

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council Summer Meeting: July 23, 2024

Virtual Meeting Agenda

Meeting venue: Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

All times are eastern time

- 1:00 p.m. **CONVENE**
Welcome and Council member introductions
- 1:05 p.m. Opening Comments
 ➤ Martha Williams, *Director – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
- 1:10 p.m. Public comment session
- 1:40 p.m. Meeting overview: John Devney, *HWCC Chair*
- Council Subcommittee report
- Wildlife Health: Land Tawney, Chair
 - Discussion and consideration of FWS lead-free ammunition pilot projects on national wildlife refuges.
 - Siva Sundaresan, *Deputy Director – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
 - Christian Myers, *Policy Advisor – National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
 - Other subcommittee reports
- 2:15 p.m. Other Council business / open discussion
- 3:00 p.m. **ADJOURN**

WILDLIFE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE

Update & Summary on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lead-Free Ammunition Pilot Projects

Proposed locations:

- FWS has selected 7 Refuges to host lead-free pilots in Fall 2024.
- The selections were made based on robust internal considerations at all levels of FWS, plus critical and substantial input from HWCC members and State wildlife agencies.

Pilot Project background:

- In 2022, FWS began a deliberate and collaborative process to find the best solution to lead poisoning in wildlife.
- As part of the process, FWS requested recommendations from the HWCC.
- In 2023, the HWCC recommended a voluntary approach based on education and incentives.
- In 2024, FWS, the HWCC, State wildlife agencies, and the North American Non-Lead Partnership (NANLP) have shaped a pilot program to test lead-free incentives on NWRs.

Goals & Purpose:

- The purpose behind this pilot program is to address lead poisoning in wildlife.
- The overarching goal is to develop a proven model for addressing the issue through voluntary lead-free incentives.
- For 2024 pilots, the key objectives are:
 - Kick-start the pilot program
 - Test variations among pilot sites (e.g., State, target species, regulations)

HWCC update: 07/23/2024

- Collect and evaluate data
- Compile lessons for 2025 pilots

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.
- 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 strictly 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,

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