



April 29, 2015

Re: SUPPORT for House Bill 460 (Jewett)

Dear Chairman Deen and Members of the Vermont House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources,

On behalf of our 1.4 million members and activists, 2,518 of whom live in Vermont, I am writing to support House Bill 460, which would require the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting purposes in Vermont.

The danger of lead poisoning to both humans and wildlife is well-recognized (Cade 2007). Lead is a cumulative metabolic poison that has a wide range of serious debilitating effects and can cause death (Fisher et al. 2006). While lead is naturally present in the environment, human activities are primarily responsible for the environmental exposure to lead concentrations that cause lead poisoning. In the United States, decades of legislation has removed lead from many common products and processes, such as paint and gasoline. However, lead poisoning continues to pose a serious environmental and public health threat.

In recent years, numerous scientific studies have drawn a link between the use of lead ammunition in firearms and lead exposure in wildlife and humans. Even infrequent consumption of lead in carcasses can have negative health impacts, as debilitating and irreversible effects can be seen even at very low blood levels (Hunt et al. 2009; Iqbal et al. 2009). A single serving of game meat may contain up to fourteen times the estimated daily dietary intake of lead in the American diet (Kosnett 2009).

For wildlife, cases of lead poisoning from the ingestion of lead ammunition have been documented for more than one hundred species, including fifty-nine species of terrestrial birds. Avian scavengers that feed on carrion may be particularly at risk of ingesting lead ammunition. These species often feed on carcasses of animals that have been shot with lead ammunition, ingesting lead bullets, bullet fragments, or lead shot (Fisher et al. 2006; Kelly et al. 2014). Even one ammunition-tainted meal can cause fatal lead poisoning (Pain and Rattner 1988; Pattee et al. 2006; Cade 2007). However, sublethal doses of lead can also have devastating impacts, causing neurological and physiological impairment that hampers normal breeding and surviving behaviors (Scheuhammer and Norris 1996). Birds are not the only species at risk, with some studies suggesting that a wide variety of mammalian scavengers, including black bears and coyotes, could be at risk from ingesting lead ammunition in game carcasses (Rogers et al. 2009).

Vermont is not immune from the dangers of lead ammunition. According to a report compiled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service using census data, in 2011 approximately 90,000 hunters

spent 1,584,000 days hunting in Vermont (USFWS 2011). Luckily, alternative nonlead ammunition is readily available for both shot and bullets. Indeed, California, which already requires the use of nonlead ammunition while hunting, has approved dozens of different brands of alternative ammunition.¹ Nonlead is both safer than traditional lead ammunition and just as effective, with equivalent and superior ballistic characteristics (Thomas 2013; Gremse, et al. 2014).

NRDC therefore applauds you for introducing HB 460, which will help Vermont hunters switch over to nonlead ammunition and protect the health of hunters, their families, and the rich and diverse wildlife of Vermont.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elly Pepper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elly Pepper
Wildlife Advocate
Natural Resources Defense Council

¹ "Certified Nonlead Ammunition Information." California Department of Fish and Game.
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/lead-free/certifiedammo.html> (accessed April 29, 2015).

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