

# San Jose Mercury News

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## Editorial: Schwarzenegger should buck NRA to protect condors in state

Perhaps it is true, as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger claims, that his firing of Fish and Game Commissioner R. Judd Hanna this month had nothing to do with pressure from the National Rifle Association. If so, Schwarzenegger should be willing to buck the gun lobby and sign a bill banning hunters from using lead bullets in areas that endangered condors inhabit.

That's what scientists are unanimously recommending, and a governor who argues that science should determine the state's response to global warming should apply the same principle to protecting the state's magnificent, endangered bird. As scavengers, condors absorb lead as a result of eating squirrels, coyotes and other animals that hunters shoot.

Hanna's gutsy willingness to advocate the ban is what got him into trouble with the NRA. At a commission meeting last month, Hanna handed out a packet of information, including studies citing irrefutable evidence that lead from bullets has poisoned at least a dozen condors in the past decade and led to the hospitalization of dozens of others.

There are only about 135 condors flying wild in California, despite tens of millions of dollars the state has spent over the past 25 years to restore them. Lead poisoning is a serious setback to that effort.

Fish and Game Department staff is recommending the lead-bullet ban in condor habitat. Two military and national guard bases on the central California

coast are now prohibiting lead bullets for hunting in order to protect the condor. But hunting groups oppose the broader ban, because alternatives, like copper bullets, are more expensive. They also claim they are less accurate.

Within days of the commission meeting, 34 Republican legislators, following the gun lobby's lead, wrote Schwarzenegger, demanding that Hanna be fired. Days later, Hanna was asked to resign. The administration's line is that Hanna left to make room for a commissioner from Southern California. But Hanna, a Republican and hunter who had only served nine months on the five-member commission, blamed the National Rifle Association for his removal.

Fish and Game commissioners oppose SB 821, the lead-bullet ban, which they say interferes with their authority to regulate hunting. So Schwarzenegger could use the jurisdictional dispute as an excuse to veto the bill, leaving the lead-ban issue in the commission's hands. Of course, by firing Hanna, the commissioners now know that the next lead bullets from the governor may be aimed at them.

The surest way to protect the condor is to sign SB 821. To do otherwise would be a black stain on this green governor's reputation.