 as amended 1917.
8. The release of acidic water from mines results from the exposure of air and water to the pyrites present in bituminous coal. The combination creates sulfuric acid which had a devastating impact on the natural and built environments of western Pennsylvania. Nicholas A. Casner, "Acid Water: A History of Coal Mine Pollution in Western Pennsylvania, 1880-1950" (Ph.D. diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 1994).
9. *The Pennsylvania Coal Company v. Sanderson and Wife*, 113 Pa. 126. William D. Hatfield, "Pollution," *Outdoor America*, May 1928, 23.
10. *McCune v. Pittsburgh & Baltimore Coal Co.*, 238 Pa. 83.
11. Casner, "Acid Water," 55-94.
12. William T. Hornaday, *Thirty Years for Wild Life* (New York: Arno Press reprint, 1931, 1970), 231. Also: Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 182-183.
13. "Time to Call a Halt," *Outdoor America*, May 1928, 1.
14. Letter dated April 19, 1927 to Acting Surgeon General, C. C. Pierce from William D. Hatfield, Director, Pollution Bureau, IWLA, records of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), National Archives, RG 90, "General Correspondence File, 'Mine Sealing.'"
15. IWLA Records, Robert O. Beatty, Acting Director, "memo to all chapters," no date.
16. John H. Ferting, "Pollution and the Law," *Outdoor America*, June 1926, 20-22, 51-54. Also: Hatfield, "Pollution," 22.
17. William B. McCaleb, "Progress in Controlling Stream Pollution in Pennsylvania," *Outdoor America*, May 1928, 22-24. Also: *Pennsylvania R. R. et al., Appellants, v. Sagamore Coal Co. et al.*, 281 Pa. 233.
18. PHS Records, letter to the Surgeon General from W. H. Frost, dated October 25, 1926, and letter to the Surgeon General from William Hatfield, dated April 29, 1927. Also: U. S. Congress, House, *Hearings: The Pollution of Navigable Waters*, 1924, 191.
19. James A. Hatfield, "Pollution: A National Menace," *Outdoor America*, May 1925, 50-51, 102.
20. James H. Duff, "Report on Stream Pollution," *Outdoor America*, January 1945, 6-8. Also: "Lonergan Bill Strikes at Pollution," *Outdoor America*, March 1936, 6-7.
21. Kenneth A. Reid, "Water—The Orphan Step-Child of Conservation," *American Nature Association Quarterly*, January 1939, 3-31.
22. Kenneth A. Reid, "Editorial: Water Policy of the League," *Outdoor America*, January 1947, 3.
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29. Reid, "Pollution Control," 4.
30. Kenneth A. Reid, "Water—the Orphan

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32. "Lonergan Bill Strikes at Pollution," *Outdoor America*, March 1936, 6-8.

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37. Leslie Alexander Lacy, *The Soil Soldiers: The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Great Depression* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Publishers, 1976).

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41. Bureau of Mines Records, copy of a letter to Harold L. Ickes, Secretary, Department of

the Interior, from Forney Wade, President Morgantown Business Association dated August 24, 1933. Also see Bureau of Mines Records, letter Mr. John Bristow, Pittsburgh from R. D. Leitch dated March 18, 1935.

42. "Sealing Abandoned Mines!," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* (October 6, 1933) editorial.

43. Bureau of Mines Records, "Confidential Memorandum" to Y. P. Yant, Supervising Chemist, U. S. Bureau of Mines from R. D. Leitch dated November 24, 1933.

44. Bureau of Mines Records, copy of a letter to Theodore Appel, Secretary of Health, Pennsylvania from Kenneth Reid, dated August 25, 1933.

45. Bureau of Mines Records, letter to Alden H. Emery, U. S. Department of Commerce from R. D. Leitch dated September 28, 1933.

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47. "Mine Sealing Hearing in Washington Tuesday," *The Daily Courier* (November 16, 1933).

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49. "First Mine Sealed Under CWA Program," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (December 22, 1933).

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