

August 12, 2013

THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

National Rifle Association Enemies List Now Includes Scientists, Zoos

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WASHINGTON -- In a move bizarrely reminiscent of its “anti-gun” enemies list, the National Rifle Association announced a new plan Friday to target scientists, environmental groups, government regulators and individuals who favor banning the use of lead in gun ammunition.

The targeted attacks are part of Hunt for Truth.org, a newly revamped effort by the nation’s largest gun lobby to block attempts to regulate the use of lead in bullets. Regulations have been proposed in some states after studies have shown that millions of birds -- most notably the highly endangered California condor -- are dying of lead poisoning after ingesting lead bullet fragments.

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group, estimates that hunters in the United States shoot more than 3,000 tons of lead into the outdoors every year, and that as many as 20 million birds die annually from lead poisoning.

To the NRA, however, the proposed bans on lead in bullets represent an “assault” on “traditional” hunting and on hunters’ rights.

“Anti-lead ammunition groups will not rest until all lead ammunition, and ultimately hunting, is banned,” the gun lobby claimed in a Friday press release.

The NRA singled out a law under consideration in California which would require hunters in the Golden State to use lead-free ammunition. Lead free bullets are widely available from top manufacturers, and have not been shown to function any differently than bullets containing the highly toxic element.

In order to rally its members to oppose the lead regulation, the NRA described a conspiracy theory involving crooked scientists, phony research, and a shadowy network of nonprofits, zoos and government agencies all conspiring to ban hunting.

According to the NRA, an “activist portion of the scientific community” has formed “a highly organized network of like minded researchers with an agenda to ban lead ammunition.” In order to thwart this looming threat, “Hunt for Truth will expose the researchers associated with ‘faulty science’ critical of lead ammunition,” the gun lobby says.

Scientists aren’t the NRA’s only new targets. Nonprofits like the San Diego Zoo and the California Condor Recovery Team are also on the enemies list. The NRA claims these groups “have considerable influence over many legislators and regulators,” which they use to “capture” the regulatory agencies and bureaucrats responsible for lead ammunition restrictions.

“Under this capture theory, NGO’s, legislators, regulatory agencies and researchers work in concert to implement policies and regulations to ban traditional ammunition,” the NRA alleges.

As of Monday, the NRA had yet to list any scientists it planned to target, but there were seven environmental and wildlife conservation groups on the site, including the National Resources Defense Council and the Center for Biological Diversity. Four government agencies were also singled out: the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Los Angeles Zoo and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

A spokesman for the NRA declined to comment on the listings.

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