

## For the Love of the Water

11/3/2023

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### Timeless Adult Volunteer(s) 2023 Water Quality Stewards

Once a month on Tuesdays in the summer in Sandpoint, Idaho, a group of 30 volunteers get into their kayaks and boats and set out for 15 different sites in Idaho's biggest lake, Lake Pend Oreille, to take water samples.

They are the Water Quality Stewards of the Idaho Conservation League, and these dedicated volunteers are this year's winners of the Idaho Philanthropy Day Timeless Adult

Volunteer Award.

The Stewards bring a variety of backgrounds to their volunteer work for the Idaho Conservation League, but they all share one common interest: the well-being of Lake Pend Oreille.

As Karissa Hunstman, said of the Stewards, "Not only do they protect the lake by volunteering their time, they often are vocal advocates. The Stewards keep an eye out for threats to the lake, including degradation, pollution, and poor land use management, and they speak up when necessary.

Through the power of diligent citizen science, the Stewards' data helps inform local and regional policy.



"Every time they collect samples we can add data to our collection, creating a baseline so we can tell when something is wrong," Huntsman said. "Their efforts have a long-lasting impact. The data they collect helps us to tell a story of Lake Pend Oreille for years to come, and is used by agencies like the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to make management decisions."

Speaking to a few of the Stewards, their love for Idaho's waters and passion for protecting them for future

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"The lake is one of the reasons I'm here," said Pam Duquette, a volunteer who got started in the early days of the Water Quality Stewards. "It's an important part of our area, as is maintaining the water and keeping it clean and drinkable for the fish and for the people who swim and kayak in it." Pam's background isn't in science, but she's passionate about citizen science. For her, collecting water samples once a month has become a ritual of summer.

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that's **given me so much.***

James Cope grew up recreating on the lake every day after work. He moved away to go to college and got his degree in biology. As fate would have it, he worked for the scientist who put together all of the water samples and through him, connected with the Idaho Conservation League's Water Quality Stewards. "It's been a great way to give back to the lake that I've spent so much time enjoying," James said. "It feels good to be doing something for the lake that's given me so much."

Preston Andrews spent his career as a scientist and knew he wanted to stay connected to science in retirement. "Citizen science is such a wonderful way to contribute," Preston said. "Natural resources and water quality are so important for all of us and all of the living creatures who are here. That motivated me to give back, and my wife and I have been doing it for about 7 years now."

The Stewards also shared similar sentiments about learning they'd won the Timeless Adult Volunteer award: surprise, excitement, and gratitude.

As Water Steward Preston shared, it was "a wonderful surprise."



"We do this because we feel it's important," Preston said. "We don't expect any awards for it, but we're grateful to be recognized. We're also excited for the people at the Idaho Conservation League doing all the behind-the-scenes work, who get all of our materials prepared every month, to be recognized."

What would the Stewards recommend for people looking to volunteer and get more involved in their communities?

Preston's advice? "Find out what you have a passion for."



*Get involved with something you're passionate about, and talk to those people. They're there for the same reason you are. **You all have something in common.***

James echoes Preston's recommendation: "If you're thinking about it but not sure, do something you already like doing. Get involved with something you're passionate about, and talk to those people. They're there for the same reason you are. You all have something in common."

As James concluded, "Just get out there and do it. It'll be worth it."



## Written by: Sonya Feibert

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