

# WHERE THE PEDAL MEETS THE METAL: LEAD AMMUNITION TOP OF MIND IN D.C.

CONSERVATION  
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**For most hunters, the metallurgical composition of ammunition only comes to mind when buying a box of cartridges or two at the sporting goods store. Most folks find their preferred caliber, peruse the specs, and buy the most cost-effective round for their budget. Traditionally, few outside those who reload their own or are in tune with the industry have looked closely at how their bullets are built. However, we all know that this composition matters. It matters for the efficacy of your shot, the terrain you are hunting, and, at least occasionally, it matters in the eyes of the law.**

Today, lead ammunition is top of mind for lawmakers and bureaucrats in Washington, especially the leadership of the Interior Department. The latest moves on this issue came in the promulgating of rules to expand hunting and fishing opportunities on National Wildlife Refuge System lands—places where some feel the need and

ability to restrict the equipment of hunters and anglers.

In 2022, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) finalized a rule to expand access to hunting and fishing opportunities on National Wildlife Refuge Service lands. However, that rule also sought to phase out the use of traditional lead ammunition and fishing tackle on those lands. The Boone and Crockett Club was disappointed to see the lack of a science-based justification for these rules and that these rules do not recognize state fish and wildlife agencies as the primary managers of our nation's fish and wildlife.

Concurrently, litigation by animal rights interests was brought against a similar, previous rule to expand hunting and fishing access on national wildlife refuges, alleging that accumulation of lead ammunition and tackle will harm wildlife species at those refuges. The best available science does not substantiate those allegations.

Lead has no known positive effect on the

landscape, though science is clear that lead can cause harm to individual animals that consume it. Lead is clearly a toxic substance that can create health issues in wildlife and people when ingested or inhaled, and it has been observed most recently in raptors. While the mortality of any individual bird can be concerning, it may not necessarily indicate a threat to an entire population. The debate surrounding the use of lead-based hunting ammunition focuses on the existence, extent, and types of poisoning risks—and how to address them best.


Lead ammunition has not been legal for pursuing waterfowl since 1991, but that ban did not address concerns surrounding lead bullets. When these waterfowl ammunition restrictions began, the impact of bullets was largely unknown. Today the debate centers on lead bullets fired from centerfire rifles that fracture upon impact. Fragments of those lead bullets are left in the meat and guts of the animals they kill.

The concern then turns to where the lead goes from there. Does it go home with us in the meat we pack out, or is it left on the landscape in gut piles and consumed by scavengers? Perhaps it's a combination of both.

A survey conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources found that little lead makes it home with us—only two percent of packages of whole cuts contained lead in that survey. Heavy metals like lead are relatively inert in soil, so using this ammunition at the range is unlikely to cause harm.

Laws, rules, and regulations must play a role in using lead products, but we must be careful in considering the venues where these policy decisions should be made and ensure that these rules are properly tailored.

Decisions should be made at the state level, where most fisheries and wildlife policies are made, and policies should be targeted to ensure they truly address the problems we are attempting to solve. Overly broad and



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Learn more about the effects of lead on raptors on page 34.

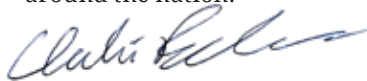
arbitrary ammunition and tackle bans severely and unnecessarily impact the economy and can hinder fish and wildlife conservation programs and projects.

“The Boone and Crockett Club is concerned about efforts to arbitrarily limit the use of lead ammunition and fishing tackle and appreciate legislation to curtail these proposals,” said Tony Schoonen, Chief Executive Officer of the Boone and Crockett Club. “Science-based fish and wildlife conservation is the cornerstone of our organization and is fundamental to how federal and state fish and wildlife agencies manage our natural resources. If an individual wildlife agency decides that lead exposure prevents them from meeting a population management objective for a particular species in a given area, it should be up to that agency to implement targeted solutions that do not unnecessarily restrict hunting or shooting opportunities, including hunter education, voluntary programs, or mandatory

programs using suitable ammunition alternatives.”

In some cases, alternatives to lead ammunition and tackle that deliver similar performance at a comparable cost simply do not exist. But where they do exist, or even when they cost a little more, the Boone and Crockett Club encourages folks to use non-toxic products. It is part of the fair chase hunting ethos to ensure we are aware of the consequences, intended or unintended, of our actions on the landscape, and it is up to each of us to gather as much information as possible before heading afield.

There will always be an intersection of state and federal policymaking on issues like this, especially regarding issues that are regulated at multiple levels of government. As always, the leaders, members, and staff of the Boone and Crockett Club actively engage in debates on this issue in Washington, D.C., and state capitals around the nation. ■




Read the Club's Position Statement on Lead in Ammunition for Hunting and Shooting



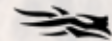
Read John Organ's Science Blasts column, A Wicked Issue, from the Fall 2020 issue of Fair Chase.

The topic of non-lead hunting ammunition has become one of the most polarizing topics discussed in today's hunting community—and beyond for that matter.

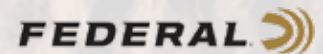
Read the article covering the factors to consider when deciding if you will make the switch.



Excerpt from the Spring 2020 issue of Fair Chase



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THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.

