

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council

December 15, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council (Council) would like to thank you and the agencies within your respective Departments for your commitment to increasing access to America's public lands for all American's, including sportsmen and women. America's public lands are increasingly important in providing opportunities for the public to pursue wildlife-dependent recreational endeavors, including hunting. The Council is writing to offer its perspective and recommendations related to an important conservation and wildlife health matter that both your departments continue to work to address; that being the use of lead-based ammunition on public lands managed by the DOI and USDA.

The use of lead ammunition has drawn much attention over the last decade. Some have called for a total ban of the use of lead ammunition on Federally managed lands, due to potential impacts to wildlife and human health while others claim that the use of lead-based ammunition poses no significant impact and therefore its use should not be restricted. This on-going debate has created confusion and angst among hunters, wildlife managers, and the public. Over the course of the last year, the Council has worked to identify durable solutions for use in creating a path forward for Federal agencies on this issue. The recommendations we provide emphasize education, voluntary incentives, management unit level science-based decisions and the lifting of current impediments to research and development of alternative, non-lead ammunition. The recommendations are inter-related and build upon one another, therefore, they should be considered together, in total. We believe that together, these recommendations will provide a positive path forward in addressing the issue.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. The Council stands ready to continue dialog on this matter and helping with implementation of the recommendations. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Council Designated Federal Officer Doug Hobbs at doug_hobbs@fws.gov, or on (703) 358-2336.

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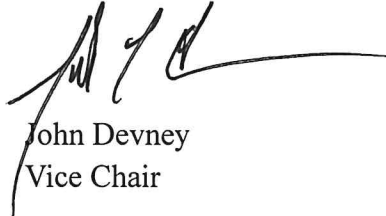
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Sincerely,



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Chair



John Devney
Vice Chair

Attachment

Cc: HWCC Members
Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Martha Williams, Director - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Randy Moore, Chief – U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture
Tracy Stone-Manning, Director - Bureau of Land Management
Cynthia Martinez, Chief - National Wildlife Refuge System

HWCC Recommendations related to Addressing Future Use of Lead/Non-lead Alternative Ammunition on Federal Lands

1. Public-private partnerships to educate and incentivize voluntary use of non-lead ammunition.
 - a. Public-private partnerships to address concerns surrounding use of non-lead ammo, including its availability and affordability.
 - b. Education/information sharing with the hunting public on the unintended impacts of lead ammunition; also, what non-lead ammo is, its current availability, and its effectiveness.
 - c. Voluntary and incentive-based programs to support hunter choice of non-lead ammunition versus bans or phase-outs.
2. Science-based decision making related to lead/non-lead alternative ammunition use at a management unit level.
3. Address research and development impediments for industry to develop non-lead alternative ammunition.

1. Utilization of public-private partnerships and federal incentives to educate, incentivize, and fund the voluntary use of non-lead ammunition:

The Council believes that the most effective and least interruptive path forward in positively influencing consumer behavior related to the purchase and use of nonlead alternative ammunition (and away from purchase/use of traditional, lead ammunition) and to minimize negative impacts to wildlife species and their habitats is through the establishment of public-private partnerships and incentive-based programs. These partnerships will work to educate the public on the benefits of selecting non-lead ammunition, share best management practices, and establish programs that will address the issues of availability and affordability of non-lead ammunition throughout the United States. These public-private partnerships will include federal, state, and tribal governments, nongovernmental organizations, and industry, including both manufacturers and retailers.

a. Public-Private Partnerships:

Issues around the use of traditional lead ammunition are complex; therefore, no single organization or entity is positioned to effectively address the many aspects of developing effective public-private partnerships among the states, tribes, industry, nongovernmental organizations, and federal government. These public-private partnerships should be established to promote best management practices, including, but not limited to, addressing the availability and affordability of non-lead ammunition.

b. Education/information sharing regarding use, availability, and affordability:

Public-private partnerships will utilize multiple communications platforms to share information with the hunting public on the unintended impacts of lead-based ammunition; also, what non-lead ammo is, its current availability, and its effectiveness. In-person workshops, testing opportunities, and hosted hunts that utilize non-lead ammunition can be undertaken to help educate the hunting public about the effectiveness, availability, and affordability of this ammunition.

Action: Establish consumer-focused marketing campaigns that highlight the effectiveness, affordability, and availability of non-lead ammunition. Strategies to employ could include:

- a. Use of community influencers, “meet ups” at shooting ranges for consumers to test non-lead ammo, etc.
- b. In person workshops / Federal-state hosted hunts that provide non-lead ammo for the hunt or recreational shooting opportunity.
- c. Utilize social media platforms.
- d. Utilize traditional media e.g., magazine, video, television, radio.
- e. Utilize pamphlets and other print material available at visitor and education centers.

c. Voluntary/Incentive Based:

Undertake and pursue voluntary and incentive-based programs to promote and drive consumer adoption/demand for non-lead ammunition.

Action: Formation of public-private partnerships to include the federal, state, and tribal governments, nongovernmental organizations, and industry, including both manufacturers and retailers.

Action: Specific budget request by agencies to develop and implement non-lead ammunition rebate and subsidy programs. Determination by federal and state governments on the appropriateness of utilizing funds from the Wildlife Restoration Program to fund these programs.

Action: Develop framework of program and ask all managers to adopt

Action: Identify financial resource needs and submission of budget requests by agencies to secure adequate funds to implement efforts.

2. Science-based decision making related to lead/non-lead alternative ammunition use at a management unit level:

The Council believes that current/future regulatory decision-making regarding the use of lead ammunition on NWRS and other federal lands should be made utilizing the best available, species and site specific (e.g., field data) studies. Such information should be utilized to inform future regulatory actions so that any restrictions on the use of traditional, lead ammunition will be targeted to specific and finite geographic areas and over finite and specific time periods. Federal and state governments, in partnership with NGOs, should collaborate to address gaps and shortfalls in information needed to make targeted regulatory decisions with existing legal mandates in mind.

Action: Develop a process that includes NGO stakeholders, state agencies, and federal representatives to generate information needed to address significant wildlife and health impacts.

Action: Support continued research to better understand the relationship between lead and wildlife and the social science to support adaptive mitigation for the unintended impacts of lead ammunition.

3. Address research and development impediments for industry to develop non-lead alternation ammunition.

The DOJ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) interpretation of portions of the Gun Control Act (18 U.S.C. § 921(17)(B)) has negatively impacted the ability of the firearms industry to develop and bring to market alternative non-lead projectiles designed and intended by the manufacturers for the hunting market. America's leading ammunition manufacturers have been working to develop and market new and innovative rifle hunting ammunition projectiles (bullets) made with a wide array of metals and alloys (e.g., brass, bronze) other than lead which is used to make traditional ammunition. Increasingly, however, these alternative rifle hunting ammunition projectiles are being misclassified in a manner as to prevent their development. The Council believes the Departments can play a role in addressing this issue by urging the ATF to undertake needed actions to provide an appropriate policy environment in which the firearms industry can research, develop, and bring to market new effective and affordable non-lead ammunition.

Action: Recommend that the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture author a joint letter to the ATF asking its engagement in positively addressing the need for increased use of the "sporting exemption" to enable and increase further development of non-lead alternative ammunition.