Testimony to the Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Committee in favor of Legislative Document No. 958 (H.P. 605) An Act to Expand Protections to Maine's Loons from Lead Poisoning by Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs

Dear IF&W Committee Members,

I write today in support of the Act to protect Maine's loons by strengthening the prohibition of use and sale of lead fishing tackle by closing the painted lead jig loophole. I am the Director of the Somes Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary on Mt. Desert Island and two of our major activities are the study of loon behavior and reproductive success in territories on MDI's lakes and a collaborative effort with Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, College of the Atlantic, and retired Tufts University wildlife veterinarian Dr. Mark Pokras to necropsy loons who die in Maine to ascertain as best as possible the cause(es) of death; and to collect tissue samples for numerous studies around the country. Many of the loons necropsied over the past two years have died from lead poisoning, usually caused by the ingestion of lead jigs consumed as a result of eating a fish with an embedded lure.

A very important part of the loon digestive system is the muscular gizzard chamber that is filled with small stones for grinding up fish bones, crayfish and crab shells, and other hard to digest prey parts. If a fish is eaten that has a lead jig in it (the fish broke off the fishing line and survived to be later captured by a loon), the fish will be digested but the lead jig usually remains in the gizzard.

The stones that surround other gizzard contents grind everything up gradually. They can even break down steel fishhooks into small pieces and the stones themselves get ground smaller requiring the acquisition (swallowing) of new larger stones periodically. Paint on a jig does not stay in place long due to abrasion, and whatever barrier value the paint (sometimes also made with lead) had is removed quickly. Tufts University student Jillian Hojsak has simulated the erosion of paint off the surface of various size lead jigs in rock tumblers and found that the jigs became unpainted in short order.

Loons who ingest lead sinkers from the bottom of a lake (thinking they are suitable "stones" to go along with the others in their gizzard) or ingest a fish with a lead jig die within a few weeks, as lead leaches into the bloodstream and multiple systems fail due to the poisoning. The loss of a territorial, breeding loon on our lakes is particularly damaging due to reduced capacity to produce chicks as a result of disrupted pair bonding and territorial knowledge of the best place to nest (not many suitable locations).

I posted photos showing effects of lead jigs in loons in two posts to the Sanctuary Facebook Page (https://www.facebook.com/somesmeynellwildlifesanctuary/) this morning if you would like to see relevant photos and descriptions.

Thank you for addressing this loophole and providing better protection for Maine's loons and other wildlife.

Sincerely,
Billy Helprin

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