CENTER for BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY Because life is good.

May 14, 2013

Wayne LaPierre
National Rifle Association
11250 Waples Mill Road
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Mr. LaPierre:

In a curious May 6, 2013 letter to one of my staff, the National Rifle Association's attorneys indicate that your organization is not familiar with the volumes of scientific studies and reports documenting the damaging, often lethal effect of spent lead ammunition and shot on endangered California condors. Perhaps this admission of ignorance explains the NRA's long history of public statements denying the terrible toll lead poisoning is taking on America's wildlife. It would seem that the NRA's implausible opinions are simply based on not having researched the issue thoroughly.

The Center for Biological Diversity is happy to provide you with the requested information and be of service in bringing the NRA up to date on this critical issue. At the risk of being too forward, may I suggest that you deploy a small portion of the NRA's considerable resources to hire a wildlife biologist? I think you'll find that a biologist would have easily obtained or already possessed all of this publicly available information. A corporate law firm is not typically relied upon for expertise and professional advice on toxicology and wildlife biology. Perhaps this reliance on lawyers to perform the functions of a scientist also explains in part the NRA's misguided policies promoting continued lead poisoning.

Most of the information in our April 16, 2013 press release is publicly available and published on the web sites of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and other organizations affiliated with the federal California Condor Recovery Program.[1] They are the best source of information on the questions you ask.

[1] See for example, http://www.fws.gov/hoppermountain/CACORecoveryProgram/CACondorRecoveryProgram.html
http://cacondorconservation.org/programs/
http://www.nps.gov/pinn/naturescience/condors.htm
http://www.oregonzoo.org/conserve/species-recovery-and-conservation/california-condors
http://www.ventanaws.org/species_condors/
http://www.oaklandzoo.org/Press_Releases.php?c=California_Condor_Oct_30_2012
http://www.peregrinefund.org/projects/california-condor
http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/nongame/t_e_spp/condor/
http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/california_condor.shtml

P.O. Box 710 . Tucson, AZ 85702-0710 tel: (520) 623.5252 fax: (520) 623.9797 www.BiologicalDiversity.org

We regret that your legal counsel has not been able to find any of the readily available public information regarding the mechanisms of lead poisoning of endangered condors, the source of lead that is poisoning condors, the magnitude of the threat, the status of reintroduced condor populations, the causes of mortality for reintroduced condors and recent condor deaths.

Regarding the question about the source of information that ingestion of lead ammunition is the leading cause of death for Arizona condors, there are numerous readily available public information sources demonstrating this. We suggest reading:

- Environmental Science and Technology 2006 – *Ammunition is the Principal Source of Lead Accumulated by California Condors Re-Introduced to the Wild*

- Two papers from the 2009 proceedings of the conference on Ingestion of Lead from Spent Ammunition: Implications for Wildlife and Humans: *Lead Exposure Among a Reintroduced Population of California Condors in Northern Arizona and Southern Utah; and Evidence for the Source of Lead Contamination within the California Condor*

- The Arizona Game and Fish Department web page on lead poisoning of condors, which states that "Lead toxicity has been identified as the leading cause of death in condors in the Arizona reintroduction program. Although there may be other sources of lead, a scientific study funded by the Arizona Game and Fish Department has identified lead from spent ammunition as the major source of lead in condors. Background lead from the environment does not appear to be a factor."

Regarding the sources of information that: 1) seven of the 80 wild condors in Arizona and Utah have died since December; 2) three of those deaths have been definitively linked to lead poisoning from ingesting spent lead ammunition fragments in carrion; and 3) lead poisoning is suspected in the other four deaths.

