

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council

CHAIR
John Devney

VICE CHAIR
Collin O'Mara

July 23, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council (Council) would like to thank you and the agencies within your respective Departments for your commitment to increasing access to America's public lands for all Americans, including sportsmen and women. America's public lands are increasingly important in providing opportunities for the public to pursue wildlife-dependent recreational endeavors, including hunting.

At the May 17 Council meeting, there was an update and discussion of the on-going work by the Fish and Wildlife Service to implement recommendations regarding lead ammunition made by the Council at our December 2023 meeting. Those recommendations (attached) provide Council ideas for non-regulatory approaches to the management of the future use of lead and lead-free ammunition for hunting on federal public lands, and in particular, national wildlife refuges. The Service provided an update via letter on these efforts just before the May meeting (attached letter & concept paper).

A working group of the Council's Wildlife Health Subcommittee was established to collaborate with the Service as it has been formulating a pilot project concept to test approaches for increasing use of lead-free ammunition of select Refuges during the Fall 2024 hunting season. After consideration of information provided to the Council by the working group and the Service, we would like to express our support for the pilot project concept. In addition, we strongly encourage the Service to:

- Prioritize consultation with state fish and wildlife agencies in developing and implementing pilot projects.
- Select pilot sites that are geographically diverse.
- Select pilot sites which have robust and popular (species) hunting opportunities.
- Implement and evaluate the initial round of pilot projects before considering additional regulatory measures.

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- Evaluate pilot projects, including input and feedback from refuge managers/staff, conservation partners, industry partners, and hunt participants.

We commend the Service for its willingness to work in collaboration with the Council to implement a new and, we hope, durable solution to increasing the use of lead-free ammunition by the hunting public on federal lands and reducing the incidence of lead poisoning in wildlife. The Council recommends a voluntary, incentive-based approach and believes it may prove to be more effective than a regulatory approach.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. The Council stands ready to continue dialog on this matter and helping with implementation of the recommendations. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Council Designated Federal Officer Doug Hobbs at doug_hobbs@fws.gov, or on (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,



John Devney
Chair

Attachments

Cc: HWCC members
Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Department of the Interior
Martha Williams, Director – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Lesli Gray, Assistant Director – Office of Communications, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service