



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES MEASURES TO REDUCE RISK TO BALD EAGLES FROM LEAD POISONING

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director Robert Jantzen today announced proposed new conservation measures designed to reduce the risk to bald eagles from lead poisoning.

Jantzen noted the number of bald eagles has been increasing in recent years, but that the species is not fully recovered from earlier declines caused primarily by the effects of pesticides and loss of habitat. Examinations of bald eagles that have been found dead indicate that some have died of lead poisoning.

"We have carefully examined available scientific data concerning lead poisoning in bald eagles," Jantzen said. "Although this examination indicated the need for additional scientific data to better identify the cause of and cure for this problem, we believe our unique responsibility to protect our national bird requires action now to alleviate the risk of lead poisoning in eagles.

"Therefore, we are proposing a comprehensive program we believe to be both responsible and scientifically appropriate. We plan to work closely with the States in this effort, and we hope the public will comment on the proposal and work with us in developing and carrying out this conservation plan."

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The Fish and Wildlife Service has been studying lead poisoning in bald eagles for some time, but a recent petition from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) served to intensify the Service's efforts, Jantzen said.

Citing potential threats to eagles, NWF on August 1 petitioned the Service to immediately impose emergency nontoxic (steel) shot zones for waterfowl hunting in six counties in five States, or else close waterfowl hunting in those areas this fall. NWF also identified 89 counties in 30 States where it said the Service should establish nontoxic shot zones for the 1985-86 waterfowl season in order to protect bald eagles.

Jantzen said the Fish and Wildlife Service shares the Federation's concern for bald eagles, but agency biologists question the scientific validity of some of the assumptions NWF made in its petition. Based upon the continued recovery of the bald eagle, the Service has found no "emergency" warranting the immediate imposition of nontoxic shot zones or the closure of waterfowl hunting, he added.

However, Jantzen said, the Fish and Wildlife Service agrees additional measures are needed to lessen the potential threat to eagles from lead poisoning. Therefore, the Service proposed, in the September 14 Federal Register, a comprehensive conservation program including the following elements:

- o Establishment of three categories of areas where there is evidence that bald eagles have either died from lead poisoning or could potentially be affected by lead poisoning. While these areas are now identified on a county-wide basis, the Service may refine them to more specific ecological units, such as river basins.

- o Announcement of the Service's decision to propose regulations by mid-December banning the use of lead shot for the 1985-86 waterfowl season in the areas of greatest concern unless additional study and public comment demonstrate this regulation would be inappropriate. These areas, known as "Category I," are Siskiyou and Modoc Counties (Calif.); Klamath and Jackson Counties (Oreg.); and Holt County (Mo.). The Service will make a final decision on this regulatory option in mid-November, after a review of public comments and any further data acquired by that time.

- o Accelerated acquisition and review of data concerning lead poisoning in eagles in 14 counties in 11 States -- "Category II" -- with the possibility that some Category II areas ultimately may be added to the Category I list after the public comment period. The Service is seeking all available data and requesting public comments on whether any of the Category II areas should be designated as nontoxic shot zones for the 1985-86 waterfowl season. Counties listed as Category II areas are: Thurston and Clallam (Wash.); Lassen and Butte (Calif.); Weber (Utah); Canyon (Idaho); Coconino (Ariz.); Churchill (Nev.); Jefferson (Ark.); Madison (Ill.); Terrebonne (La.); Dorchester (Md.); Washington and Hancock (Maine).

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FACT SHEET

AREAS OF POTENTIAL CONCERN FOR LEAD POISONING RISK IN BALD EAGLES

In identifying the areas listed below, the Fish and Wildlife Service assumed that the greatest potential risk of lead poisoning in bald eagles occurs in areas where: (1) lead shot is used for waterfowl hunting; (2) there are large concentrations of bald eagles and waterfowl, especially geese, during fall and winter; and (3) there are large harvests of waterfowl and thus a potential for a high incidence of lead shot carried in the tissues of birds hit, but not killed. It is believed that bald eagles get lead poisoning primarily from swallowing lead shot embedded in the bodies of such birds, rather than from eating lead-poisoned birds. Eagles may also obtain lead from sources other than shotgun pellets but the extent of this exposure is currently unknown.

