



**Allison Hepler**

417 Montsweag Rd.

Woolwich, ME 04579

Phone: (207) 319-4396

[Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov)

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

May 8, 2023

*Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler  
presenting*

**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  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

Good morning, Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and fellow members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to present **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.**

LD 958 is designed to help address a gap in Maine's lead fishing tackle laws that allows for the sale and use of *painted* lead jigs. Following a five-year phase-out process, it has been illegal to sell and/or use lead sinkers and bare "unpainted" jigs (weighing less than an ounce in weight or measuring less than 2 ½ inches in length) in Maine since 2017.

Phasing out lead fishing tackle has been and continues to be an important conservation measure for Maine's Common Loons. Lead poisoning has long been one of the leading causes of death for adult loons in our state. Loons ingest a striking amount of fishing tackle – lead and otherwise – that is either lost or left behind or is in fish that have ingested tackle. Despite Maine's existing lead tackle laws, educational campaigns and lead buyback programs, lead poisoning continues to be one of the leading causes of death in loons where the ultimate cause of death could be determined.

Recent studies have shown that a paint coating on fishing gear, specifically jigs, does NOT prevent the exposure of a lead content core during the digestive process of the Common Loon. This bill addresses this loophole and phases out painted lead jigs, specifically using the same methodology used in 2013.

LD 958 is a common-sense adjustment to Maine's lead fishing tackle laws. It prohibits the sale of small-sized painted lead jigs by September 1, 2024 and the use of small-sized painted lead jigs by September 1, 2026. Additionally, this bill would not add any new responsibilities for game wardens, as its enforcement is compatible with lead tackle laws already on the books.

Since the enactment of the earlier bill to ban lead tackle, lead-free tackle alternatives have become more widely available, especially lead-free jigs. Prices are comparable, with some alternatives costing less than a dollar, and supplies are getting easier to find as more states – including New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and others – pass and expand regulations to limit toxic lead tackle. As the market grows for lead-free tackle, economies of scale will also likely continue to help to bring relative costs down.

Additionally, programs are in place to provide lead-free tackle samples at no cost to anglers and to swap out lead tackle for non-toxic alternatives. Maine Audubon and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) have partnered with Maine-based tackle shops to provide a \$10 store voucher to any person who turns in one ounce or more of lead fishing tackle (including lead jigs and sinkers containing any amount of lead).

It is clear that the continued presence of lead – specifically lead painted jigs – in Maine’s lakes and ponds is negatively impacting the health and survival of loons in Maine. Common Loons are an iconic wildlife species in Maine. Protecting wildlife – especially those that are closely tied with the Pine Tree State – is an essential principle of our state’s shared vision to conserve priority wildlife species and habitats. This bill is an opportunity to help us exemplify that.

Mainers care deeply about this iconic species and are eager to support initiatives like this one to help protect Common Loons. We have an opportunity to *tackle* this loophole and put an end to these avoidable deaths.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to take any questions you may have.