

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER -- IN SUPPORT OF
L.D. 1364, "Resolve, Authorizing a Study on the Impacts and Risks of Lead-based Ammunition"
Committee On Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
April 2, 2025**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony of support for L.D. 1364. We already know that no amount of lead is safe to ingest. As a result, I am a little disappointed at the conservative nature of this bill, but I support it as it's a good first step that hopefully will lead to a phase out of lead ammunition use in Maine

By allowing the sale and use of lead ammunition, we are voluntarily poisoning our wildlife, our water, our soil, and ourselves.

Over the past few decades, in recognition of the serious health risks posed by lead, the United States has removed this toxic heavy metal from gasoline, paint, toys, and pencils. Sadly, there is one industry that has not responded to this proven threat in a meaningful way and continues its use of lead -- the hunting industry.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin that disrupts brain development in babies and children, damages kidneys in adults, and can cause pregnant women to miscarry. Exposure to lead in childhood can lower IQ. ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) is also associated with heightened blood and bone lead levels. According to the World Health Organization, there is no known level of lead exposure that is considered safe.

Eagles, other scavenger birds and wildlife ingest the lead while feeding off gut piles left behind by hunters or used as bait piles to trap coyotes. According to an article in the Bangor Daily News, since 2016, Avian Haven has treated 82 eagles with elevated levels of lead in their system. Sixty of those eagles have died. The deaths of these eagles draw attention to a widespread lead contamination crisis in our state.

In addition to poisoning our wildlife, the lead contaminates our soil and water, that then is absorbed by plants that are food for many animal species, including humans. As is the case with eagles, this toxin also presents a danger to humans who eat animals killed with lead ammunition.

- A study conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the North Dakota Department of Health that shows people who regularly consume wild game tend to have higher levels of lead in their blood.
- **Ten years of monitoring donated venison in Minnesota found that more than 7% of deer meat contains toxic lead fragments from bullets.** The monitoring is conducted each year by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, which X-rays all the venison donated by hunters to all Minnesota food shelves.

Over the past 10 years in MN, 94,782 pounds of venison have been donated by hunters to help feed the hungry. Of that, 6,735 pounds, 7.1%, had to be thrown out because it was contaminated with lead.

- **Maine's Hunters for the Hungry Program distributes donated game meat without x-raying it for lead fragments,** as no such game safety program exists in our state.

Ideally, a phase-out of the sale and use of lead ammunition in Maine should result from this study as well as a mechanism to test lead in donated game meat. We already test game and fish for PFAS contamination, it only makes sense that we would do the same for lead.

In the name of long overdue progress, I ask that you vote “ought to pass” on L.D. 1364, “Resolve, Authorizing a Study on the Impacts and Risks of Lead-based Ammunition”

Thank you for your consideration.

Susanna Richer
Portland, ME

Sources:

- NH Venison donations may come with a side of lead
<https://newhampshirebulletin.com/2023/11/06/venison-donations-may-come-with-a-side-of-lead/>
- Long-term monitoring shows 7% of Minnesota venison laced with toxic lead
<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/northland-outdoors/6910295-Long-term-monitoring-shows-7-of-Minnesota-venison-laced-with-toxic-lead>
- A Hunter Asks, “Why Are Lead Bullets Still a Thing
<https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/hunter-asks-why-are-lead-bullets-still-thing>
- North Dakota Department of Health Blood Lead Level Study Results
<http://www.ndhealth.gov/lead/venison/Fact%20Sheet%20Blood%20Lead%20Level%20Study%20Results.pdf>
- It’s time to consider banning all lead ammunition, Bangor Daily News
<https://bangordailynews.com/2021/03/29/outdoors/its-time-to-consider-banning-all-lead-ammunition/>