In consideration of these factors, the Service took the counties of the country that were included in the National Wildlife Federation petition and ranked them on the basis of the level of harvested waterfowl. It then confirmed that each of these counties had a wintering population of 15 or more bald eagles. Finally, the Service noted for each county whether or not there had been a documented death of a bald eagle attributed by the Service to lead poisoning.

Category I: AREAS FOR WHICH AVAILABLE INFORMATION INDICATES THE SUBSTANTIAL LIKELIHOOD OF A PROBLEM INVOLVING LEAD POISONING IN BALD EAGLES

Criteria for Designation: (1) an average annual harvest of 25,000 or more waterfowl; and (2) at least one documented bald eagle death attributed by the Service to lead poisoning.

<u>Name of County/State</u>	<u>Number of Harvested Waterfowl</u>	<u>Number of Dead Bald Eagles</u>
Siskiyou (CA)*	77,300	3
Klamath (OR)	59,200	0
Modoc (CA)*	27,200	1
Holt (MO)*	25,000	1
Jackson (OR)	6,800	1

Note: The four listed counties in California and Oregon constitute the Klamath Basin area and are treated as an ecological habitat unit because the same waterfowl and eagle populations must range over this entire area. Thus, Klamath County is included although no eagle deaths were recorded there and Jackson county is included although its waterfowl harvest is less than 25,000.

Category II: AREAS FOR WHICH AVAILABLE INFORMATION SUGGESTS THERE MAY BE A PROBLEM WITH LEAD POISONING IN EAGLES

Criteria for Designation: (1) an average annual harvest of 25,000 or more waterfowl and no eagle deaths from lead poisoning; or (2) an average annual harvest of less than 25,000 waterfowl and one documented bald eagle death from lead poisoning.

<u>Name of County/State</u>	<u>Number of Harvested Waterfowl</u>	<u>Number of Dead Bald Eagles</u>
Butte (CA)	111,200	0
Terrebonne (LA)	91,500	0
Weber (UT)	54,000	0
Canyon (ID)	52,300	0
Jefferson (AR)	48,100	0
Lassen (CA)	42,900	0
Churchill (NV)	38,200	0
Dorchester (MD)	34,700	0
Clallam (WA)	31,000	0
Thurston (WA)*	14,600	1
Hancock (ME)	13,700	1
Washington (ME)	10,400	1
Coconino (AZ)*	5,800	1
Madison (IL)*	3,900	1

Category III: AREAS FOR WHICH AVAILABLE INFORMATION SUGGESTS THERE IS A POTENTIAL FOR A PROBLEM OF UNKNOWN MAGNITUDE INVOLVING LEAD POISONING IN BALD EAGLES

Criteria for Designation: an average annual harvest of between 10,000 and 25,000 waterfowl but no documented bald eagle deaths due to lead poisoning.

<u>Name of County/State</u>	<u>Number of Harvested Waterfowl</u>	<u>Number of Dead Bald Eagles</u>
St. Charles (MO)	19,400	0
Spokane (WA)	16,400	0
Ballard (KY)	13,600	0
Mason (IL)	12,400	0
Henderson (IL)	11,800	0
Mississippi (AR)	11,200	0
Sagadahoc (ME)	11,200	0
Pierce (WA)	11,000	0
Duchesne (UT)	10,800	0
Whatcom (WA)	10,200	0

* Identified in NWF petition as areas where NWF sought emergency imposition of nontoxic shot regulations or closure of waterfowl hunting this fall. All the other listed counties were identified in NWF petition as areas where nontoxic shot zones were requested for the 1985-86 waterfowl season.