



Indiana Native Plant
& Wildflower Society

INPAWS Strategic Plan 2016–2020

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Introduction

In spring 2016, INPAWS finds itself in a time of change. Our governance structure has been reorganized, creating a Board of Directors to complement our Council, and our traditional programs have been divided up between the state organization and regional chapters in hopes of giving each of them due attention. The period of the previous Strategic Plan 2013-2016 is nearing its end, and the organization is seeking to move more purposefully into the future.

This document summarizes the vision and goals that will carry INPAWS through its next five years, which include the 25th anniversary of its founding. It is the Board and Council's intent that this plan be a living document that will continue to be fine-tuned and added to as goals are implemented.

Mission

To promote the appreciation, preservation, scientific study, and use of plants native to Indiana and to teach people about their beauty, diversity, and importance to our environment. (Approved March 2013)

Vision

INPAWS envisions an Indiana whose citizens treasure and protect their native plants and the web of life that relies on them and who use native plants in public and private landscapes. (Approved March 2013)

Strategic Planning Process

On April 3, 2016, members of the INPAWS Board and Council met at Marigold Contemporary Clothing store (courtesy of Linda Shikany) in the Broad Ripple neighborhood of Indianapolis for a Leadership Retreat.

Led by president Jeff Pitts and communications chair Wendy Ford, those assembled created a 10-years-out vision for INPAWS, conducted an internal and external analysis of the organization, and drafted priorities to move INPAWS in the envisioned direction.

Present were Cynthia Monnier (Membership), Greg Shaner (West Central Chapter), Amy Perry (past Secretary), Steve Sass (North Chapter), Amanda Smith (Central Chapter), Jeannine (Plant Rescue), Melissa Moran (Plant Sale), Don Gorney (Treasurer), and Ruth Ann Ingraham (Historian).

Notes from the retreat were compiled into a draft Strategic Plan 2016-2020, which was ratified by INPAWS Council at its May 17, 2016, meeting.

State of the Organization

This section summarizes the thoughts and concerns expressed during a systematic analysis of INPAWS strengths and weaknesses as an organization and the threats and opportunities it faces going forward. Elements of the visioning exercise are included, as are thoughts added in response to earlier drafts.

Membership

A perceived strength of our organization is the goodwill and helpfulness of INPAWS members who share a love of native plants. Membership in INPAWS brings opportunities to meet and work with interesting people from a variety of backgrounds and experience, including naturalists, nature photographers, avid gardeners, political activists, landscapers, scientists, and professional educators. Many are also members of other conservation-minded and gardening organizations, so there can be cross-fertilization of ideas among these bodies.

In spring 2016, INPAWS conducted its first-ever survey to get to know the membership better and gather their feedback on what we do. We hope this will enable us to judge how to increase INPAWS membership, which has been steady but static over recent years.

We know we need to increase the diversity of our membership. Retired adults make up a large portion of our membership, which brings to INPAWS the talents and enthusiasm of well-educated, highly trained individuals looking for something meaningful to do. We need to keep attracting this age group, especially to take leadership positions. But we also want to enroll and engage the generation of millennials who seem to be more interested in conservation issues than their parents. Our membership clearly lacks ethnic and cultural diversity, suggesting that we develop recruitment efforts targeted toward the missing groups.

As a statewide organization, INPAWS struggles with the geographic isolation of some of its members. It is not unusual to be the only INPAWS member in a given county! In time, we hope to establish more regional chapters to engage these isolated members. Meanwhile, we need to welcome new members, make them feel connected, and put them to work in INPAWS programs to the extent possible.

Programs

Another strength is the robust programs INPAWS has sustained over its 20+ years. Our Annual Conference is strong and growing and in fall 2015 registered a record 373 participants to hear native plant rockstars Doug Tallamy and Rick Darke. Our quarterly INPAWS Journal is well received and full of worthwhile information. Our spring Plant Sale & Auction, our main fundraiser for the state organization, draws eager customers from central Indiana. Letha's Youth Outdoors Fund provides support for school-age children to visit wild areas in hopes of connecting them to their natural heritage.

