



MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

February 3, 2026

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Testimony on: Bill to Phase Out Lead Ammunition in Maryland

Position: Support SB 181

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee

I write on behalf of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) in strong support of SB 181, the Bill to Phase Out Lead Ammunition in Maryland.

Impact of Lead Shot on Birds

The presence of lead in the environment from spent ammunition is deleterious to many forms of wildlife, but particularly to raptors and water birds. Lead has been shown to reduce populations of Bald Eagles by 3.8% and those of Golden Eagles by 0.8%ⁱ. Other studies have concluded that lead suppresses the vigor of Bald Eagle populationsⁱⁱ and decreased the resilience of Golden Eagle populations to other environmental toxinsⁱⁱⁱ and reduced their growth rate by 4.2% (in female) and by 6.3% (in males)^{iv}. Both species are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act which prohibits 'take' of either species, where take is defined as harming them in one or more of various ways, including poisoning^v. Regardless, both species are still poisoned whenever they eat wildfowl or fish containing lead. In addition to eagles, carrion eating birds, namely vultures, condors and corvids, are poisoned by the lead in carcasses. Exposure to spent lead shot also causes lethal and sub-lethal impacts in many other birds, notably ducks^{vi} and swans^{vii}.

Bans Really Do Work

Bans on the use of lead ammunition have already shown promising results. The ban on lead shot for hunting waterfowl in Illinois was followed by a reduction in the numbers of crippled duck and geese^{viii}. The ban in New Jersey was followed by lower detectable levels of lead in the blood of American black ducks^{ix}. Bans on lead shot in 1999 were followed by lower incidence of non-hunting lead poisoning among ducks using the Mississippi Flyway and an estimated 64% reduction in mortality among mallards from ingesting lead shot^x. Following a lead shot ban in the California Condor's range in 2008, lead levels in golden eagles and turkey vultures.^{xi}

Banning lead would also have positive impacts on human health since, according to the World Health Organization, there is no safe level of lead^{xii}. The ban will thus also protect those who eat wildfowl. It is high time that exposure of birds and ourselves to lead was reduced by passage of this eminently sensible bill.

Based on the forgoing, we urge the Committee to vote favorably on SB 181.

MOS

MOS is an approximately 2200-strong member all-volunteer organization that is dedicated to the study, conservation and enjoyment of birds in Maryland and beyond. We were founded in 1945 and are organized into 15 chapters throughout the state. We lead field trips, organize lectures, have a very active youth group, conduct period bird counts, hold an annual convention and own 10 sanctuaries in various parts of state (all of which are open to the public at no charge).

In closing, I wish to thank you and the Committee for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Robin G. Todd PhD,
Conservation Chair
Maryland Ornithological Society
10174 Green Clover Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21042
Robin.todd@mdbirds.org

References Cited

- ⁱ Slabe et al. (2022). Demographic implications of lead poisoning for eagles across North America. *Science*, 375. Pp. 779-782.
- ⁱⁱ Hanley, B. J. et al. (2021). Environmental lead reduces the resilience of bald eagle populations. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 86(22177).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Watson, J.W., and Davies, R.W. (2015). Lead, Mercury, and DDE in the Blood of Nesting Golden Eagles in the Columbia Basin, Washington. *The Journal of Raptor Research*, 49(2). Pp.217-221.
- ^{iv} Golden, N.H., Warner, S.E., and Coffey, M.J. (2016). A Review and Assessment of Spent Lead Ammunition and Its Exposure and Effects to Scavenging Birds in the United States. *Reviews of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology*, 237. Pp. 123-191.
- ^v [16 U.S.C. 668-668d and 50 CFR 22.6](#)
- ^{vi} Rattner, B.B., Franson, J.C., Sheffield, S.R., Goddard, C.I., Leonard, N.J., Stang, D. and Wingate P.,J. (2008). Sources and Implications of Lead Ammunition and Fishing Tackle on Natural Resources. The Wildlife Society American & The Fisheries Society Technical Review Committee on Lead in the Environment. Technical Review 08-01 Pp.15, 22, 28 31 and 35
- ^{vii} <https://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/what-we-do/swan-health.html>
- ^{viii} Ellis, M.B., and Miller, C.A. (2021). The effect of a ban on the use of lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting on duck and goose crippling rates in Illinois. *Wildlife Biology*, e01001.
- ^{ix} Lewis, N.L., et al. (2021). Blood lead declines in wintering American black ducks in New Jersey following the Lead Shot ban. *Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management*, 12(1).
- ^x Havera, A.W., and Zercher, B. (2000) Ingestion of lead and nontoxic shotgun pellets by ducks in the Mississippi flyway. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 64. Pp. 848–857.
- ^{xi} Kelly, R.T. et al. (2011). Impact of the California Lead Ammunition Ban on Reducing Lead Exposure in Golden Eagles and Turkey Vultures. *PLoS One*, 6(4).
- ^{xii} <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lead-poisoning-and-health>