

**Testimony for ME 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 INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, MAY 8TH, 2023

Dear Chairman LaFountain, Chairman Landry, and Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of LD 958 to prohibit the sale and use of certain painted lead jigs. My name is Megan Hess and I am a registered Maine Fishing Guide, commercial fly tyer, and trained ecotoxicologist who is enthusiastic to voice a few facts and thoughts.

Lead has been scientifically proven, an overwhelming amount of times, to have negative effects on the Common Loon and other wildlife species. Unlike some other natural metals, lead is not a dietary metal that living things require, thus any level of lead exposure is considered toxic to humans or wildlife. I strongly urge you to look to the peer-reviewed scientific literature of recent studies¹ that prove that lead continues to wreak havoc on wildlife, likely because of loopholes like using painted lead jigs.

Lead jigs that are painted have the same pollution potential as lead jigs that are bare. Per weight, there is the same amount of lead within them and when they are ingested by a Common Loon or other waterfowl, their gizzards grind them up all the same exposing toxic lead, painted or not.

Anglers should be leading the charge on conservation and protection of Maine's water bodies and should be held to a high standard to do so. As a registered Maine fishing guide, I believe it is my duty to hold 'conservation conversations' with each one of my clients and these conversations often include not using toxic materials as fishing lures, weights, or flies. Maine guides need a thriving ecosystem to sustain their income and anglers need a thriving ecosystem to sustain their love of the sport. Our 'rent' for utilizing the environment is to take care of it, not pollute it. In 2016 and 2017, Maine legislation made great strides to reduce the use of lead fishing tackle and it is time to continue to improve that law. This bill is an opportunity to ensure that anglers across the state are practicing conservation efforts that will play a role in protecting the Common Loon and many other wildlife species.

¹ Grade, T., Campbell, P., Cooley, T. *et al.* Lead poisoning from ingestion of fishing gear: A review. *Ambio* 48, 1023–1038 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-019-01179-w>

There are many lead-free options for anglers and support systems to help make this change. As a commercial fly tyer, I know that there are alternate options to lead materials that are non toxic, just as heavy, and more durable (e.g. Tungsten). As a guide and an avid angler, I know that there are plenty of other lead-free options to fish with because I use them everyday when I am on the water. I run my business using lead-free products and do not feel financial hardship. If anything, I have been commended and received great support in that endeavor from customers and clients. Anglers and fly tyers like using lead because it is cheap but I do not see that as a justification to use something that is well documented to be damaging to wildlife. To help combat this issue, Fish Lead Free (fishleadfree.org), is a great program in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York that is helping anglers exchange lead tackle by providing vouchers for lead-free options. This program is backed by Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maine Audubon, B.A.S.S. Youth Nation, Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, and others. Simply, there are things that can be done, starting with this bill, and we need to start holding the people accountable who are utilizing the environment.

This is not an “anti-angler” bill. This is a “anglers can always do better” bill, myself included.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity.

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