Starting in 2016 some traditional INPAWS programs will be directed by the chapters rather than the state organization, including hikes, plant rescues, speakers bureau, public outreach, and youth outreach. These have been shifted to INPAWS chapters in hopes of building those programs regionally.

A promising new state-led, chapter-assisted program, Grow Native, will be rolled out statewide in the fall of 2016. Initiated by MC-IRIS, the program was expanded by INPAWS to the Indianapolis and Fort

Wayne areas. A dedicated website will direct plant buyers to vetted sources of native plants and will offer incentives to plant sellers and designers to sell and design with native plants. Sellers that agree not to stock or use invasive plants will receive special recognition.

With the exception of certain support positions, all INPAWS programs are run by teams of dedicated volunteers. A goal of the 2013-16 Strategic Plan was to establish a robust volunteer orientation and engagement process to establish a pool of experienced volunteers ready and able to take the lead. Little progress has been made on this front, and the objectives outlined in the last Strategic Plan are still valid. Our challenge remains to engage more members as volunteers and develop future team leaders to keep INPAWS programs going.

Leadership

INPAWS aspires to have a deep pool of enthusiastic volunteer leaders who clearly understand the roles and policies of the organization and feel empowered to find creative, effective ways to carry out INPAWS programs.

INPAWS is a volunteer led organization, which is both a strength and a limitation. It is a strength because volunteers have opportunities to learn new things and dig into areas that interest them, bringing along their energy and enthusiasm. It is a limitation in that when no volunteer steps forward to take the lead, an established program may languish.

The question is sometimes raised whether we should hire an Executive Director. This would require special funding and possibly a staff for this person to oversee. For now, we have chosen to fund a few support positions and have them overseen by volunteer team leaders who sit on the INPAWS Council.

The state organization has recently undertaken a reorganization to give INPAWS the strategic leadership it needs, which necessitated moving the focus of some of its programs to the regional level. A governance task force met in the summer of 2015 to redesign the leadership structure, in part to bring it in line with state requirements for a nonprofit organization. Members voted in new Articles of Incorporation at the November 2015 Annual Conference.

In the new structure, INPAWS will have a Board of Directors from which officers will be elected to head up the state organization. The Board will continue to meet quarterly with a Council consisting of state program team leaders and chapter presidents. As we transition to the new structure, roles remain unclear and more needs to be done to clarify the expectations of the state organization vis-a-vis the regional chapters. To this end, the bylaws are being revised in spring 2016.

With the number and variety of programs INPAWS has traditionally conducted, there is a chronic shortage of leaders to fill vacant team positions. It has been especially difficult to find leaders willing to take on officer roles at the state level. The new Board is grappling with how to cultivate future leaders and ensure continuity as leadership changes.

Regional Chapters

INPAWS is blessed with some highly active regional chapters. Other chapters struggle to maintain leadership and energy. To better communicate with and support the chapters, the Board has designated the Vice President to be the point person for the chapters vis-a-vis the state organization.

With the transitioning of certain INPAWS programs to the chapters, it will be especially important to clarify roles and promote sharing among the team leaders of various chapters. A Chapter Leader Handbook has been drafted as a “cookbook” style reference for mounting these programs, to be added to as team leaders discover more effective approaches.

It is expected that not all chapters will have the personpower to mount all programs; on the other hand, there will be new opportunities for volunteers to become engaged and run with their respective programs.

With this shift to regional programs, our chapters will play a major role in engaging INPAWS members in the work of the organization. The chapters will also be the front lines in promoting sociability and sharing among members and making them feel welcome and connected. Knowing that chapters with smaller geographic areas have a better chance for good member communication and synergy, INPAWS will continue to work toward an optimal number of chapters across the state.

Finances

INPAWS has a reserve of about \$60,000, drawing income from member dues and donations to the general fund. Our major fundraiser is the annual Plant Sale & Auction, which nets about \$10,000. INPAWS also receives sponsorships to defray the cost of the Annual Conference, and restricted donations to Letha’s Youth Outdoors Fund.

INPAWS allocates about ___ to small grants for local projects in line with our mission, and occasional large grants to assist land trusts in the purchase of valuable natural areas.

