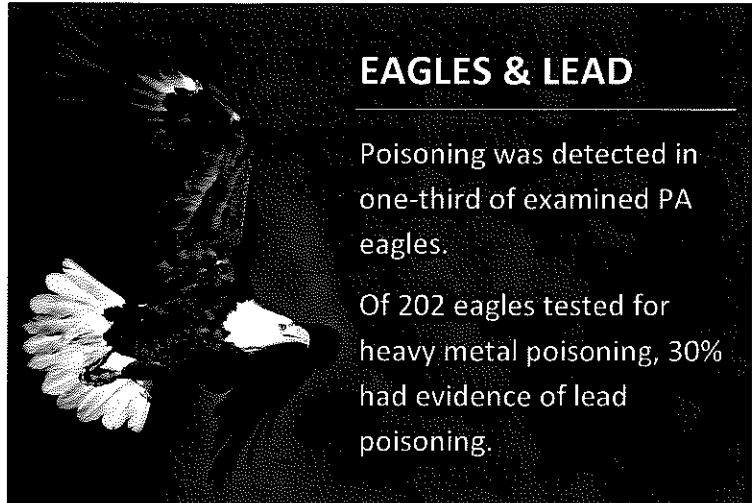


NON-TOXIC AMMUNITIONS FOR DISPATCHING WILDLIFE

Problem: Bald and golden eagles scavenge regularly at State Game Lands deer pits increasing their exposure to lead and poisoning.

Background: It is difficult to overstate the success of the bald eagle recovery—a testament to what can be accomplished when people work together for wildlife conservation. In only 30 years, Pennsylvania bald eagles went from a remnant, almost extirpated species to a population of over 300 nesting pairs. As the state population continues to grow, so does the risk of negative eagle-human interactions.



Bald eagles (as well as golden eagles) prefer fish but are opportunistic foragers that scavenge when practical. When scavenging, eagles are adept at finding and consuming animal remains. In most areas of their range, eagles are exposed to food sources with expended lead bullets (e.g., from varmint shooting, offal piles, non-recovered game, as well as contaminated and weakened live prey), which are ingested and result in poisoning at lethal and sub-lethal lead levels. Deer pits across the Game Commission's State Game Lands provide a regular source of food for scavenging eagles—especially in the fall and winter when scavenging for food becomes more important.

Between 2006 and 2016, 228 eagles from across Pennsylvania were necropsied. Causes of disease and death were recorded including trauma by car, train, and gunshot, also electrocution and infection. Lead poisoning was found in one-third of the examined animals, most as a result of scavenging behavior. Of the 202 birds tested for heavy metals, 30 percent had detectable levels in their liver, the majority consistent with lead toxicity.

One simple way to reduce lead toxicity in eagles and other wildlife is to use non-lead ammunition when dispatching wildlife. Both performance and cost of non-lead ammunition is comparable to lead counterparts. Game Wardens have earmarked .22 WMR rimfire rifle for dispatching wildlife (often deer and smaller species). The Game Commission advocates the use of non-lead ammunitions to hunters across the Commonwealth.

Solution: Game Wardens use non-toxic .22 WMR ammunition to dispatch wildlife (when appropriate). Thus, reducing the risk of lead exposure to wildlife at State Game Land deer pits.
