



Minimizing Risks to Wildlife and People from Lead Hunting Ammunition Progress Report

February 2025

Since release of the [Minimizing Risks to Wildlife and People from Lead Hunting Ammunition](#) report in April 2022, DEC and partners have taken many steps to implement recommendations in the plan to minimize the risks associated with lead ammunition for hunting.

The recommendations in the report were centered around four main themes:

- *Outreach* - advance strategic educational outreach to increase public understanding of the potential and realized impacts of lead hunting ammunition on wildlife and people and encourage hunters to use non-lead alternatives;
- *Minimization* - develop and disseminate best management practices to hunters, deer processors, and food pantries to minimize the presence of lead on the landscape and in game meat consumed by people;
- *Supply* - work to increase supply, availability, and use of non-lead hunting ammunition;
- *Research* - conduct research to further understand the scope and extent of impacts of lead hunting ammunition on people and wildlife.

Some high priority recommendations from the report either underway or completed include:

- Prior to the 2023 deer hunting season, DEC initiated a study with the New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University, United States Geological Survey, and Conservation Science Global. Research partners provided rebates (up to \$60) to hunters to use non-lead ammunition while measuring ammunition use, hunting effort, and eagle abundance in the study area (9 Wildlife Management Units) to determine the non-lead ammunition usage rates at which eagle mortality is reduced. After the 2023 hunting season about 200 rebates were distributed to hunters. For the 2024 deer hunting season, we expanded the rebate program to all of New York's big game hunters to increase participation in this important voluntary initiative. DEC also increased outreach of this program to over 250,000 licensed hunters via email, boosted social media posts, and the [Hunters for Eagle Conservation webpage](#). As more people try alternative ammunition and have success, we expect increased use by others through word of mouth. This study also involves eagle surveys and a citizen science effort where successful hunters use trail cameras to record scavengers at gut piles. This project will continue in 2025 and 2026.
- DEC's Wildlife Health Program continues to measure lead levels in furbearers and other scavenging wildlife to evaluate lead exposure. In 2024, 508 fisher liver samples obtained from trapped animals were analyzed and 57% had detectable levels of lead, but none had lead levels high enough to have significantly impaired their health. Additional research is ongoing to determine if there is any correlation to elevated lead levels and impacts to reproductive organs. Additional samples from other mammalian and avian scavengers continue to be collected and analyzed throughout the state as part of the ongoing mortality and morbidity investigations.

- DEC promoted an educational video produced with Cornell Wildlife Health Lab and Cornell Department of Communication titled: "[Your Choice of Ammunition](#)" featuring hunter's experience with non-lead ammunition on the DEC YouTube Channel and hunting page, including updated messaging in the annual hunting regulations guide about the benefits of using non-lead ammunition.
- DEC sent staff to a workshop on "Modern Hunting Ammunition", hosted by the [North American Non-Lead Partnership](#).
- DEC updated existing educational materials and developed several new items to help hunters make informed choices in the ammunition they use including:
 - Updated information on DEC's website
 - FAQs for the lead ammunition rebate program
 - Outreach banners to use at public fairs and events including the NYS Fair
 - Epoxy resins showing the fragmentation of traditional lead, lead bonded, and copper bullets for use at outreach events.
 - Wooden lighted travel cases for ballistic gels to demonstrate the fragmentation of lead ammo vs non-lead ammo.
 - Identifying and mapping [retailers that carry non-lead ammunition](#) to facilitate hunter access to these products.
- DEC has updated our Hunter Education Program course curriculum and continues to train its instructors to emphasize the risks to wildlife from lead ammunition and the benefits of non-lead ammunition. All instructors are now expected to include the benefits of non-lead ammunition in hunter education courses.
- Department of Health (DOH) has attended both the Saratoga and Dutchess County fairs and educated the public using lead & non-lead ammunition ballistic gels. A case was fabricated by DOH staff to house the gels with lighting so they can be more easily compared. This display was received well by fair attendees and information about the rebate program was offered to interested hunters. DOH previously surveyed food banks on practices related to donation of wild game and plans to develop outreach accompanying materials in the beginning of 2025. Additional language capabilities have been added to the DOH webpage "[Health Advice for Harvesting, Preparing, and Eating Wild Game](#)"
- DEC staff continued to work with the Cornell Center for Conservation Sciences group to conduct additional surveys of hunter and public perception, interest, and communication strategies on hunting with non-lead ammunition.
- Assisted with the completion of scientific articles:
 - [Vulnerability to lead toxicosis and bioindicator utility of deer scavengers in New York \(wiley.com\)](#)
 - [Diving into the wicked discourse of lead ammunition for big game hunting \(wiley.com\)](#)
 - Identifying drivers of non-lead ammunition use: A survey of hunters in New York, US (in review)

Much of this initial focus has been directed towards information and education and increasing our knowledge of wildlife exposure to lead. There is more to be done to increase hunter awareness.

In 2025, DEC will:

- Continue the study on eagles with the New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University, United States Geological Survey, and Conservation Science Global.
- Continue to revamp and update our web information related to use of non-lead ammunition and provide more extensive access to existing sources of quality information about the topic.
- Begin work on a DEC video/demo with key messages about the benefits to hunters, wildlife, and consumers of game meat of using non-lead ammunition for hunting.
- Increase staff capacity to offer educational demonstrations to hunters and others using new educational materials developed in summer/fall of 2024.
- Develop “Best Management Practices” (BMPs) for hunters and meat processors to reduce lead exposure to people and wildlife when lead-based bullets are used to harvest game through improved meat processing techniques and strategies to prevent scavenger access to offal and carcass remains.
- Work with the Division of Law Enforcement and other law enforcement agencies to promote and increase use of non-lead ammunition or BMPs when responding to sick or injured wildlife.
- Explore, with the help of the Lead Ammunition Working Group, the addition of new partners to join our efforts within the working group.
- Continue to work with the Northeast States non-lead coordinator and the North American Non-Lead Partnership to advance common messaging and information in New York and adjacent states.
- Work with ammunition retailers to increase awareness and availability of non-lead ammunition, and how they can help hunters access non-lead alternatives.
- Future work will pursue broader establishment of an incentive-based program (rebates, reduced price coupons, etc.) to encourage hunters to try alternative hunting bullets including working in partnership with retailers and distributors of these products. We remain convinced, once hunters try non-lead ammunition, they will continue to use it.

HUNTERS FOR EAGLE CONSERVATION
NEW YORK

Offering rebates of up to \$60 toward the purchase of non-lead ammunition used for deer hunting in New York State.

Scan with your mobile phone to learn more

A Conservation Science Global program in partnership with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

NEW YORK STATE Department of Environmental Conservation
dec.ny.gov

Banner advertising rebates for the purchase of non-lead ammunition.

CHOOSE NON-LEAD AMMUNITION

CHOOSE PERFORMANCE: Non-lead ammunition expands rapidly and retains weight for a quick, humane kill.

CHOOSE HIGH-QUALITY MEAT: By using non-lead ammunition, you're ensuring healthier food for you and your family.

CHOOSE YOUR CONSERVATION LEGACY: Eagles and other scavengers ingest lead when feeding on carcasses and gut piles, causing some to become sick or die.

Choose non-lead to protect wildlife, your family, and hunters' conservation legacy.

NEW YORK STATE Department of Environmental Conservation
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48420.html

Lead bullets fragment; non-lead bullets don't.

Sample "advertisement" from the Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide.