



TOXICS:

Enviro group's poll finds support for banning lead ammunition

Phil Taylor, E&E reporter
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A new poll commissioned by an environmental group found that a slim majority of voters favor a mandatory switch from lead hunting bullets to nontoxic alternatives, while only 27 percent oppose such a move.

The poll, conducted for the Center for Biological Diversity, also found that about half of all respondents want Republicans in Congress to work with Democrats to ban lead in ammunition.

The poll, conducted last month by Democratic-leaning Public Policy Polling, included 657 registered voters and had a 3.9-point margin of error. Those who responded to the poll were told that “millions of birds and animals die each year from lead poisoning in the wild” and that “people who consume game are also at risk from lead left in the wild.”

CBD has long fought for a ban on lead bullets, arguing that the heavy metal harms birds that eat game carcasses and can enter the bloodstream of hunters. But ammunition manufacturers and hunting groups have opposed a ban, arguing there are no proven threats to human health or wildlife populations and that alternative nonlead bullets are more expensive.

“Lead poisoning from ammunition exacts a deadly toll on wildlife, killing bald eagles, endangered California condors, swans, loons and millions of other birds each year,” said Jeff Miller, conservation advocate at CBD. “It’s heartening to see that most Americans agree there’s no reason to continue putting toxic lead into the food chain or risking human health when there are nontoxic bullets already on the market and in use by hunters.”

The poll found that 57 percent favored “mandating a switch from lead bullets to nontoxic alternatives,” if those alternatives are “readily available” and “comparable in price to regular ammunition.”

The group’s poll comes as California’s Legislature considered a bill to bar lead bullets throughout the state. Currently, lead is banned for hunting only within the range of the endangered California condor in central and Southern California. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banned lead shot for waterfowl nationwide in 1991.

The debate over lead bullets garnered national headlines late last year when the Senate took up a package of hunting, fishing and conservation bills by Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) that included a measure clarifying that U.S. EPA could not regulate lead bullets under the Toxic Substances Control Act. CBD has petitioned and sued EPA to regulate lead.

While Tester's package enjoyed the support of most senators, some high-ranking Democrats, including Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer of California, said they opposed the bill because of the lead language. CBD also launched a campaign opposing the lead provision, buying a full-page ad in The New York Times and print and radio ads in Las Vegas urging Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to oppose the lead measure.

Tester's bill was blocked by Republicans on an unrelated budget matter and did not pass before the end of the lame-duck session of Congress.

While few conservation groups publicly supported the lead language, most of them supported Tester's hunting package or at least did not oppose it.

Susan Recce, the National Rifle Association's director of conservation, wildlife and natural resources, said last year that hunters and their families are not at any higher risk of lead poisoning than people who are not eating wild game, but she urged people to be mindful of how they prepare harvested meat and cook it.