



**Testimony of Sara Walker, Director, Lead-Free Wildlife Campaign
In Support of H 460, a bill to require non-toxic ammunition for the take of wildlife**

To the Vermont House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our Vermont supporters, I am testifying in support of H 460, a bill that would stop the dispersal of toxic lead ammunition caused by hunting to protect people, wildlife, and the environment. We thank you Chairman Deen and members of the committee for hearing this important and necessary legislation, and thank Representative Jewett for his introduction of the bill.

Lead is a toxic metal, which is why it has been removed from most paints, gasoline, pipes, and several other consumer products due to its harmful effects on humans and the environment. Despite its known toxicity, lead exposure through hunting ammunition continues to pose a threat to humans and wildlife, and is likely the most unregulated form of lead use in the country.

Lead has devastating impacts on wildlife. Animals are at risk of poisoning when they forage spent lead shot from the ground, consume contaminated prey, or scavenge gut piles left behind by hunters. Death from lead poisoning is slow and extremely painful. Even when lead levels are not high enough to cause immediate death, it may weaken the animal and make them more susceptible to predation or disease. Just one single ingested shotgun pellet or bullet fragment is all it takes to cause brain damage, and even death, in various bird species.

Superior ballistics, health concerns, and a changing market have already encouraged many hunters to make the switch to non-lead ammunition. Decades of research supported removing lead from ammunition, which guided the US Fish and Wildlife Service's decision in 1991 to require all hunters to use non-lead shot for hunting waterfowl. This policy has been credited to saving 1.4 million ducks from lead poisoning in a single fall flight within just six years. Since its enactment, waterfowl hunters have served as a leader in the non-lead ammunition movement, demonstrating that non-lead ammunition is more suitable for hunting and conservation than lead.

In addition, thirty-four states have increased restrictions on lead ammunition beyond the 1991 federal waterfowl regulation. In 2013, California addressed the serious threats of this toxin by

passing legislation to phase out lead ammunition for the taking of wildlife by 2019, citing not only harmful effects to the endangered California condor but to other species as well. Recently, the California Fish and Game Commission unanimously passed regulations to implement this law.


Furthermore, The U.S. Army has announced they will begin eliminating the use of lead ammunition and the National Parks Service has dramatically phased out their use of this toxic substance due to environmental and wildlife concerns. Regulations at the state and federal levels over the years have prompted ammunition manufacturers to increase production, improving the availability, performance and affordability of non-lead alternatives.

Scientists resoundingly agree that spent lead ammunition poses a significant risk to human health and wildlife. More than 500 scientific papers have been published that cite the many dangers caused by lead exposure from spent ammunition. And in 2013, a scientist consensus was released in support of eliminating the introduction of lead ammunition into the environment, signed by thirty leading national and international experts. Toxicologists, veterinarians, pathologists, physicians, epidemiologists, biologists, and other experts have advised against the use of lead in ammunition due to its toxic effects.

Vermont has already on the right track toward protecting wildlife from this toxic metal. In response to high loon mortality rates from lead poisoning, the legislature prohibited the sale and use lead fishing sinkers weighing one-half ounce or less, becoming effective in January 2007. This simple switch to non-toxic material for sinkers provides protections to wildlife, including Vermont's fragile loon population.

We do not need to conduct another study to determine that lead ammunition is bad for our environment and our wildlife. Vermont should take the conservation-minded approach and phase out the use of lead for hunting. We thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



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