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EPA asked to ban lead in ammo, fishing tackle

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LEAD IN BUCKSHOT AND FISHING lures kills millions of birds and other wildlife each year, according to 60 conservation groups seeking a ban on the metal in ammunition and weights.

The Center for Biological Diversity last month petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to outlaw lead in bullets and shotgun pellets, as well as in sinkers for fishing hooks.

A 30-year-old federal rule forbids lead pellets for shooting waterfowl over concerns the heavy metal can contaminate waterways. A separate 2008 state law bars lead shot within

the habitat range of the endangered California condor.

Nevertheless, 10 million to 20 million eagles, ravens, doves, ducks, cranes and other species die each year after ingesting lead from spent ammunition and lure sinkers, according to Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity in San Francisco.

"It's needless poisoning, and it's happening on a large scale," he said.

Miller's group says makers of hunting and fishing gear should have to use non-lethal metals such as copper. About 7,000 tons of lead are dispersed into the environment each year through

spent ammunition and lost sinkers. Lead poisoning damages the heart, kidneys, reproductive and nervous systems. But gun industry advocates insist the lead fears are overblown.

"It's a big jump to say that all the lead ammunition in the entire country should be banned," said Chuck Michel, attorney for the National Rifle Association and the California Rifle and Pistol Association.

Michel argues that the EPA does not have the authority to regulate the metal in bullets and pellets. The EPA agreed with that assessment earlier this month, saying it would only consider the ban on fishing lure sinkers.