

HB1067 Lead Ammunition Phase Out

OPPOSE HB1067

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Committee Members,

I have been a Maryland hunter for decades; I am a member of Deer management with 2 counties, and a DNR trained Maryland Hunter Education instructor.

Key Points

Development of the copper rifle bullet

Firearm deer hunting in more densely populated eastern states was limited to "Shotgun slugs" up until a few years ago. In the last few years, 8 states have approved the use of straight wall cartridge (SWC) rifles, including Maryland in 2020.

25+ years ago, Barnes Co. pioneered the copper bullet for use in High powered rifles; these rifles are primarily used out west in wide open terrain. Barnes Co holds many patents that are now expiring.

With the recent popularity of Straight Walled Cartridge Rifles, companies are working to develop copper bullets that function in these rifles. The major difference is the SWC shoots a much larger bullet at half the speed as a "high powered rifle", and they are having issues with the harder copper engaging the rifling in the barrels (especially older rifles), and expansion at slower speeds.

With the Barnes Co. patents expiring and the popularity of SWC rifles, there are many new companies emerging that are developing SWC copper bullets. I have personally talked with 3 companies and shot their copper bullets with some limited success in one rifle, unsuccessful in 2 others, and supplied feedback. I heard of some other small shops starting up development. One manufacture said they are working with a new copper alloy that is softer.

Point is, The SWC rifles we now use in MD are a recent emergence, and it will take time to develop bullets that function safely and effectively in these rifles.

This is the 3rd year at an attempt to limit hunting with an ammunition restriction

In 2024 and 2025 with the backing and support from animal rights groups, Legislation was proposed to ban lead ammunition used for hunting in Maryland, claiming bald eagles were being harmed, even though all evidence showed the opposite. Then In July 2025 this was confirmed by Maryland DNR's report: 2025 "*A Soaring Success: Maryland's Bald Eagle Population Recovery*". Adding to that, the simple step of having hunters remove the gut pile with their deer would eliminate the chance of ANY animals having access to any part of the deer. Effectively ending the claim that Hunter's use of lead ammunition is harming eagles.

Now in 2026, they have shifted to "Hunters are harming themselves and their families"
This is clearly a case of "A goal", in search of a problem.

The Backers of this legislation have no interest in a large reduction of lead use, only a ban.
As far back as 2024, I have personally talked with crafters/supporters of the Maryland lead ammo ban. I offered up ways to reduce the lead use by up to 80%, they had no interest in that, they only wanted the full ban. I have pointed to the success states have had partnering with the "North American Lead-Free Partnership", again, no interest.

<https://www.leadfreepartnership.org/about>

Impossible to enact/enforce:

Adding the section that allows The DNR to "Authorize the use of lead ammo if Non-lead ammo is not commercially available for a caliber/weapon" will not work as proposed. This is just another example of the crafters of these legislative attempts that have no concept of Firearms, ballistics or hunting.

Many States have adopted an approach of education and partnership, to see a reduction of up to 80% reduction in the use of lead ammunition in hunting.

Many states have a successful partnership of education and training with The "North American Lead-Free Partnership". When you involve wildlife agencies, land trusts, outdoor brands, educators, and hunter-conservation groups, it is proven that that conservation works best when it's collaborative.

As opposed to heavy handed bureaucrats, who only want a full ban and have little to no knowledge of Hunting, Firearms, or ballistics.

<https://www.leadfreepartnership.org/partnership>

Limited availability of Copper base ammunition

There has been a very limited supply of copper based ammunition on Maryland store shelves. With the pending legislation to add an 11% tax on Firearms/Ammunition (HB0197/SB0118), this would all but end online ammunition sales to Maryland residents.

It has been shown, that when states add special taxes to firearms/ammo, many online retailers just refuse to sell to residents of that state, They are not going to set up special account/taxing just for those state's customers.

DETAILS

Education

Conservation is most effective when it's led by those who know the land, the wildlife, and the Firearms best—hunters, conservationists, Wildlife biologists, manufactures.

The last 2 years I have requested that MD enact a policy of education and outreach to teach hunters about non lead alternatives, where they work, and where they do not.