The 2013-16 Strategic Plan called for a long-term financial and supervision plan that would allow for paid administrative support. In the past two years we have begun paying stipends to an administrative support person (\$1,800/yr) and to the content and layout editors of INPAWS Journal (\$4,000/yr). We raised individual/household dues to \$35 to accommodate this increased spending. Such expenses loom large in the budget, but must be considered in the context of the thousands of unmonetized hours that our volunteers devote to INPAWS.

INPAWS has also taken on the expense of technology solutions for online payment and registration with automated acknowledgments. In September 2013, INPAWS implemented an online payment system through Network for Good, which handles memberships, donations, and event registrations. We are convinced this is money well spent for an organization of this size.

Our treasurer worries that our operating expenses may not be sustainable if they grow any larger, yet we have never really launched intentional fundraising campaigns to increase our reserves. Our ambitions dictate that we begin to consider ways to increase our income, such as foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, cultivating major donors, and encouraging members to remember INPAWS in their wills.

If we do raise money, we need to make sure that our spending plan aligns with the long-term results we hope to achieve. We need to invest our dollars in what will bring the greatest return to our goals.

Direction and Goals

With the range and complexity of traditional INPAWS programs to be managed by an all-volunteer organization, it comes as no surprise that there has been little long-range planning. With this round of strategic planning, we have begun to take a longer view at the end results we hope to achieve. We started by developing a vision of what a successful INPAWS might look like in ten years. We are asking ourselves what are our goals, and whether they are the right goals to move us toward our vision.

Our vision clearly demands that we go beyond “preaching to the choir” and be more intentional in our advocacy for native plants and native habitats. It begins with education: We think the public should have a good understanding of what native plants are, their role in the cycle of life, what invasive plants are and how they harm that cycle. Connecting the dots, they can then begin to grasp the importance of biodiversity, and they can appreciate how important it will be to conserve those wild spaces where native species still survive. Along the way they may also appreciate that INPAWS is the fun, vibrant, go-to place for information about native plants.

In particular, our goals must make clear how individual member volunteers can contribute to making the vision a reality. We want to unleash their creativity and energy, not micromanage their efforts.

The Context

In aiming high, INPAWS recognizes that there will be hurdles to overcome.

- Indiana is a “big agriculture” state with special-interest groups that are not interested in conservation. Under their influence, our legislators are largely indifferent or hostile to conservation issues.
- Native plants still prove hard to find in the trade, and big box stores can only be influenced at the corporate level.
- Invasive plants are still being marketed to consumers. The invasive plants sold in the trade have ornamental qualities (e.g., Bradford pear, burning bush) that continue to create customer demand, making dealers reluctant to forego the income from those sales.
- Builders and developers may not consider native plantings in their fast-paced construction projects. Commercial development in our state parks threaten our natural areas. Homeowners association rules and municipal ordinances are often unfriendly to native plants.

On the positive side, many more organizations are interested in native plants in the last few years. Master Gardener gardenfests include programs on native plants, Indiana Wildlife Federation is selling native plant kits, and Keep Indianapolis Beautiful is giving away native trees and shrubs for free. INPAWS will have to work hard to keep a compelling niche so it can maintain its membership and continue to lure people to its major fundraiser, the annual Native Plant Sale & Auction.

Communications/Outreach

Among those who know of us, INPAWS is trusted for the depth of our knowledge about native and invasive plants and is acknowledged for the expertise of our members. But our visibility with the general public is questionable. We aspire to be more widely respected and admired as a leading conservation group—a household name like Audubon and Sierra Club. To establish our niche vis-a-vis these other groups, we need to clarify our focus. We think it’s that we’re “champions of biodiversity.”

Our existing communications vehicles are solid, but conventional. INPAWS has a website chock full of information, but only for those people actively looking for it. We have attractive displays for outreach tables, and several popular brochures, but more could be done to lend pizzazz to our presence at outreach events. Our public outreach should be making people want to know more and driving them to our existing sources of information.

