February 28, 2025

Bill: https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0634F.pdf

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on SB0634 Hunting—Nonlead Ammunition, Fox Chasing, and Deer Managment

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) supports SB0634.

We strongly favor the addition of one full-time employee to the Deer Management Assistance Program within the Department of Natural Resources and the phase-out of lead ammunition for hunting of all game species. We do not take a position at this time on fox chasing.

Deer Management Assistance Program

Deer over-population is a serious problem for out nesting songbirds. When deer become too numerous, they can denude the understory of a forest, leaving nothing but non-native Japanese stilt grass and other exotic invasives, and can be observed in many places in Patapsco Valley State Park and other public and private lands across the entire state. This eliminates nesting places for forest-interior dwelling species (FIDS) that nest on or near the ground, such as Ovenbirds, Hooded Warblers, [1]and Kentucky Warblers. All three species are considered by Maryland as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

The overpopulation of deer also substantially results in many human deaths, injuries, and property damage to vehicles through deer-vehicle collisions.

The Deer Management Assistance Program educates and assists farmers with deer management on private lands. An additional full-time person will promote more deer control, and this will benefit our nesting birds.

Nonlead Ammunition Phase-Out

MOS strongly supports an overall lead ammunition phase-out in Maryland. Lead has no biological function, which makes it particularly toxic to wildlife and humans alike. Lead poisoning is a serious problem to all birds, but especially waterfowl and scavenging birds, such as vultures, hawks, eagles, and owls. Lead poisoning is a serious issue at any location where hunting is being conducted with lead shot/bullets Our local raptors can consume lead left behind in gutpiles left by hunters, or in carcasses of dead animals shot with lead shot/bullets. Waterfowl can consume spent lead shot in areas where hunting has occurred for many years.

Environmental lead also presents an imminent danger to all humans, especially children, as no safe level of lead has ever been found. Even the smallest amounts of lead tested by scientists have caused noticeable adverse effects. Clearly, we should be reducing, and hopefully eliminating, further lead use and deposition in our environment.

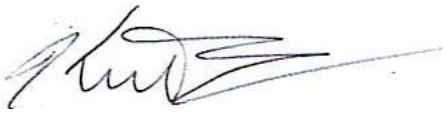
In addition, there is a danger to humans eating game shot with lead. Lead bullets fragment and humans can inadvertently eat the lead fragments, as well as lead shot. It is recommended that children and pregnant women not eat game taken with lead ammunition. The best way to avoid lead poisoning is to use lead-free ammunition.[2]

Contrary to the assertions of some opponents of nonlead ammunition, MOS strongly supports hunting as an effective game management tool. The elimination of lead ammunition should not seriously decrease hunting. In 1991 the United States banned lead shot for waterfowl hunting. Waterfowl hunting goes on today, and over time there has been a decrease in blood level concentrations in ducks.[3]

It is often complained that nonlead ammunition costs more. However, according to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the cost differential of a box of copper bullets versus a box of lead bullets is less than $10, and for premium ammunition there may be no cost difference.[4]

Birds in the United States, and North America overall, face numerous threats to their existence and many species are in grave trouble. North America has lost almost 30% of all of its birds since 1970[5]. Clearly, we should be working to eliminate further lead deposition in our environment.

We emphatically urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for HB0634, to enhance deer control, and phase-out toxic lead ammunition.



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[1] Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan, 2015, Appendix 1a. page 5, https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/SWAP/SWAP_AppendicesChapter1.pdf

[2] Lead in wild harvested game, Colorado Department of Public Health and environment, https://cdphe.colorado.gov/lead-health/lead-in-wild-harvested-game

[3] Lewis, N.I., et al, Blood level declines in wintering American black ducks in New Jersey following the Lead Shot ban, Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management, 12(1), 2021.

[4] Hunting with Nonlead Ammunition, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, 2024, https://www.maine.gov/ifw/hunting-trapping/hunting/nonlead-ammunition.html

[5] Rosenberg, Kenneth V. et al, Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, VOL 366, NO. 6451, 19 September 2019, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313?adobe_mc=MCORGID%3D242B6472541199F70A4C98A6%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1707754028