

Protecting Birds from Lead Ammunition and Fishing Tackle

Lead toxicity from ingestion of ammunition and fishing tackle is a major threat to birds and other wildlife, killing millions of grit-eating birds each year, in addition to countless raptors.

- Species and groups affected include: California Condors, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, Waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, Migratory Birds, and Upland Game Birds.
- Purely educational and voluntary efforts have not had a sufficient impact as indicated by elevated blood levels of lead in eagles in all regions of the country.
- Regulations to transition to readily available non-toxic alternatives are needed to protect wildlife and humans from lead ammunition and tackle toxicity.



Bald Eagle. Credit: USFWS

Population-Level Effects on Bald and Golden Eagles: New Discovery in 2022

2022 Slabe et al. paper [Demographic implications of lead poisoning for eagles across North America](#) demonstrates that lead ammunition is negatively impacting Bald and Golden Eagles at the population level, hampering recovery and population growth. A quote from the paper is below:

“Use of lead in ammunition during hunting seasons corresponds directly, both spatially and temporally, with the feeding ecology of facultative scavengers such as bald and golden eagles, a problem that has been studied extensively. Our data show a continent-wide temporal correspondence between acute lead poisoning of eagles and the use of lead ammunition.”

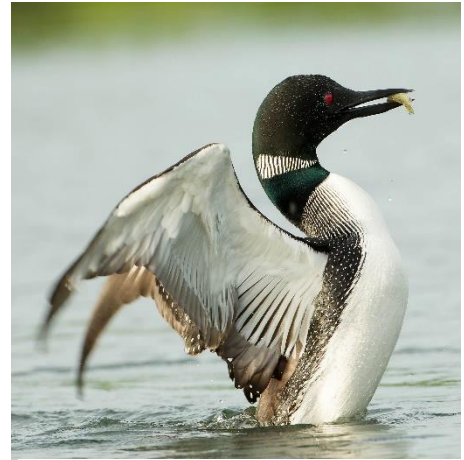
- Bald and Golden Eagles both had lead levels at a chronic toxicity level
 - 47% of Bald Eagles | 46% of Golden Eagles
- Lead toxicity in Eagles is geospatially correlated with hunting
- Lead toxicity is [impeding Bald Eagle](#) resilience as populations continue recovering
 - 3.8% Population Suppression
- Lead toxicity threatens Golden Eagle populations across the country
 - 0.8% Population Suppression

Bald Eagles were only recently removed from the Endangered Species list, and Golden Eagles are unfortunately on their way as indicated by recent population estimates. Removing anthropogenic threats from lead are well within the purview of the United States.

US Fish and Wildlife Service Initiates Reform

The USFWS has [recently initiated efforts](#) on eight National Wildlife Refuges to phase out lead entirely. Additionally, all Refuge lands newly opened to Hunting and Fishing will require non-lead materials. Key takeaways from the Service's rule include:

- 1) Lead poses a threat to wildlife.
- 2) A population level impact is not required for significant rulemaking (though one does exist for Eagles and previously for waterfowl).
- 3) Purely voluntary approaches to lead reduction have not yielded significant results.
- 4) Requiring non-lead material is not significantly prohibitive to under resourced groups.



Common Loon. Credit: Anieszka Bacal



California Condor. Credit: Shutterstock

Looking to the Future

We can make hunting and fishing safer for people and for wildlife. Viable alternatives to lead ammunition are widely available and not cost prohibitive. Eagle populations are impacted by lead and threats to Condors and other species persist; [nationwide regulations on lead are urgently needed.](#)

States must also play a role. Several states are already providing important leadership to solve this problem, either banning lead statewide ([California](#)) or aggressively providing information on lead alternatives ([Oregon](#), [Minnesota](#)).

A survey by American Bird Conservancy found only 20 states have any information about lead toxicity on state wildlife agency websites, and of those only 8 were easily accessed.

Educating sportspeople about the dangers of lead is important, but enacting rules and regulations to protect wildlife is critical.

Additional Resources and References:

[North American Non-Lead Partnership](#)
[Video: Switch to Non-Lead Ammunition](#)
[Get the Lead Out: Minnesota DNR](#)

[Scientific Papers on Hunting with Lead](#)
[Fish Lead Free](#)
[Non-Lead Tackle Suppliers](#)