

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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STEEL SHOT RULING GOES INTO EFFECT

Steel shot will be required for waterfowl hunting only with 12 gauge shotguns in portions of nine States along the Atlantic seaboard this autumn, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. The steel shot restriction does not apply to the hunter of species other than ducks, geese, and coots.

The ruling, which takes effect immediately, was published in the September 13, 1976, Federal Register. It follows a proposed rulemaking published in the Federal Register on July 28, 1976.

It differs from the proposed rulemaking in that lead shot may be used in shotguns smaller than 12 gauge in the designated areas this year only. This change was made in response to public comments pointing out that about 15 percent of the hunters use the smaller gauges and would be adversely affected by a restriction to steel shot. Steel shot shells will be available only in 12 gauge in 1976. The one-year exception includes the following gauges: 16, 20, 28, and 410.

The steel shot zones designated for the upcoming waterfowl hunting season were areas where waterfowl are highly exposed to lead poisoning because of high annual deposits of lead shot. Waterfowl hunters should refer to waterfowl hunting regulations for exact descriptions of the areas but brief descriptions are as follows:

(over)

Delaware--Waters of five State Wildlife Management Areas and a zone within 150 yards of these waters.

Florida--Eastern half of Brevard County.

Maine--Merrymeeting Bay.

Maryland--Waters of Dorchester County and a zone within 150 yards of these waters.

Massachusetts--Coastal portions of Essex County.

New Jersey--Atlantic County east of Garden State Parkway.

New York--Southern portions of Nassau County and Suffolk County west of the Robert Moses Causeway.

North Carolina--Waters of Currituck County and a zone within 150 yards of these waters.

Virginia--Virginia Beach, primarily the area known as Back Bay.

These areas where steel shot will be used in 1976 were selected on the basis of their location in counties that met the following criteria:

- (1) An average annual harvest rate of 25 or more ducks per square mile.
- (2) An average annual harvest of 12,000 or more ducks.

Counties meeting these criteria represent some of the most critical lead poisoning problem areas in the Atlantic Flyway. The high levels and intensity of harvest indicate that large quantities of lead pellets are deposited in this waterfowl habitat of those counties. For example, a harvest of 12,000 ducks is estimated to result in the deposit of more than 3 tons of lead shot. This means high availability of lead pellets to waterfowl, and as a result high exposure to lead poisoning.

Ammunition supplies are adequate for 12 gauge shotguns for the areas designated for 1976 but there is not enough to cover many other areas. The steel shot program will be expanded to cover the most important lead poisoning problem areas in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways next year when supplies of ammunition are expected to be much greater.

In the meantime, the limited program in 1976 is important because it will provide an opportunity for observation and experience that will be useful in planning next year's program. At the same time it will begin to protect waterfowl in areas where exposure to lead poisoning is greatest.