



The Future of Conservation

The Power of Youth and the Power of Stories

By T.A. Barron

As the Izaak Walton League begins its second century, Outdoor America is asking people about the coming challenges and priorities for conservation.

T.A. Barron is a best-selling writer for young readers, a conservationist and outdoorsman. His books include *The Merlin Saga*, *The Great Tree of Avalon*, and *The Hero's Trail*. His podcast, "Magic and Mountains," features interviews with a diverse array of leaders in conservation.

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T.A. Barron, author and conservationist.

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Here's our interview with T.A.

OA: How should we approach the next century of conservation advocacy?

T.A.: There is no higher calling than saving our beautiful planet that supports all life. That is great and meaningful work. What we do today can shape the entire future for our kids and grandkids and all living creatures. So let's include all sorts of people in our conservation work, even those who don't currently feel the urgency of environmental challenges.

OA: What are your insights into engaging youth in environmental causes?

T.A.: Young people really want to help. They already understand the Earth is in trouble—with accelerating climate change, water scarcity and wildlife extinctions. They already know our beautiful planet needs people to fight hard for our future.

What young people need, though, is to know they have power. They can make a positive difference. They can inspire humanity to make better choices. They can truly help us to save ourselves, our fellow creatures and our most cherished places.

That's why I created the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes (which I named after my mother, a lifelong outdoorswoman). The whole point of the prize is to honor amazing kids who are actively making our world better, and to inspire more young people to do the same.

OA: With all the difficult environmental challenges we face, what gives you hope?

T.A.: My greatest hope comes from young people. Their high ideals, positive energy, honesty, and fresh sense of wonder are fabulous. They inspire me every single day—as a dad, a writer, and a

conservationist. Besides, those awesome kids also make me laugh.

Nature too gives me hope. Nature is incredibly resilient, a source of endless inspiration—if only we will give it more help. So let's do that, with all our hearts. No work today is more needed, more important, or more meaningful.

And one more thing: if we're going to save the Earth, we need to tell better stories. Not just because stories can be great fun and exciting adventures—but also because the best stories carry big, powerful ideas. They can inspire us and move us and empower us. For example, think of the Biblical story of

Noah's Ark, where God asked Noah to save two of every kind of living creature. In this time of biodiversity crisis, what could be a more powerful metaphor to inspire our own lives?

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THE POWER OF YOUR OWN STORYTELLING

The power of storytelling isn't restricted to authors who make the best-seller list. It also applies to Izaak Walton League members and chapters.

Embedded in the League's rich history and in our activities in communities nationwide are countless stories that can engage people and inspire action. A successful conservation project that will benefit wildlife or water quality. A program that introduces the community to outdoor traditions and adventures. "Aha" moments for children and adults alike.

Ahead: look for tips from the League on how to bring these stories to life.

Michael Reinemer, Editor