

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 Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife  
Presented by Jayne Winters, South China, ME

May 8, 2023

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, distinguished members of the Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Committee, my name is Jayne Winters. I have lived in Maine all my life and currently reside in South China, as well as maintain a summer family home on Sebec Lake. I am submitting comments 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."

Most loons that die from lead poisoning do so as a result of eating fish that have ingested lead tackle, by striking at tackle being retrieved through the water, striking at fish being reeled in, or even by picking up small pieces of lead tackle from the lake bottom while ingesting small pebbles as grit. Once swallowed, the lead tackle goes into the loon's gizzard, where its acid and grinding action breaks down the lead, which then passes into the bloodstream and organs. A loon will die within 2-4 weeks after ingesting even a single small lead split shot sinker.

Very few loons have been successfully treated for lead poisoning and released. They usually don't show symptoms until the lead is already at toxic levels in their bloodstream. By then, the only humane option is euthanasia.

Maine Audubon engages with partners in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York in a "Fish Lead Free Initiative" in an effort to reduce loon lead poisoning by increasing the use of lead-free tackle on lakes and ponds throughout the regions. In addition, Maine Audubon sponsors tackle exchanges across the state in a cooperative partnership with the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Maine Lakes Society, Maine BASS Nation, and the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine.

Although lead poisoning has long been the leading cause of loon deaths in Maine, the latest studies sadly reveal that boat strikes are now causing more deaths than lead poisoning. Nests are flooded and eggs subsequently washed out of the nest by boat wakes.

To protect loons and other wildlife, Maine state law currently bans the use and sale of lead sinkers and bare lead jigs that weigh one ounce or less, or measure 2½" or less. I respectfully urge you to pass LD 958, which would add "painted jigs" to the law in an effort to further protect not only loons, but other wildlife. Thank you for your consideration.