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NRA targets new enemies: Zoo and wildlife groups

The National Rifle Association, which labels politicians and actors as “enemies” of guns, now has in its sights the San Diego Zoo, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Defense Council and other groups seeking a ban on use of lead bullets by the nation’s hunters.

As always, the NRA is ginning up fear, in this case that foes of lead bullets have a secret agenda to ban hunting in America.

“Self-proclaimed environmental organizations are pushing to prohibit the use of traditional lead ammunition in hunting and recreational shooting,” it said Friday. “These radical groups are now going so far as to claim that eating wild game taken with lead ammunition is a serious health risk to hunters and families.

“Anti-lead ammunition groups will not rest until all lead ammunition, and ultimately hunting, is abandoned.”

The NRA’s target list embraces the California Condor Recovery Team and the Center for Biological Diversity, as well as such public agencies as the California Dept. of Fish and Game, Arizona Game and Fish, and the Humane Society of America.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, a longtime player in America’s environmental



Ted Nugent, National Rifle Assn. board member, rails against “anti-gun leftist violence” and “socialist stooges who are responsible for violence.”

politics, reacted with bafflement at being in the NRA’s sights.

“We don’t have a problem with bullets or hunting,” said Josh Mogerman of the Council. “We have a problem with lead: Lead in gas, lead in paint, lead in the air. It’s a toxin that we need to get out of the environment since reams of science has shown it to be a problem to people and animals.

“If that somehow makes us an enemy, then we are in good company since most everyone recognizes the threat. Luckily, there are plenty of non-lead alternatives that perform the same or better than lead.”

What set off the NRA is legislation, pending in the California State Legislature, that would ban lead bullets in America’s most populous state. The Golden State has already banned lead bullets in favored habitats of the giant, endangered California condor.

The NRA has maintained and expanded a list of “anti-gun” groups and figures. The label of enemies has been applied to groups ranging from the American Medical Association to the U.S. Catholic Conference and YMCA, to celebrities from Alec Baldwin to Moon Unit Zappa.

Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., are on the enemies list, along with four other Democratic senators from Oregon and California. Sen. Diane Feinstein, D-Calif., is longtime chief sponsor of legislation that would require criminal background checks of those purchasing firearms at gun shows.

The latest list of enemies includes longtime defenders of the California condor and endangered raptors, such as the California Condor Recovery Team, the Peregrine Fund and the Ventana Wildlife Society. (The Ventana Wilderness Area, south of Monterey, Calif., is prime condor habitat.)

The NRA alleges the environmental and wildlife groups have “captured” state and federal wildlife agencies, and are out to “ban traditional ammunition” and “impede hunters rights.”



Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., both get an “F” grade from the National Rifle Association for their votes on gun issues..

It decries “scientists as partisan activists,” but has not as yet added environmental scientists to its enemies list. The list includes performers (e.g. singer Judy Collins) long active in conservation work.

A new NRA-sponsored web site called Hunt-forTruth.org makes the case for lead bullets, with such headings as “Through human history, lead has been used in many societies.”

The Center for Biological Diversity has argued that as many as 20 million wild birds are killed each year, along with many animals, not just from being shot with lead bullets but in eating creatures that have been shot.

Not so, says the NRA.

“The truth is that the average American adult has a higher blood-lead level than hunters who consumed a significant portion of their diet from game meat harvested with lead ammunition,” argues its site. “This shows that alternative sources of lead exposure are a much

greater health concern than eating game meat harvested with lead ammunition.”

The National Rifle Association has long anchored its membership among America’s hunters.

In its ratings of politicians, however, the NRA has taken to giving “F” grades to lawmakers who have fought to preserve wildlife habitat, and “A” grades to some of the most extreme anti-environmental members of Congress.

In Washington, Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., prominent advocates for preservation of public land — and defenders of the beleaguered U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service budget — have been given “F” grades.

By contrast, anti-environmental U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., in whose House Natural Resources Committee protection bills go to die, gets an “A.” Hastings regularly gets a “Zero” rating from the League of Conservation Voters.

The Alabama Wildlife Federation has just announced it is giving a “Conservationist of the Year” award to NRA President James Porter. Porter, who hails from Alabama, is best known for describing the Civil War as “the war of Northern aggression.”