

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.F.2946 by Carrol L. Henderson

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My name is Carrol Henderson, and I wish to indicate my support for H.F. 2946, “a bill for an act relating to natural resources; appropriating money to protect raptors from lead poisoning.” I have been involved with research and documentation of lead poisoning in Bald Eagles in Minnesota since 1977. I have also been an avid hunter since the age of ten, and I hunted deer since my college days in the 1960s.

Lead poisoning continues to be a major source of mortality for eagles treated at the U of MN Raptor Center. The poisoning comes from deer hunting. When eagles consume lead bullet fragments in dead unretrieved deer and in deer gutpiles left in the field by deer hunters.

This lead poisoning of our national bird has been well documented. The Raptor Center receives about 30 sick and dying eagles associated with the annual deer hunting season. If we consider a minimal loss of 30 bald eagles per year since about 1990, about 900 eagles have been poisoned due to use of lead bullets for deer hunting since we first became aware of this problem. This is called “secondary lead poisoning”, because lead poisoning is a secondary effect of deer hunting with lead which is a neurotoxic poison. Hunters do not see the polluting effect of the lead remaining in the field, and many are unaware of this problem. This mortality is totally avoidable because of the much-improved availability and cost of nontoxic deer hunting ammo. How many more eagles need to die needlessly from lead poisoning before the State of Minnesota takes action to require nontoxic ammunition for deer hunting?

As eagle mortality from lead poisoning has become widely-known, some hunters have taken offense at the information and consider it as criticism of hunting, a threat to gun ownership, and even a threat to the second amendment! This is totally false pro-lead propaganda. These hunters falsely rationalize that lead poisoning in bald eagles is acceptable because the mortality has not caused eagle populations to decline to the point that they have become endangered, so it doesn't matter. To most Minnesota citizens, it does matter. There is nothing in the Bill of Rights that states it is acceptable for deer hunters to poison bald eagles. In fact, the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Act of 1940 specifically states that it is illegal to poison eagles, even a single eagle!

There is also a human health dimension for the use of lead ammo for deer hunting. Tiny, undetectable lead fragments in venison can be consumed by deer hunters, their spouses, children, and friends. This can reduce the IQ of children, threaten the health of expectant mothers, and create cognitive issues for older

adults. Lead-biased propaganda for use of lead ammo also discourages prospective hunters from being recruited by R-3 efforts. R-3 audiences, including millennials, locavores, women, and youths would be repulsed by the idea of using lead ammo, eating lead fragments in their venison and feeding it to their families.

Use of nontoxic ammo for hunting deer does not threaten hunting traditions, gun ownership, or the second amendment. Misinformation spread by some hunters jeopardizes the reputation of hunters as conservationists because it implies that they do not care about wildlife beyond game species. Hunters have also long espoused the importance of observing high standards of hunter ethics:

“As a responsible hunter, you owe it to the animal to use a weapon powerful enough to cleanly kill whatever species that you are pursuing...You must do everything in your power to ensure that you quickly kill your target with as little pain and suffering as possible...The absolute last thing an ethical hunter wants is to wound an animal and have it suffer unnecessarily.”

However, when hunters or hunting organizations who advocate lead are confronted with facts regarding lead poisoning in eagles, they ignore the data and express no sense of responsibility for the tragic and lingering deaths of the poisoned eagles. That double standard of hunter ethics is unacceptable.

Major ammunition manufacturers have been proactive in developing nontoxic big game ammo for shotguns, rifles, and muzzleloaders. They understand the very real transition away from lead products throughout society--including ammo, and they need to be ahead of the marketing curve to compete in their industry. A total of 61 ammo companies now offer nontoxic ammo in deer hunting calibers. Federal cartridge, for example, has 62 big game calibers and bullet weights.

HF 2946 will facilitate presentation of objective information about nontoxic ammunition choices and the relative advantages of those ammo choices. The Raptor Center will develop and deliver a hunter-friendly comprehensive educational program of shooting workshops, events, and materials in collaboration with the Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society, and other conservation partners. They will present hunting in a positive manner that explains how nontoxic ammo perpetuates conservation concepts and our legacy of deer hunting traditions without causing collateral damage from lead poisoning to our national bird, the bald eagle, and other raptors.