Creative initiatives are called for if we are to move beyond preaching to the choir. For example, we could have a column in the garden section of major newspapers. Our members could all perfect “elevator speeches” for talking with friends and neighbors, acting as ambassadors for INPAWS. We could reward those who are working to increase biodiversity, planning highly visible awards for native plant friendly housing developments, corporate landscapes, and school gardens. With INPAWS’ 25th anniversary coming up in 2018, we have an opportunity to make a media splash by staging a PR event.

We especially could be making more effective use of all the forms of technology available to us. We could be doing Youtube “workshops” for landscapers, homeowners, teachers on butterfly gardens, rain gardens, pollinator support. We could be tweeting about upcoming chapter events that include an educational program. We could be making video testimonials about why our members value native plants or why they remain INPAWS members.

Our Facebook Public Group is wildly successful as judged by its 5500+ followers, and we wish we could convert some of those to dues-paying members. The Grow Native program is expected to serve this group of interested plant buyers and hopefully bring them into the membership fold.

The question has been raised what are the perks of INPAWS membership—INPAWS Journal, chapter newsletters, members-only hikes, etc. We need to do a more effective job of conveying all the good programs that an INPAWS membership supports for those not in it for the perks.

All this suggests a much more intentional program of public relations. We aspire to be a “media machine”—defining key terms, promoting native plants, where to buy them, reasons to use them, and reasons to use and support INPAWS as the go-to reference.

To the extent that our message is disseminated broadly and people are “getting it,” INPAWS can serve as a model for other native plant societies across the US.

Perfecting Our Messages

Want “native,” “nonnative,” and “invasive” to be household words. We want homeowners to recognize nonnative invasives in their landscapes. We want everyone to understand why biodiversity is so important. These are not easy concepts to explain, nor are people easily motivated to take the time to understand them. Clearly, we need to set our minds to crafting compelling messages. In this process, we should not rule out revising our existing mission and vision statements to more accurately reflect our current aspirations.

The key may be to show the relevance of these concepts to other things that people value, such as birds and butterflies in their backyards, or a connection to their Hoosier heritage. People can relate to the decline of the Monarch Butterfly, and so might be open to hearing why we need great stands of native milkweed, much as the plight of the Bald Eagle got people excited about conservation generations ago.

The risks to pollinators of habitat loss and pesticides provides another potential rallying point for native plants.

People are aware of what’s happening with Monarchs and pollinators, and INPAWS should ride these waves of public interest to get our message out. We should also visibly reward people for responding to our messages; an example might be to certify landscapes that include native plants.

Considering the broad range of audiences that need to absorb the INPAWS message, it will be important to prioritize our efforts to keep them manageable and to tailor our messages to specific groups. Here are just some of the groups we need to reach, and some ideas for reaching them.

Builders, developers	Workshops on value of incorporating natural areas, avoiding invasive plants
Landscape architects, designers	Grow Native certification
Landscape installers, maintainers	Recognize native plants as not weeds Avoid invasive plants in the trade
Plant buyers	Grow Native website provides sources
Plant sellers	Grow Native incentive program
Major corporations	Support biodiversity because that’s the kind of city young professionals want (i.e., potential hires)
Retired adults	Meaningful volunteer opportunities Ways to interest children and grandchildren in nature
Young professionals	Extinction is becoming an issue, interest 30s and 40s
Urban farmers	Edible native plants
Gardeners	Landscape-worthy native plants Working native plants into a formal setting Dealing with weed ordinances
Homeowners	How to evaluate property for potential native landscapes (woodland, woods edge, grassland, wetland) Strategies for invasives removal How to incorporate native plants in traditional landscapes Steps toward building biodiversity Reward use of native plants in the landscape (e.g., certification program)
Schools	INPAWS clubs in all the high schools, emphasizing social aspects Teacher workshops Book on native plants for kids
Colleges and universities	Service projects Affiliate INPAWS memberships for conservation clubs
Families	Engage more families with hikes and family friendly events
Government agencies	Push for invasives agent/native plant promoter in every county
Purdue University	Bring on board with natives, biodiversity conservation, urban farming

The Next Generation

INPAWS has successfully carried on the Letha’s Youth Outdoors Fund to bring kids in touch with nature. Thousands of school-age children have participated in outings and nature-related projects since the

program's inception in 2008. Beyond this fund, however, INPAWS has had little impact among the youth of Indiana, despite this being a major goal of the 2013-16 Strategic Plan.