Several of the partners in the California Condor Recovery Program regularly publish updated information on their web sites regarding the status of all condor populations in the wild and captivity:
Condor Population status summary (PDF)
California Condor current population data table

They also regularly publish information regarding the status of every single condor released into the wild. This information includes mortality data documenting when condors died, and the cause of death, if determinable. Partners in the California Condor

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http://www.sandiegozoo.org/animalbytes/t-condor.html

Recovery Program perform necropsies on recovered condors, taking blood lead measurements and identifying any ingested materials to aid in determining cause of death. For Arizona and Utah condors, see *Condor Update Archive* and *Detailed Information on California Condors Released in Arizona*. In addition, there are several websites maintained by participants in the California Condor Recovery Program that publish breaking news and recent field reports. See for example *Arizona Notes from the Field*, *Condor Reintroduction Notes From the Field*, *CondorCliffs* and *Updates on the Pinnacles Condors*.

These sources report the mortalities of seven condors in Arizona and Utah since December 2012. The cause of death for condors #442, #466 and #343 has been confirmed as lead poisoning.

Regarding the sources of information that: 1) of the 166 condors reintroduced into Utah and Arizona since 1996, 81 have died or disappeared; and 2) when the cause of death could be determined, more than half were due to poisoning from ingesting lead ammunition fragments left in gut piles or carcasses of shot game.

As explained above, California Condor Recovery Program partners regularly publish updated information on their web site regarding the status of every single condor released into the wild. For Arizona/Utah condors, see *Detailed Information on California Condors Released in Arizona*. The numbers of condors reintroduced, the number that have died and the causes of death are posted.

The NRA's public statements about the impacts of lead exposure risks for wildlife and humans exhibit an ignorance of the best available science on lead poisoning from spent lead ammunition. Fortunately, leading experts in the fields of ornithology, toxicology and public health have evaluated the published, peer-reviewed literature on the effects of spent lead ammunition on wildlife and human health, and released scientific consensus statements on the hazards of lead ammunition.

For example, an April 2013 statement from 30 scientists, doctors and public-health experts from Harvard, Cornell, Rutgers and other universities concluded that lead hunting ammunition poses a serious danger to people and wildlife and ought to be phased out.

These experts found that:

> Based on overwhelming evidence for the toxic effects of lead in humans and wildlife, even at very low exposure levels, convincing data that the discharge of lead-based ammunition into the environment poses significant risks of lead exposure to humans and wildlife, and the availability of non-lead alternative products for hunting, we support reducing and eventually eliminating the introduction of lead into the environment from lead-based ammunition.

They note that lead ammunition is likely the biggest, largely unregulated source of lead knowingly discharged into the environment in the United States and cite peer-reviewed studies showing that:

- Discharge of lead-based ammunition and subsequent accumulation of spent lead in the environment poses significant health risks to humans and wildlife;
- Lead ammunition poses risks of elevated lead exposure to gun users;
- Lead bullet fragments are easily ingested by scavenging animals or incorporated into processed game meat for human consumption;
- Lead ammunition fragments are a significant source of lead exposure in humans that ingest wild game;
- Lead poisoning from ingestion of ammunition fragments poses a serious and significant threat to many species of California wildlife.

Another scientific consensus statement from leading condor experts and toxicologists in 2007, *Science Links Lead Ammunition to Lead Exposure in California Condors (Gymnogyps californianus)*, details the scientific chain of evidence linking lead ammunition to lead exposure in California condors and concludes the evidence is sufficiently strong to support a ban of lead ammunition in condor country.

I hope this information has been useful to you in understanding the voluminous science documenting the terrible effects of lead bullet poisoning on humans and wildlife. I'm sure you'll agree that needless and avoidable lead poisoning is unacceptable in modern America. I'm sure you are aware that many hunters are already turning to non-lead bullets because they don't want to expose their families to lead-tainted meat, don't want to contribute to the extinction of endangered species, and do not believe in wasteful killing of non-target animals from ingestion of spent toxic lead fragments.

If I can be of further service to you in updating your policies on lead ammunition, please don't hesitate to contact me. A statement by the NRA in favor of phasing out lead bullets in order to ensure the health of hunters and their families, save endangered condors, and stop the poisoning of bald eagles and other wildlife would be looked upon very favorably by the majority of Americans.

Sincerely,

Kieran Suckling
Executive Director

Cc:
Michel and Associates
180 E Ocean Blvd., #200
Long Beach, CA 90802