There are national groups of hunters specializing in the promotion of Lead-free ammunition for hunting. They are achieving up to an 80% rate of hunters voluntarily switching to lead-free bullets. And this is in the infancy of these programs and the copper bullet market. As copper bullets are developed for the SWC rifles used in MD, Hunters will gladly switch. These are programs that would cost the State zero dollars with proven success. And yet the sponsors of these MD bills ignore these options.

And yet Maryland legislators with national animal rights groups continue to ignore these options and push blanket bans that would cut many hunters out.

<https://www.leadfreepartnership.org/about>

<https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2025-09/voluntary-lead-free-ammunition-incentive-program-2025-2026-hunting-season>

<https://www.kjzz.org/kjzz-news/2024-10-27/arizona-hunters-aid-california-condor-recovery-efforts-through-lead-free-ammunition-program>

Enforcement and mandates

SB0181 includes the section: *“THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION FOR MUZZLELOADERS, HANDGUNS, RIFLES, AND SHOTGUNS IF NONLEAD AMMUNITION IS NOT COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE FOR THE SPECIFIC WEAPON.”*

This is both not enforceable, and not practical. Just because there is ONE non-lead cartridge available for a caliber rifle that does not guarantee that it will function in that rifle.

In response to CA lead bans, there was four 22LR cartridges marketed: CCI Copper-22, Winchester Super-X 26g Tin 22, and Norma Ecco Speed and Ecco power,, They have all been discontinued due to very poor performance. But Maryland small game hunters would have to use these non functioning cartridges, because they were a “Commercially available cartridge” Another example is the 44mag rifle, it has been sold with both a 1:20 barrel twist, and a 1:38 twist,, A 1:38 twist will not stabilize a copper bullet,, But since a “commercially available cartridge” is available, they would have to use it.

It typically takes a hunter trying multiple brands of ammunition to find one that works in their particular rifle. How Is DNR going to be able to regulate what ammo will function properly in whose rifle?? ,, They are not.

Vagueness and assumptions in SB0181

500 peer-reviewed studies about lead exposure, but no references to the actual studies, or what form of lead (Inorganic? Organic? Metallic?)

They claim copper bullets are available for every gun, but we have proven that to be false.

They keep referring to “Steel bird shot” used in waterfowl hunting, This has zero correlation to Bullets used for deer hunting.

The Shattering lead bullets – what brand/model bullet, what velocity, what range?

This is what is put out by Anti-hunting groups



This is the reality of what we are using in Maryland as far as Straight Wall Cartridges:



Winchester 44 big bore



Weight Retention

Winchester 44 white box



Hornady 45-70 lever action

Bald Eagles

As noted above, The Bald Eagle population in the Chesapeake region has gone from ~60 breeding pairs in 1970s to over 3000 pair in 2020.

(The following are clips from a “Bay Journal article and WTOP Melissa Howell interview) According to Bryan Watts, founder and director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Virginia’s College of William and Mary, who has authored dozens of academic papers on bald eagles over a more than 30-year career:

“Eagles have shown themselves to be more adaptable than we expected,” But now, he says, they seem to be running out of room in the Bay region. The most notable consequence has been the growing population of so-called “floaters,” breeding-age eagles of either sex with no territory of their own. The crowding has become so intense that researchers now believe that the floater population is six to eight times greater than the breeding population. Breeding males that do have nests and mates find themselves at near-constant threat of losing them to intruders. “These things can be bloody fights to the death”. “It’s a jungle out there for these birds.” “Food supply for eagles hasn’t been able to keep up and infighting has become common, the professor said. Watts added that the population began to reach its limits”. “The young were starving in the nest,”

Lead is present in many aspects of the Chesapeake Bay, It is in the sediment base, it is in the fish the Eagles eat, A major source is the paint in the bridges over/around the bay, often where Eagles perch/nest, It comes from runoff from active industrial sites and military installations that are prevalent in the bay region.

Eagles exposure to lead is not primarily from hunters.

<https://www.pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30698866/>

Summary:

HB1067 is not enforceable and if it was, it would cut many hunters off from hunting with their weapons, as a wide range of viable copper Ammo is not yet available for all weapons.

There is a National organization that helps States with “Education and incentive” based transition to lead free hunting ammunition – “North American Lead Free Partnership”, This is a route the state could take that would cost zero dollars and achieve a 80% compliance in the first few years, giving the market time to mature and provide product to the hunters.

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For these reasons I OPPOSE HB1067

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