

01/24/2022

Representative Mike Freiberg,
Chair, Preventative Health Policy Division
Minnesota House of Representatives

Re: Toxicity of Lead Ammunition and Lead Fishing Tackle

Dear Representative Freiberg and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Gretchen Strate, I am a lifelong resident of Minnesota and a current resident of Robbinsdale. I have a Master's Degree in Biology with a focus on conservation. I have been a volunteer for over ten years with an organization called Wildlife Rehabilitation & Release, a local nonprofit that supports the wildlife rehabilitation community through education, public outreach, and direct care programs. I am currently a Board Member and the Wildlife Rescue Team Coordinator. The Wildlife Rescue Team's mission is to capture injured and sick wildlife that the public is unable to safely capture on their own and coordinate placement into appropriate medical and rehabilitative care. My experience leading the Wildlife Rescue Team over the past two years has shown me firsthand the harmful effects of lead toxicity on Minnesota's wildlife species, primarily from lead shot and fishing sinkers.

Our team has rescued birds from various areas throughout the state that were later found to be suffering from lead poisoning, including Trumpeter Swans and Canada geese. Just a few weeks ago we captured two Trumpeter Swans on a frozen lake in Annandale. Both swans were taken to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center where they were diagnosed with lead poisoning. Despite receiving medical treatment, both swans had to be humanely euthanized after a few days because their conditions continued to rapidly deteriorate due to the lead toxicity. Last winter we captured two Trumpeter Swans from Sucker Lake in Vadnais Heights that were diagnosed with lead poisoning, and observed multiple dead swans at the same location. Testing of dead Trumpeter Swans from Sucker Lake identified lead poisoning as the cause of death, attributing the source of lead to fishing sinkers. Last winter we also observed Trumpeter Swans exhibiting symptoms of lead poisoning at Lake Rebecca in Rockford. The ice and water conditions at the time prevented us from being able to safely attempt a rescue. Upon returning the following day, we found the bodies of three dead swans that had not been there the previous day. Upon contacting the Three Rivers Park District, I was told that the swans may have ingested lead from the Crow and Mississippi Rivers. The Minnesota DNR identifies lead poisoning as the greatest threat to Trumpeter Swans in Minnesota, and

attributes 40% of Trumpeter Swan fatalities to lead poisoning. The DNR also estimates that lead poisoning may account for up to 50% of loon fatalities in Minnesota.

Lead poisoning affects our mammal species as well. Our team rescued an opossum with eight babies in her pouch last winter and she was subsequently diagnosed with high levels of lead in her system. Tests administered on admitted mammals at The Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota found that a third of squirrels had toxic lead levels, and 80% of opossums had lead in their systems, with 50% at toxic levels. Lead poisoning causes significant and prolonged suffering in our wildlife species. Symptoms include muscle weakness and paralysis, tremors, impacted crops, gasping, an inability to regulate body temperature, vomiting and diarrhea, and starvation.

The toxic effects of lead ammunition and discarded tackle can persist in our environment for decades, posing long-term threats to the health and survival of many of our wildlife species. Much of the illness and mortality caused by lead toxicity is unnecessary and preventable, since non-toxic alternatives are readily available. I strongly support a ban on the use of lead ammunition and lead fishing tackle. I sincerely hope that the Minnesota House of Representatives will recognize this urgent threat and take appropriate action to protect our wildlife species and ecosystems.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Gretchen Strate

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