



Testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

**LD 958, An Act to Expand Protections to Maine's Loons from Lead Poisoning by
Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs**

*Submitted to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee
May 8, 2023*

Good afternoon, Chair LaFountain, Chair Landry, and Distinguished Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of LD 958. My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters and volunteers as well as over 80 Lake Associations. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality and habitat, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for all Maine people.

I am here today to urge you to support LD 958.

If you spend enough time on Maine's lakes and ponds, you might think we have a healthy, thriving population of loons. Sometimes it feels like they are everywhere, that we are "overrun" with loons. We have seen a slow and steady growth in the number of adult loons on Maine's lakes and ponds since monitoring of the state's loon population began back in 1983.

But as any good wildlife manager knows, seeing a lot of animals in a population does not necessarily translate into a healthy population capable of maintaining itself over the long term. Only if that population is producing enough young who survive to be breeding adults to replace those adults who die each year, will the population truly be healthy and robust over the long- term. Lead poisoning, from the ingestion of lead sinkers and lead-headed jigs, targets arguably the most important part of our loon population: mature breeding loons actively nesting and raising young on our lakes and ponds.

Protecting this vital part of the population was what led to the first lead sinker bill, LD 875, which passed this committee in the first session of the 119th Legislature. I had just started working at Maine Audubon, I had no kids and no gray hair, and one of my first tasks as the director of the Maine Loon Project was to analyze the data for Maine loon deaths and develop ideas for policy solutions that would reduce mortality of our Common Loon, a critical predator in Maine's lake ecosystems and a beloved Maine icon. The answer was clear. We needed to replace lead tackle with lead-free alternatives to reduce deaths to breeding Common Loons.

The first ban was on the sale, but not the use, of lead sinkers a half ounce or less and took effect in 2003. In the years that followed, more and more lead-free tackle alternatives became available, and lead tackle unfortunately remained the leading cause of death for Common Loons. More needed to be done to protect Common Loons from lead poisoning.

A revision to the lead tackle ban came back to this committee in the 126th Legislature, and the ban successfully extended to both the use and sale of larger sinkers, an ounce or less, and to the use and sale of bare lead-headed jigs measuring an ounce or less or measuring 2.5" or less.

The amendment that allowed painted lead-headed jigs to be excluded from the revised law was a compromise and was not based on any research or data that showed protective values of paint. In fact, as you'll hear today, the paint on a lead-headed jig wears off quickly in the acidic environment of a loon's gizzard, exposing the loon to the same dangers as an unpainted jig, including almost certain death from lead-poisoning.

After 24 years of supporting smart lead tackle policy, it is time to eliminate this one last source of lead from tackle boxes that we know harms loons. There will be a lag between when this legislation passes, takes effect, and people learn about it and when we will see benefits to loons on our lakes in reduced risks from lead tackle. So it is critical to act today.

We urge you to support LD 958 and to close this jig loophole, maximizing protections for Maine's Common Loons.