

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 1364**

“Resolve, Authorizing a Study on the Impacts and Risks of Lead-based Ammunition”

Presented by Representative BRIDGEO of Augusta.
Cosponsored by Representatives: DILL of Old Town, ROBERTS of South Berwick.

DATE OF HEARING: April 9, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against **L.D. 1364**.

This resolve directs the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to study the impacts and risks to wildlife, humans and the environment of using lead-based ammunition to hunt and shall consider and identify the biological, social, economic, political and administrative implications of using lead-based hunting ammunition. The resolve also directs the Department to submit a report with findings and recommendations back to the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than November 4, 2026.

Lead has long been known to be a toxin to humans and wildlife and the Department has proactively engaged in efforts to mitigate the potential risks and impacts of lead-based hunting and fishing equipment for several decades. These efforts began in earnest in the 1980s in response to significant losses to waterfowl from lead poisoning caused from ingesting spent shot from lead ammunition. In 1991, it became illegal nationwide to hunt waterfowl with lead ammunition. Maine led the way in the National effort to develop strategies to combat these losses, which led to restricting waterfowl hunters to using non-toxic ammunition and ultimately resulted in the recovery of waterfowl species, as well as other water birds. In the early 2000s, in response to concerns over increasing mortalities and impacts to loon populations in the Northeast the Department and other conservation partners began an effort to explore issues and options around specific lead-based fishing tackle. In addition to voluntary efforts such as Audubon’s Fish Lead Free, a program to offer non-lead jig and sinker alternatives to anglers, the Department has supported several initiatives to restrict the sale and use of specific lead-based tackle that is particularly harmful to loons and other fish-eating waterbirds that this committee has recently considered.

Impacts to eagles and other avian scavengers from ingestion of spent lead ammunition has been a long-standing concern in Maine. Eagles and other avian scavengers are particularly vulnerable to lead; it only takes a small fragment to become toxic or even lethal. To help

address this issue, the Department officially joined a partnership in 2020 with the other 13 Northeastern Fish and Wildlife State Agencies to work collaboratively to minimize the unintended impacts of lead hunting ammunition on wildlife, while continuing to support the contributions of legal hunting to wildlife conservation. As a part of this effort, the Department has embarked on an educational and outreach campaign to inform the public on the advantages/disadvantages of non-lead ammunition, the potential impacts of lead ammunition on wildlife, and strategies to address issues associated with the use of the various forms of hunting ammunition. To help hunters become more informed about non-lead ammunition, we have created a webpage with frequently asked questions on the Department website with links to other vetted resources. We also send out informational emails regarding the advantages to non-lead ammunition to hunters, as well as timely social media posts throughout the fall. Additionally, the Department hosted its first of several joint in-person workshops with the North American Nonlead Partnership workshop in 2021 at our Summerhaven Shooting Facility. These workshops highlight differences and similarities of traditional and non-lead ammunition and provide participants with a hands-on opportunity to make an informed decision about ammunition choice.

To further support this effort, Maine led an effort for the Northeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to secure a Multi-State Conservation Grant to hire a full-time staff member to provide technical assistance to State Agencies for the promotion of voluntary Best Management Practices for the reduction of unintended ingestion of lead ammunition across the region. This work also includes the development of course material to incorporate into hunter education courses and the creation of additional outreach materials to provide consistent information to sportspersons across the Northeast region.

The Department is very supportive of the intention of this bill, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to using the best available science to safeguard Maine's wildlife and the environment from harmful toxins while keeping our citizens informed of potential risks. We believe we have been doing this work in good faith, regarding lead and other hazards. However, if we are directed to conduct a study or convene a stakeholder group to further examine all the concepts contained in this resolve, we believe that this would detract from our efforts already underway, both regionally and nationally, and this would likely incur a significant financial cost, and perhaps divert staff time from working on other important conservation efforts.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.