



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES NONTOXIC SHOT ZONES TO PROTECT BALD EAGLES FROM LEAD POISONING

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has for the first time proposed to require nontoxic (steel) shot for waterfowl hunting in certain areas to protect bald eagles from lead poisoning.

Nontoxic shot has been required for waterfowl hunting in designated areas since 1976 to prevent lead poisoning in waterfowl. Ducks and geese are known to get lead poisoning from spent lead shot pellets that they swallow while consuming seeds or grit.

The Service is now proposing additional nontoxic shot zones to protect bald eagles because eagles sometimes feed on sick, crippled, and dead waterfowl and may ingest lead shot contained in the bodies of such birds.

The action, published in the February 13, 1985, Federal Register, proposes designation of nontoxic shot zones in all or portions of 30 counties in 8 States. Twelve additional counties are identified as needing further study to determine if nontoxic shot should be required.

The Fish and Wildlife Service announced its intention to take this action on September 14, 1984, following receipt of a petition from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) that requested immediate designation of nontoxic shot zones in 6 counties and proposal of zones in 89 more counties to prevent lead poisoning in eagles. After reviewing NWF's petition and other information, the Service published an alternative eagle conservation plan that identified and requested public comments on 29 counties where lead poisoning in eagles was believed to be a problem or to warrant further study. The Service also requested public comments on the 95 counties identified by NWF.

After analyzing the public comments and conducting field analysis, the Service is now officially proposing 30 counties or parts of counties as nontoxic shot zones for the 1985-86 waterfowl hunting season in order to prevent lead poisoning in bald eagles. In identifying these counties, the Service has given highest priority to areas where there was an average annual waterfowl harvest of 10,000 ducks and geese between 1971 and 1980, and where the winter count of bald eagles exceeded 50 birds in at least one year between 1980 and 1982. This is based on the assumption that the availability of crippled or dead waterfowl is greater in areas with large waterfowl harvests.

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The Service also looked at the geographic distribution of reported eagle deaths, with the view that repeated deaths in an area are indicative of a problem while a single death could represent a bird that had ingested lead shot elsewhere and then flown a long distance. The Service also assessed the hazard to eagles in light of local observations by wildlife biologists and others. Among other observations, the Service sought information on whether bald eagles in the counties identified were in fact feeding on waterfowl or on fish. The Service also considered ecological and natural boundaries, as well as county boundaries, in identifying these areas.

As a result of this analysis, all or portions of the following counties have been proposed for designation as nontoxic shot zones for the 1985-86 waterfowl hunting season to protect bald eagles. The list includes groupings by geographic or ecological units.

California and Oregon: Klamath Basin, including Klamath County, Oregon, and Siskiyou County, California.

Oklahoma: Sequoyah County.

Kansas: Stafford County.

South Dakota: Missouri River and adjacent uplands, including Stanley, Hughes, Lyman, Brule, Gregory, and Charles Mix Counties.

Missouri: Holt County; also, Swan Lake Goose Management Zone including parts of Chariton, Livingston, Carroll, and Linn Counties; also, areas along the Mississippi River including St. Charles, Lincoln, and Pike Counties.

Illinois: areas along the Mississippi River including Calhoun and Pike Counties and Henderson County; Southern Illinois Goose Quota Zone including portions of Alexander, Jackson, Union, and Williamson Counties; areas along the Illinois River including Peoria, Fulton, and Mason Counties.

Iowa: Harrison County and an adjacent portion of Pottawattamie County.

The following counties have been identified for additional study during 1985-86 to determine whether they should be proposed as nontoxic shot zones to protect eagles: Douglas and Grant Counties, Washington; Lake County, Oregon; Shasta, Lassen, and Modoc Counties, California; Bingham and Jefferson Counties, Idaho; Box Elder County, Utah; Weld County, Colorado; Dawson County, Nevada; and Polk County, Florida.

Some counties identified by the Service as potential problem areas are not being proposed for nontoxic shot zones or further study at this time. Two of these counties -- Jackson County, Iowa, and Grant County, Wisconsin -- already have nontoxic shot zones. Five counties in Washington -- Grays Harbor, Skagit, Clallam, Snohomish, and Whatcom -- are judged to have a low risk of lead poisoning because eagles there are feeding primarily on fish rather than on waterfowl.

Public comments on the eagle proposal are welcome and should be submitted by March 13, 1985, to Director (FWS/MBM0), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.