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WEIGHING IN

by Ed Zieralski

Lead ammunition ban Sonke Mastrup, deputy director of the Department of Fish and Game and former head of the state's deer program, said recently that he doesn't believe there's a need for an emergency ban on lead bullets in California condor country.

Environmental groups have petitioned the state Fish and Game Commission to impose an emergency ban on lead ammunition in California condor habitat to protect the recovering population of the twitchy vultures, even though no condors have died of anything, including lead poisoning, in 14 months.

"Given the evidence we have, I don't see an emergency," Mastrup told Jim Matthews of Outdoor News Service. "The actions we've taken and the condor recovery team has taken . . . well, we've been clean for 14 months. There has not been a single lead episode with condors for over a year. I can't claim cause-and-effect, but our volunteer effort may have in fact contributed to this." Still, Mastrup, ever the politician, left the door open by adding: "I just don't want this debate to turn into another lead shot like we had in the '80s when we switched over from lead shot to steel for waterfowl," Mastrup said. "There is something going on here, and we have the responsibility to have a game plan on how to deal with this." Mastrup will lead a panel of deer experts today in a discussion about the state's deer herds and other hunting issues at the International Sportsman's Expo that runs through tomorrow at the Fairplex in Pomona. The Fish and Game Commission will consider the request for the emergency ban on lead ammunition from the Center For Biological Diversity at the second day of the commission's meeting here Feb. 4 at Hubbs Sea World Research Institute.