

martha stewart

Why Ian Somerhalder is On a Mission to Make Our Oceans Clean Again

See what's driving this "Vampire Diaries" star to help us #ChangeTheDay.



By [Alexandra Lim-Chua Wee](#)



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: COURTESY OF THE IAN SOMERHALDER FOUNDATION

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"We'll offer simple ways you can have a positive impact on your health, your home, and even the world. Get inspired by our Change Makers and the companies that are making a difference in the way we live. Join us!"

On April 10, eight years ago, the Gulf of Mexico took an environmental hit when nearly 210 million gallons of oil flooded the waters. Nearly 68,000 square miles of marine life—equal to the size of Oklahoma—were affected making it the largest spill of its kind in oceanic history. For actor, Ian

Somerhalder, whose Louisiana hometown was one of the six bordering states affected, it was a personal travesty. The waters he had swam in growing up were now covered in black oil—and it moved him to to make a difference.

“Watching millions of gallons of crude oil destroy one of the most beautiful bodies of water, in my own backyard, changed me forever,” the 39-year-old "Vampire Diaries" alum and lifelong nature lover tells marthastewart.com.

As a UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador, Somerhalder not only helped clean the affected wildlife, but also made PSAs inviting the public to take action. Shortly after the 2010 spill, he launched the [Ian Somerhalder Foundation](#), to help spread awareness of the importance of environmental and wildlife preservation. And while the ISF continues to [follow the gulf's recovery](#) nearly a decade later, and create local [plant and animal sanctuaries](#) among its many other eco-efforts, the world's waterways are facing an even bigger threat these days: plastic.



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“An estimated 8 million metric tons of plastic ends up in our water every year. It is seeping into the DNA of marine life,” Somerhalder tells us. “And at the rate we are going, by 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.” Realizing that this problem was bigger than most people could fathom, Somerhalder and his team recently launched the ISF Clean-Up Program, encouraging and helping people to reduce their single-use plastics, recycle, and clean-up stray litter. “It’s just getting started, but I am really excited to watch it grow and inspire action.”



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“Ian with wife, Reed. At their 2015 wedding, the two animal-lovers requested their guests donated to animal charities instead of traditional gift-giving.

Between community [grassroots campaigns](#) and [grant programs](#), the ISF also works closely with young activists from its [College and Early Career Volunteer program](#) to its [Coast2Coast Spring Break Action](#) campaign which draws attention to the pollution spikes that result from many vacations. “Not only must we encourage everyone to properly dispose of plastic or to recycle it, but we must also foster a new generation that will refuse to pollute,” he says. This month, the ISF also held its [second annual youth-led clean-up event](#) in Flint, Michigan, to help combat the city’s ongoing clean water crisis.

And while lately, it seems like every other headline bears the bad news of plastic pollution—even [beer is being tested](#) for microplastics—the new father, whose baby girl Bodhi Solei with wife Nikki Reed will turn one this summer, remains hopeful that one day, trash-free seas become reality. “My hopes are high that we’ll begin putting our dying oceans at the forefront and demand immediate action from our politicians and society,” he says. “When we use our voices and work together, we are an unstoppable force for positive change.”

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