The team leaders in this area have been challenged to narrow the scope of possible endeavors to something manageable with their small number of busy volunteers. The good news is that many other organizations are on the horizon, working toward the same goal of connecting children with nature (e.g., ICAN). Partnerships with these organizations have the potential to infuse their efforts with the knowledge that INPAWS possesses about native plants.

Fulfilling an objective of the 2013-16 Strategic Plan, INPAWS' Native Plant Wizard patch program has been implemented in several locales and is ready to be expanded throughout the state through the efforts of the regional chapters. We would like to see such a program eventually becoming a part of the K-6 curriculum in Indiana schools, creating in each child an ambassador for biodiversity.

To reach the next generation, the place to start is by educating teachers about native and invasive plants and biodiversity. Most elementary school teachers are generalists and would not be expected to have this knowledge. INPAWS could pilot workshops and materials for this endeavor, which could be shared with other native plant groups.

It has also been proposed that INPAWS create a book on native plants for preschool and kindergarten students, with associated coloring pages. Special funding could be sought to make this happen.

Partnerships

Many organizations are out there working toward the establishment of healthy ecosystems and the preservation of Indiana's natural areas. INPAWS is known among these groups, in fact many of our members belong also to these groups. The 2013-16 Strategic Plan called for INPAWS to pursue partnerships and collaborations with other agencies, organizations, and schools that could promote native plants as essential to healthy ecosystems. We have made some progress but have not leveraged these partnerships to best effect.

INPAWS has received excellent support from The Nature Conservancy's Indiana organization, which has permitted us to store outreach materials and hold Council meetings at their headquarters. We also acknowledge the support of Ratio Architects, which supported the development of our website and houses our Board meetings.

We have made some inroads in colleges and universities by offering students free registration to attend the Annual Conference, but INPAWS is by no means a presence on college campuses.

There is potential also to partner with companies, foundations, and private individuals with ties to the environment. Several of these have been regular sponsors of our Annual Conference. We envision being able to develop a corporate sponsor relationship and cultivating major donors for specific projects.

Other partnerships that could be more deeply cultivated are: Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Indiana land trusts, Indiana Wildlife Federation, beekeepers associations, Indiana Urban Forest Council (IUFC), Indiana Arborist Association (IAA), IFOWD (???), Indiana Landscapers Association (INLA), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), Amos Butler Audubon, Sierra Club, Indiana Parks Alliance (IPA), Hoosier Environmental Council (HEC), Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Indiana Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects (INASLA),

landscape architecture schools, Hoosier Association of Science Teachers Inc. (HASTI), Parks and Recreation Departments (IPRA), and Environmental Educators Association of Indiana (EEAI).

In particular, we could do more to develop the biodiversity ethic with Master Gardeners, many of whom are retired persons who could be recruited to volunteer for INPAWS programs and thereby learn more about native plants and invasives.

Priority Goals for 2016 to 2020

A. Position INPAWS for visionary leadership.

1. Complete transition to Board, Council, Chapter structure, clarifying respective roles, limitations, leeway

- a. Implement new bylaws, revised April 2016.
- b. Empower chapters to initiate those programs they have the personpower and interest to implement.
- c. Cultivate INPAWS leadership to sustain a volunteer-led organization.

2. Engage INPAWS members more fully in the vision

- a. Get to know the membership better
- b. Clarify and disseminate the perks of membership; cultivate a spirit of giving to sustain worthy efforts
- c. Improve intake, welcoming function
- d. Make crystal clear the reason why INPAWS exists so that members can rally to the vision
- e. Provide ready opportunities for engagement
- f. Capture the attention and energy of millennials
- g. Conduct outreach to underrepresented groups to improve diversity

B. Establish INPAWS as a highly visible champion for native plants and biodiversity.

1. Develop an effective messaging strategy.

- a. Aim to make native, nonnative, invasive, and biodiversity household words.
- b. Prioritize target audiences and develop compelling messages and programs to reach them.
- c. Determine where concerns overlap or contrast with other environmental organizations to find INPAWS' proper niche.

