

State assemblyman proposes ban on lead shot in game bird hunting

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A Southern California assemblyman is trying to block the use of lead pellets by hunters going after upland game birds.

Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, is proposing a ban on lead shot in state wildlife areas. The ban would outlaw the use of lead pellets for people hunting pheasant, grouse and other birds.

"We need to get lead out of wildlife areas," Nava said. "It makes no sense to allow people to leave poisonous material in our state parks. We expect people to clean up their litter; we should expect something similar of our hunters."

A federal law already bans the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented the ban in 1991.

Ducks and other waterfowl that dabble, or dip down with their bills to scoop up food, also were bringing up lead shot from the bottom of lakes, said Patrick Foy, a California Department of Fish and Game warden in Sacramento.

While there are reports that show lead shot was poisoning waterfowl, there isn't such support for a ban on lead shot for upland game birds, said Dave Ruiz, Weaverville committee chairman for Ducks Unlimited, a worldwide waterfowl conservation group. "They are just getting a little extreme," Ruiz said.

He said he personally carries three lead pellets in his body, a result of a hunting accident more than 50 years ago, and they haven't caused health problems.

Nava said his proposed ban is based on reports that show upland birds ingest lead shot and condors end up eating lead shot when feasting on the remains of birds shot by hunters.

"There's no excuse for continuing to spread this toxic substance into the environment and put so many animals at risk," said Jennifer Fearing, California director for The Humane Society of the United States, a nationwide group advocating animal protection.

Ruiz said the switch away from lead shot would make hunting more expensive. While a box of 25 shells loaded with lead shot costs \$3.50 to \$5, a similar box of shells loaded with steel shot costs \$15 to \$20.

And steel and other alternative pellets simply don't shoot as well as lead - which is dense, making it fly farther.

"(Steel is) not nearly as effective as a projectile," Ruiz said.

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