



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release December 26, 1985

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PUBLISHES SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ON LEAD POISONING IN MIGRATORY BIRDS

A "Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the Use of Lead Shot for Hunting Migratory Birds in the United States" has been published by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is available for public review and comment.

The new report supplements a final environmental impact statement on the use of steel shot for waterfowl hunting that the Service published in 1976. That report considered the effects of lead poisoning on waterfowl only. The new environmental impact statement incorporates data from the first report, and has been expanded to summarize information gathered since 1976 on lead poisoning of endangered species such as the bald eagle and on migratory birds other than waterfowl.

The supplemental environmental impact statement proposes that annual waterfowl hunting regulations be devised so as to eliminate lead poisoning as a cause of death in migratory birds. The report examines six alternatives for achieving this objective and analyzes the biological and socioeconomic effects of each alternative.

The first--and preferred--alternative proposes prohibiting lead shot use in waterfowl hunting in areas where lead poisoning is a known or potential problem for waterfowl or bald eagles. Separate criteria are used for identifying lead-poisoning problem areas for waterfowl and bald eagles. For waterfowl, the criteria are those finalized by the Fish and Wildlife Service earlier this year, which are based on the percentage of a sample of waterfowl in an area that have specified levels of lead in their gizzards, blood, and livers. Bald eagle protection zones would be designated by identifying areas that have large waterfowl harvests and large concentrations of wintering bald eagles. The eagle criteria may be refined as additional information becomes available.

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The second and third alternatives are the same as the first alternative except that they each propose different criteria for protecting bald eagles, and hence would affect different numbers of counties in the United States.

The fourth alternative proposes that lead poisoning be eliminated by not allowing any migratory bird hunting. The fifth alternative proposes to phase in nontoxic shot for all migratory bird hunting by flyway. (Flyways are administrative management units that generally correspond to the major migration routes used by waterfowl.)

The last alternative would permit the use of lead shot for all hunting seasons, except where States voluntarily decide to require nontoxic shot.

Migratory birds can get lead poisoning when they swallow spent lead from shotgun ammunition. Bald eagles can get lead poisoning when they feed on crippled or dead waterfowl whose bodies contain lead shotgun pellets. To reduce exposure of waterfowl to lead poisoning, the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1976 began requiring waterfowl hunters to use nontoxic shot in designated zones. As a result of increasing evidence of lead poisoning in endangered bald eagles, the Service expanded nontoxic shot zones in 1985 to include areas where there is a significant opportunity for bald eagles to be exposed to lead poisoning. The regulations requiring nontoxic steel shot instead of traditional lead ammunition in some areas have been controversial, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is required by law to obtain State approval before nontoxic shot regulations may be implemented or enforced.

Copies of the draft supplemental environmental impact statement may be obtained by writing to the Director (MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Room 536, Matomic Building, Washington, D.C. 20240 (202-254-3207). Public comments are invited and will be accepted until February 3, 1986, at the same address.

Public hearings on the supplemental environmental impact statement will be held at the following locations:

Sacramento, California: January 14, 1986, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Woodlake Inn, 500 Leisure Lane.

Denver, Colorado: January 14, 1986, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Stapleton Plaza Hotel and Athletic Center, 3333 Quebec Street.

St. Louis, Missouri: January 14, 1986, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Airport Ramada Inn.

Washington D.C.: January 14, 1986, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Department of the Interior Auditorium, 18th and C Streets, N.W.