

## Written Testimony in support of SB983

February 27, 2024

Thank you for considering my written testimony. I am testifying in support of support of SB983, the Maryland bill to phase-out lead ammunition. I am speaking on behalf of over 2,200 members of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks (Coalition), a non-profit organization composed of retired, former, or current employees of the National Park Service (NPS). The Coalition studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation of America's National Park System. As a group, we collectively represent nearly 45,000 years of experience managing and protecting America's most precious and important natural and historic resources. Among our members are former NPS directors, regional directors, superintendents, environmental and resource specialists, scientists, NEPA practitioners, park rangers, maintenance and administrative staff, and a full array of other former employees, volunteers, and supporters. We support Maryland in the phase-out approach of lead ammunition, recognizing that between the use of lead-based ammunition and fishing tackle, there are not only wildlife health and welfare issues, but also human health concerns.

I have been a wildlife biologist for over forty years, having worked in national parks from Grand Canyon to Colonial National Historical Park to overseeing the national program for biological resources for the National Park Service agency in D.C. I have been aware of this issue after having worked on the restoration of California condors in Grand Canyon National Park in the mid-90's and have been working diligently on the matter ever since. If you have ever watched a condor soar over one of our grandest national parks, only to be laid out in a vet's office days later dying of lead poisoning, you will never forget the pain and suffering. After having worked with Dr. Bryan Watts, Conservation Biology Institute out of William and Mary, on the mid-Atlantic bald eagle population and lead levels, from Virginia up the coast along the Chesapeake and Potomac and our parks within Maryland boundaries (27+ parks), I became quite aware that while the bald eagle population appears to be recovering, they and other species are still impacted by lead as they scavenge on tainted carcasses. And those are just the species we closely monitor.

You may be aware of S. 4157<sup>1</sup>, the LEAD Act of 2022, which was introduced by Senator Tammy Duckworth on May 5, 2022. A similar bill, H.R. 405<sup>2</sup> had been introduced in the House by Congressman Ted Liu in 2021. S. 4157 would prohibit the use of lead ammunition in units of the National Wildlife Refuge System. All of the findings stated in Section 2 of the bill regarding the adverse impacts of lead on human health, the environment, and wildlife are equally applicable to lands and waters in this nation where we hunt and fish. We call your attention to recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) "station specific" hunting and sport fishing regulations<sup>3</sup> that begin to phase out the recreational use of "lead" on National Wildlife Refuges across the country. In these regulations, the groundwork is laid for addressing restrictions on lead ammunition and fishing tackle and protection of our natural environment, on a national level and on a state-by-state approach.

The adverse impacts of lead poisoning on wildlife and their habitats have been known for decades and are well-documented. For example, a recent U.S. Geological Survey study<sup>4</sup> found that nearly half of all bald

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4157/text?r=2&s=1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/405/text>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-HQ-NWRS-2022-0055-16104>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abj3068>

and golden eagles in the country suffer from chronic and/or acute lead poisoning, likely the result of these birds scavenging the remains of animals shot with lead bullets. It should be noted that the use of lead ammunition is not just an issue in regards to large game, but also in sport hunting of so called “varmints” such as prairie dogs, marmots, coyotes, fox, etc. These carcasses are generally discarded in the field and left for such species as eagles to scavenge upon-ingesting poisonous lead fragments. In addition, there are a plethora of peer-reviewed scientific studies, worldwide, documenting the adverse impacts of lead on avifauna, herpetofauna, mammals from grizzly bear to small rodents, as well as to the environment on our lands and in our waters.

While the devastating effects of lead poisoning may be most acute and observed in raptors and condors that have been heavily monitored, more than 130 national park wildlife species are exposed to or killed by ingesting lead or prey contaminated with lead. At the same time, lead fishing tackle left in waters, leads to elevated levels of lead in fish, birds, and amphibians. These impacts, in addition to loss of habitat or habitat quality due to land conversion and fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change, negatively affect the health of our nation’s resources.

In addition to the numerous studies documenting the impacts of lead on wildlife, there is also an abundance of peer-reviewed science regarding the negative effects of lead poisoning on humans. Lead exposure is a significant public health concern due to its persistence in the environment. Lead poisoning can affect children, especially in underserved communities globally, according to a study published by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in 2020. Lead exposure is not just limited to situations involving lead paint or antiquated public water systems that still rely on lead pipes. The impacts of lead poisoning on underserved communities can also be connected to hunting and fishing activities and is of the utmost concern.

This is not a testimony to banning hunting or gun use. It’s about hunters and others be an integral component of this much needed conservation effort. The ecological toll of ongoing lead contamination is completely avoidable as there are equally effective, less toxic alternatives to lead-based ammunition and tackle readily available at comparable cost. Moreover, several counties and states, including California where Redwoods National Park and the Yurok tribe recently restored the California condor, and many other countries worldwide have successfully banned or severely restricted the use of lead-based recreational ammunition and tackle with little or no negative repercussions or lingering consumer objections.

From a purely conservation and human health perspective, the case for the phase-out of lead is clear. We truly believe that many species such as trumpeter swans, loons, and others that fly and migrate through the nation’s skies would not be here today if not for the USFWS actions on lead shot decades ago. The state of Maryland can now set an example and implement the most effective wildlife protection measures available. By addressing this issue now, Maryland can stop the ongoing accumulation of toxic lead in the environment and help ensure the long-term conservation of the state’s resources for this, and future generations to come.

Sincerely,  
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