

Excerpt From Game Management plan

Non-toxic Ammunition

Concerns continue to be expressed regarding the use of lead ammunition since it is known to be a toxic substance, and there is documented ingestion of spent ammunition and ammunition fragments by many wild birds and mammals. Impacts to wild birds from lead poisoning tend to be much more severe than mammals; however, population level impacts to wildlife other than California Condors have not been well documented. There have also been concerns expressed about potential impacts to hunters and their families from eating game harvested by lead ammunition. Most recently, the state of California passed a law that will phase out the use of lead ammunition for hunting by 2017.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission has a history of addressing concerns with the use of toxic shot when population level impacts can be documented and in areas where deposition or use of lead is likely to be problematic. Lead shot use and possession has been prohibited for all waterfowl hunting in Washington since a nationwide phase-in of nontoxic shot was implemented in 1986-1991. Beginning in 2000 and phased in through 2009, the Commission expanded nontoxic shot requirements for hunting all upland birds, doves, and band-tailed pigeons on all pheasant release sites. The Commission has also regulated the use of lead sinkers for fishing in lakes used by loons. A continuing problem in Washington is the poisoning of swans that consume lead shot deposited before it was banned for waterfowl hunting.

While alternatives have been developed for many of the popular types of shot and bullets, there have been concerns expressed about the limited quantities available; concerns that ammunition for some of the smaller calibers have not been extensively produced yet and that the availability of small shot sizes is limited; concerns that the non-lead alternatives are more expensive than some of the more common ammunition used for hunting and shooting; and there continue to be concerns expressed about damage to older types of firearms.

Issue Statement

A wide variety of birds may consume spent lead shot, resulting in increased mortalities and sublethal effects. Birds of prey may ingest lead as they scavenge animals (e.g., deer) taken during hunting seasons. In Washington, there is increasing evidence of lead consumption by golden eagles, a species of concern with low population levels (see

http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/research/projects/raptor/golden_eagle_ecology/). However, some sportsmen are concerned that the added expense of purchasing non-toxic ammunition is not justified with population-level impacts and may further reduce hunter recruitment and retention.

Objective 8:

Reduce the availability and use of lead ammunition where lead poisoning of wild birds is problematic.

Strategies:

a. Survey Washington hunters regarding their ammunition preferences; concerns for both lead and non-toxic ammunition; relative knowledge of the issues; and their levels of support for the development of mechanisms to reduce the use of lead ammunition.

- b. Survey Washington's general public to better understand their relative knowledge of the issues; their levels of support for the continued use of lead ammunition; and the development of voluntary programs and/or regulatory mechanisms to eliminate use of lead ammunition.
- c. Develop voluntary programs to encourage hunters to utilize lead alternatives.
- d. Develop an outreach plan that helps hunters understand the lead ammunition issues and gain support for reducing the use of lead for hunting.
- e. Work with hunters to develop restrictions that are supported and effective at reducing lead poisoning of wildlife.
- f. Promote use of non-toxic ammunition for department activities, where applicable.