



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Grand Teton National Park

Jackie Skaggs
(307) 739-3393

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Elk Refuge



Lori Iverson
(307) 733-9212 x227

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GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK AND NATIONAL ELK REFUGE ENCOURAGE VOLUNTARY USE OF NON-LEAD AMMUNITION DURING THE 2009 ELK AND BISON SEASONS

Grand Teton National Park and National Elk Refuge officials are encouraging hunters currently using lead ammunition to make a voluntary switch to non-lead ammunition during the 2009 elk and bison seasons.

Lead is an environmental toxin well known for its capability to directly impact wildlife. Recently, more attention has been directed to lead poisoning of animals that consume carcasses shot with lead bullets from center fire rifles, such as those commonly used in big-game hunting. Studies by Craighead Beringia South, a local non-profit research institute based in Kelly, Wyoming, reveal that during the fall hunting season, lead levels spike in the blood of ravens and eagles in the Jackson Hole valley. These and other studies have shown that fragmented bullets often stay in the discarded remains of wild game and subsequently enter the food chain as they are consumed by other animals. Lead poisoning can result when wildlife species ingest the toxic material.

Recent documentation of lead bullet fragments found in packaged game meat has also raised concerns that this may serve as a potential source of lead contamination in humans. One of the goals of the voluntary non-lead ammunition program is to raise awareness levels about the potential risks of lead ammunition so hunters can make informed decisions when selecting hunting ammunition.

Hunters have played a key role in wildlife protection and restoration programs for over a century. Since hunters commonly use lead bullets to harvest big game on public lands, they have an opportunity to assist agency administrators in managing for healthy wildlife populations by reducing the quantity of lead in the environment. Though lead ammunition does not appear to be affecting large-scale population levels of individual species in the Jackson Hole area, a reduction in the amount of lead deposited in the environment during hunting season can help reduce the loss of individual raptors such as bald and golden eagles. Several ammunition manufacturers have responded to the demand for non-lead ammunition by making high performance non-lead bullets available in the most popular rifle calibers.

By reporting non-lead ammunition use this season, hunters will provide Grand Teton National Park and National Elk Refuge staff with a means to measure participation in the voluntary program this year. This will help the agencies explore incentive programs to encourage additional voluntary participation during the 2010 elk and bison seasons. Hunters can note on their hunting permits whether or not they participated in the voluntary program.

Hunters are not required to use non-lead ammunition while pursuing elk in Grand Teton National Park or the National Elk Refuge, or while pursuing bison on the National Elk Refuge. This is strictly a voluntary program. However, by participating in this program, hunters can help to maintain support for hunting programs by demonstrating a commitment to safe, quality hunting practices that will benefit the long-term conservation of wildlife.

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