2. Explore new vehicles and technologies to educate, inspire, and motivate target audiences.

- a. Consider what content could be developed for talks, workshops, classes, videos.
- b. Learn how to make full use of social media.
- c. Consider a "Native Plant Habitat" certification program for homeowners.

3. Implement a comprehensive media campaign to convey INPAWS messages.

- a. Update INPAWS mailing list to be more comprehensive in terms of media targets and environmental partners

- b. Design a media campaign with manageable phases and costs using all suitable technologies.
- c. Launch first round media push to educate the public.
- d. Launch second round media push highlighting INPAWS' 25th year in 2018.

C. Nurture the next generation of ambassadors for biodiversity.

1. Maintain steady growth in Letha's Youth Outdoors Fund.

- a. Increase promotion among schools and youth groups to generate applications.
- b. Increase donations to support additional grants.

2. Empower INPAWS chapters to engage with schools and youth organizations in their locales.

- a. Designate a Youth Outreach champion in each chapter and a state level champion to promote sharing of outreach ideas and experiences.
- b. Cultivate relationships with schools and youth organizations where INPAWS might have an outreach opportunity.
- c. Expand the Native Plant Wizard patch program to sites around the state.

3. Collaborate with other Children in Nature organizations.

- a. Infuse sponsored outdoor experiences with good information about native plants.
- b. Verify the accuracy of teacher training materials and participate in training.

4. Publish a book on Indiana native plants for preschool and kindergarten children.

- a. Develop the concept, specifications, and budget.
- b. Identify author and illustrator.
- c. Release the book in conjunction with INPAWS' 25th Anniversary in 2018.

Appendix: Goals and Objectives of 2013-16 Strategic Plan

A. Establish a robust volunteer orientation and engagement process.

1. Reach out to new and current members to determine interests and expertise.
2. Encourage volunteering by making the time commitment manageable.
3. Groom enthusiastic, capable, reliable volunteers for leadership positions through engagement and mentorship.
4. Ensure that available volunteer recruitment tools are known to and useful to officers and chairs.
5. Make certain that volunteers feel appreciated for the work they do.

B. Improve the quality of information available about native plants and invasives.

1. Work with Purdue to remove invasive species recommendations from their existing publications.
2. Assist in creating a new horticulture publication that focuses on native landscaping.
3. Promote native plant–friendly municipal weed ordinances.
4. Evaluate and improve the landscaping information provided by INPAWS.
5. Promote the expansion of the “Go Green, Grow Native” retail incentive program, on the model of MC-IRIS (Monroe County Identify and Remove Invasive Species).
6. Explore the feasibility of a certification program for Certified Native Plant Designers to meet the growing demand for native plant expertise in landscape design.
7. Support INPAWS members in being ambassadors for native plants and biodiversity within their circles of influence.
8. Mine the expertise of INPAWS members to bring forward advocacy issues.

C. Expand the youth outreach program to nurture more of tomorrow’s stewards of the environment.

1. Designate a person responsible for Youth Outreach in each chapter.
2. Maintain steady growth in Letha’s Fund applications, grants, and donations.
3. Develop and pilot a youth Patch Program for ages 7 to 11 that can be proliferated statewide.
4. Cultivate relationships with youth organizations where INPAWS might have an outreach opportunity.

5.

D. Pursue partnerships and collaborations with other agencies, organizations, and schools that could promote native plants as essential to healthy ecosystems.

1. Pursue active partnership with Master Gardener Associations.
2. Raise awareness of INPAWS's vision with environmentally focused organizations and invite collaboration.
3. Investigate creating an INPAWS presence on college campuses.

E. Develop a long-term financial and supervision plan that allows for paid administrative support.

1. Develop administrative support wish list in the form of a job description.
2. Develop a financial plan for sustainably compensating support staff.
3. If Council decides it is feasible, hire paid staff.