



# Loon Preservation Committee

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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

BEFORE THE INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

MONDAY, MAY 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2023

Dear Chairman LaFountain and Chairman Landry,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 958 to prohibit the sale and use of certain painted lead jigs. The Loon Preservation Committee (LPC) has been researching Common Loon mortality in New Hampshire since 1989. Since then, lead fishing tackle has accounted for 39% of documented adult loon mortality in the state, the largest single cause of death for adult loons in New Hampshire.

Mortality from lead fishing tackle primarily affects adult loons, and the viability of loon populations is driven by adult survival. Loons are long-lived birds, with lifespans that can reach 25-30 years. They are also slow to mature, not reaching adulthood until they are 3 years old, and they do not start nesting on average until they are 6-7 years old. Once they do begin to nest, loons on average produce only a single surviving chick every 2 years. In short, loons are a very different type of bird than game birds like ducks or turkeys, and the survival of every adult is crucial to the population.

This is why lead tackle mortality is so devastating to loons on a population level. LPC published a paper in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* documenting that mortality from lead fishing tackle has had a population-level effect on New Hampshire's loon population, inhibiting the recovery of the population and suppressing population growth. Based on lead tackle mortalities and loon population numbers through 2012, we estimated that the state's loon population would have been 43% higher had it not been for the loons that died of lead poisoning and the chicks they never produced.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of New Hampshire lead deaths over the years were caused by lead fishing jigs. Of the 166 archived lead tackle objects removed from loons that died of lead poisoning over the years, 102 (61%) of them have been lead jigs. The evidence that paint does not provide any protective barrier to lead poisoning of loons was demonstrated by an experiment conducted by Dr. Mark Pokras and Jillian Hojsak of Tufts University, in which jigs were placed in a rock tumbler with acid simulating the conditions of a loon gizzard. The paint was almost completely eroded from the jigheads within 3 days; and, over the course of 7 days, an average of 13-25% of

the mass of the jig was lost, depending on the size of the jig. The majority of this mass would be lead available to go into a loon's bloodstream, resulting in lead poisoning and death for the loon. None of the 102 archived jigs removed from New Hampshire loons retained paint on the jighead, an expected result consistent with the results of the Pokras and Hojsak study. Acids in the gizzards of the loons eroded the paint, along with lead from the jigheads, and the loons all died of lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning from fishing tackle is a major cause of adult loon mortality across their range. A study published in 2019 reported that a quarter of documented adult loon mortalities in Maine resulted from lead fishing tackle.<sup>2</sup> And it is not only loons impacted by lead fishing tackle. The same 2019 study reported that 33 species of birds, 3 mammals, and 2 reptiles have been documented to have ingested lead fishing tackle.

The Loon Preservation Committee supports LD 958 to prohibit the sale and use of certain painted lead jigs. The evidence does not support the idea that a paint coating provides any protection to loons from lead poisoning. This bill will prevent the needless suffering and death of many loons and other wildlife in Maine and protect Maine's iconic loon population. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony, and we respectfully ask the Committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,



Harry Vogel  
Senior Biologist/Executive Director

References:

<sup>1</sup>Grade, T.J., M.A. Pokras, E.M. Laflamme, and H.S. Vogel. 2018. Population-level effects of lead fishing tackle on Common Loons. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 82:155-164.

<sup>2</sup>Grade, T., P. Campbell, T. Cooley, M. Kneeland, E. Leslie, B. MacDonald, J. Melotti, J. Okoniewski, E.J. Parmley, C. Perry, H. Vogel, and M. Pokras. 2019. Lead poisoning from ingestion of fishing gear: a review. *Ambio* 48:1023-1038.