

Mark Pokras

Public Comment on Lead Tackle Regulation

To Safer Products for Washington members,

I, Mark Pokras, DVM, am a member of the Loon/Diver Stewardship & Loon Rescue/Rehabilitation International Working Groups. As a wildlife veterinarian, I have been studying wildlife health issues for nearly 50 years, and am often called on to consult on lead poisoning issues throughout the U.S. and internationally.

Today, I am writing to express my concerns about the use of lead in fishing tackle, ammunition and other sporting goods and the detrimental effects of this toxic metal on both wildlife and human health. Lead poses significant risks to people, birds, and animals, and I strongly urge Washington to take action to protect both its wildlife and its communities by considering fishing tackle, ammunition, and other sporting goods a priority product for the regulation of lead and lead compounds.

- 1. Harm to Humans:** In the process of making and using tackle or ammunition, people and the environment are exposed to lead in many ways through mining, smelting, manufacturing, and the use of lead products. Lead poisoning can accumulate over time, especially in children or high-risk individuals who consume contaminated fish or meat that contains small lead particles. The harmful effects of lead exposure are well-documented, ranging from developmental and cognitive impairments in children to increased risk of heart disease and kidney problems in adults. As people continue to engage in angling and hunting, reducing lead exposure in sportsmen and women is critical.
- 2. Threat to Wildlife:** Metallic lead in any form, like fishing tackle or gunshot, is toxic to birds and other animals when ingested. Many waterfowl and birds like the Common Loon (a species of Greatest Conservation Need under the Washington State Wildlife Action Plan), mistake lead sinkers and jigs for food or pebbles that help them digest their meals. An estimated 48 to 80 tons of fishing weights are lost annually in Washington (Washington State Department of Ecology & Department of Health. Lead Chemical Action Plan. 2009. [No. 09-07-008]). Research on Common Loon mortalities in Washington state has shown that mortality due to lead toxicosis occurs across all habitat ranges and across the state's water bodies. According to the Northwest Swan Conservation Association, swans can also mistakenly eat lead shot to aid in digestion with only 3 lead shot pellets able to kill a 30 pound Trumpeter Swan (a Priority Species for conservation in Washington). Once ingested, lead poisoning often results in paralysis and death. The poisoning also affects their ability to feed, migrate, and reproduce. Given the significant bird populations in Washington, particularly along its coastal and freshwater ecosystems, this poses a serious ecological risk.
- 3. Non-Toxic Alternatives:** Fortunately, non-toxic alternatives to lead tackle and ammunition are available and become more and more widely used. Materials like tungsten, tin, steel, and bismuth are safer options that do not pose the same ecological or health risks. It's also important to note that coatings such as paint on lead fishing gear

have uniformly been found not to work to prevent mobilization and absorption of the toxic metal. Such coatings do not protect wildlife from lead poisoning.

By adopting uniform regulations to phase out lead in the manufacturing of fishing tackle and ammunition, Washington can protect its wildlife and create safer environments for residents and visitors. I strongly encourage the state to include fishing tackle, ammunition, and other sporting goods as priority consumer products to safeguard our wildlife, protect public health, and ensure a cleaner, safer environment for all.

Many thanks for your attention and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,
Mark A. Pokras, DVM
Emeritus Associate Professor
Wildlife Clinic & Center for Conservation Medicine
Tufts University, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine
N. Grafton, MA 01536 U.S.A.
email: mark.pokras@tufts.edu

home:
15 Piper Road, apt. J210
Scarborough, ME 04074