

**TESTIMONY FROM CARROL HENDERSON  
IN SUPPORT OF H. F. 157 PHASING OUT MANUFACTURE, SALE,  
AND USE OF SMALL LEAD FISHING JIGS AND SINKERS.**

**THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO HELP PROTECT  
MINNESOTA'S LOONS FROM LEAD POISONING!  
FEBRUARY 23, 2021.**

My name is Carrol Henderson. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of H. F. 157 which would phase out the manufacture, sale, and use of small lead fishing jigs and sinkers over the next three to four years. I strongly support this proposal and feel it is long overdue. I served as the Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Program supervisor from 1977 through 2018. I have been involved with research, management, and education activities related to lead poisoning in Canada geese, bald eagles, common loons, and trumpeter swans from 1977 through 2018. I have been involved in advocacy for use of nontoxic fishing jigs and sinkers since the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency first initiated their "Get the Lead Out" program in 2000. I now serve on the Boards of the National Loon Center and The Trumpeter Swan Society.

We have seen a significant increase in the awareness of wildlife-related problems caused by lead as an environmental pollutant over the past 30 years. The use of lead in fishing sinkers and jigs continues to be a source of toxicity for some of Minnesota's most iconic wildlife including common loons, trumpeter swans, and even bald eagles. This problem has been partially addressed in some states, mainly out of concern for lead poisoning in loons, by passage of restrictive legislation in New Hampshire, New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Washington. New York passed its legislation in 2004—17 years ago! In general, these states prohibit use, manufacture, and or sale of small jigs and sinkers under one ounce and less than 2 ½ inches long. What's taking so long for us to follow their lead?



Waterbirds are poisoned by lost fishing tackle. When lead jigs and sinkers fall to the lake bottom, they retain their toxic qualities for many decades—they do not rust, degrade, or disintegrate. Loons, swans, ducks And geese regularly dive to the bottom of lakes and marshes to pick up pebbles that they retain in their gizzards to grind up their food. If they accidentally swallow even one split shot or jig, they die. The above photo shows the pebbles salvaged from the gizzard of a dead Minnesota loon. The size of the pebbles is similar to the size of small jigs and fishing sinkers. Loons also get lead poisoning by ingesting fish carrying lead jigs and sinkers and by swallowing fishing jigs being retrieved by anglers.

The death these of loons, swans, ducks, and geese creates another problem. Dead waterbirds can attract bald eagles to scavenge on the carcasses. They become a victim of secondary lead poisoning. This is a toxic food chain that can be avoided by use of nontoxic tackle. In the nongame wildlife program we solicited dead loons from the public so we could determine "why loons died." We received about 25-30 loons per

year for necropsy. Lead poisoning was determined to be one of the top three causes of loon mortality (in addition to intraspecific territorial fighting and collisions from boaters).



Lead poisoning caused by fishing tackle is a cumulative problem. More lead is added to our lake bottoms every year. In 2003 DNR biologist Paul Radomski published a paper that estimated nine tons of lead tackle were lost by anglers in Mille Lacs Lake over a 20-year period. Assuming a similar rate of deposition since then, another eight tons of lead have been lost at the bottom of Mille Lacs Lake since 2003. If we treasure our lakes, we should not be treating them as perpetual dumping grounds for lead fishing tackle.

There are concerns that the nontoxic tackle is too expensive. However, a US Fish and Wildlife survey of expenditures by Minnesota anglers, published in 2011, revealed that they spent about \$1,500/year/angler for fishing. That included about \$240 in annual equipment expenditures. Suppose a person spends about \$50/year for a selection of nontoxic jigs and sinkers. That is less than five per cent of the total cost of their expenditures for fishing. Compared to the cost of boats, motors, gasoline, lodging, and other gear, the cost of those nontoxic jigs and sinkers is “peanuts.” Also, the cost for nontoxic tackle should be expected to decline over time as production accommodates increased demand.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has been a leader in actions and advocacy for using nontoxic fishing tackle. They have an outstanding “Get the Lead Out” program underway and a website with lots of great information about lead-free options for fishing, including a list of 65 manufacturers that exclusively offer nontoxic fishing jigs and sinkers. This is a huge “green” manufacturing and marketing opportunity for these businesses to demonstrate their advocacy for preserving our fishing traditions while protecting wildlife. They have already demonstrated great creativity and initiative in developing jigs and sinkers from bismuth, tungsten, tin, glass, pewter, steel, stone, and metal composites.

One of the most serious difficulties to get buy-in for nontoxic tackle is a “doom-loop” phenomenon. Anglers who go to a bait shop or outdoor retailer and request nontoxic tackle are frequently told “there is no demand so we don’t carry it” or the sales clerk doesn’t know if they carry it, Or, if so, where it is. Manufacturers are coming out with greater variety and volume of nontoxic tackle, but retailers have not done an adequate job of carrying it, advertising it, or promoting it. They don’t understand that all Minnesotans have a stake in protecting our loons, including anglers. They need big signs saying “LOON SAFE” and “SWAN SAFE” above a designated Nontoxic Fishing Tackle Display. Perhaps the MPCA could copyright a “Loon Safe” logo that could be approved for use on the logos and advertising for nontoxic tackle packaging.

We are desperately in need of coordination and collaboration among manufacturers, retailers, anglers and angling groups—but it hasn’t happened. Frankly, we need the enactment of H.F. 157 to make it happen. It is worth recalling that there was a lot of “heartburn” by waterfowl hunters in 1987 when Minnesota began requiring nontoxic shot for all waterfowl hunting in the state. While there were early issues with performance

of steel shot, the ammo industry eventually developed outstanding nontoxic loads for waterfowl hunting, and hunters have adapted well to those nontoxic alternatives.

Anglers need an opportunity to demonstrate that they care about all wildlife-as they enjoy their fishing adventures. Many anglers practice “catch and release” to demonstrate their conservation ethics, but for loons, swans, and eagles with lead poisoning, there is no catch and release. They eat lead and they die. H.F. 157 is a targeted solution to this problem that has already been proven in other states. It only applies to smaller jigs and sinkers, and it allows three to four years to be phased in. If we don’t get this legislation passed now, our “doom-loop” is likely to continue for another 20 years.



I thank you in advance for your support of H. F. 157. I think Minnesota’s citizens would sincerely appreciate your support for protecting our state bird, the common loon, through enacting this legislation. This legislation would not impair the opportunity for enjoying our fishing heritage. Loons are a treasure worth protecting, and they are much more beautiful on our lakes than upside down on a necropsy table.