



March 11, 2024

RE: SB983/HB1473

I am Founder and Executive Director of Owl Moon Raptor Center, founded in 2002 and located in Boyds, Maryland. Owl Moon Raptor Center's mission is to preserve and increase native populations of birds of prey through 1) rescue, rehabilitation, and release; 2) habitat protection, enhancement, and expansion; and 3) public education.

Owl Moon Raptor Center strongly supports SB983/HB1473 phasing out lead or lead-based ammunition for hunting.

Each year, Owl Moon admits over 500 sick or injured birds of prey into the center with the goal of rehabilitating and returning them to the wild. Unfortunately, not all birds are able to be rehabilitated, and over the years, we have seen many raptors come in suffering from the ill and often irreversible effects of lead poisoning.

We see birds exhibiting signs of lead poisoning including depressed behavior, tremors and seizures, muscle weakness, dehydration, and liver and kidney damage leading to death. While there are treatments that can remove lead from the blood system, this treatment is rarely successful in reversing the symptoms, and a bird with toxic levels of lead in their blood can almost never be saved. Lead toxicosis (poisoning) is a heartbreaking scenario to witness, and unfortunately, we witness it several times each year, primarily in Bald Eagles and Vultures (both Turkey and Black), but also in other raptors such as Red-tailed Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, Great Horned Owls, and water birds such as Great Blue Herons.

The majority of Bald Eagles and Vultures that Owl Moon receives into care have a measurable level of lead in their blood. Wild raptors consume lead in the carcasses and gut piles left by deer hunters, and in other wild game and fish that have consumed lead or been shot. Wild raptors can also become toxic from lead ammunition in their bodies from being illegally shot. Research shows that any lead in the system compromises the long-term health of a wild raptor, and the body cannot remove lead on its own. Therefore, these birds, including eagles, vultures and other birds of prey, will continue be increasingly unhealthy and in harm's way as the lead in their blood accumulates during their lifetime.

The Chesapeake Bay Region is a treasured outdoor recreation area for hunters and fisherman, bird watchers and photographers, and other nature enthusiasts. The Bay and its tributaries are currently home to water birds of all kinds, and to a robust Bald Eagle population, as well as a large population of White-tailed deer. Maryland's Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland contain numerous hunting reserves, state parks, and other areas frequented by hunters during deer season. Having these two interests together should not unintentionally endanger predatory birds including the national symbol of our country.

Owl Moon Raptor Center records show that, since we first began testing symptomatic patients in 2016 (Please note that not all birds, not even all birds suspected of lead toxicity, were tested for lead in any year.) Owl Moon Raptor Center has admitted 27 birds of prey, including 15 Bald Eagles, suspected of lead toxicosis. Of those, 13 were confirmed to have toxic lead levels by blood testing. Only one of the birds, a Red-tailed Hawk, suspected of lead toxicity survived and was released. The rest either died or were humanely euthanized due to severity of symptoms. Fifteen of them were bald eagles.

The majority of birds that are admitted with the severe symptoms of lead toxicity consumed the lead while feeding on a deer carcass or gut pile that contained lead fragments, as evidenced by radiographs showing high density pellets or other lead ammunition in their stomach and/or intestines. Less commonly, radiographs of birds with symptoms of lead toxicity show lead ammunition in other parts of their bodies, where the lead is being absorbed into their blood, such as in close proximity to joints in their limbs. These birds did not consume the lead but were illegally shot.

Our records show that since January 2014, we have admitted at least 31 raptors that were illegally shot by citizens. Of these, most were suffering from severe traumatic injuries rather than lead toxicity, but a few had elevated lead levels in their blood and some were symptomatic. Evidence shows that even slightly elevated blood lead can weaken a bird, and compromise its immune system. This would reduce a bird's chances of rehabilitation and a successful return to the wild.

I sincerely hope that the information contained in this letter will help the reader to conclude, as we do, that lead ammunition is a serious threat to the health of our wild bird populations, especially raptors, including our native Black and Turkey Vultures and Bald Eagles, but also other creatures (including humans!) that consume deer meat and gut piles, or are shot. With all the alternatives to lead ammunition currently being manufactured, there is no good reason to keep exposing ourselves and our native wildlife to the risks of lead in our environment. Thank you for reading this, and please support SB983/HB1473 phasing out lead or lead-based ammunition for hunting.

Sincerely,



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