

Outdoor Recreation

Lead ammunition the subject of ODFW / OSU survey



THE OUTDOOR COLUMN
By Todd Arriola

Early last month, I wrote an article about the planned release of California Condors, within a few years, by the Yurok Tribe of northern California, and the expected migration to Oregon.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the Oregon State University (OSU) Research Center collaborated on a State lead survey, to assess the opinions, and knowledge regarding lead ammunition use of both hunters, and non-hunters, which I also mentioned. I didn't expect to see the results of that survey until the end of winter, however, I received an email on January 26th, with a summary. The disappointing, but unsurprising results tell me this: the lead debate will continue to be a long, divisive battle for anyone involved.

ODFW Wildlife Communications Coordinator Michelle Dennehy said, "There has been speculation that this survey was a precursor to ODFW implementing a ban or restriction on the use of lead ammunition. This is not the case. There are no proposals by ODFW or the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to ban or restrict the use of lead ammunition for hunting in Oregon."

Stating a seemingly prophetic view, prompted most likely by the knowledge that State issues frequently metamorphose into heated, extended battles, she said, "However, ODFW anticipates that

events outside the State (the possible restoration of California Condors in northern California), or litigation, legislation or a ballot initiative, could affect the use of lead ammunition and hunting wildlife management in Oregon.

For these reasons, the Department believed it was important to understand the views of hunters and the public on this issue, and ensure that those views are clearly understood, and can be fairly represented in any future discussions regarding lead ammunition."

The survey included more questions for the hunters than the public (both groups picked at random, from all regions within the State).

This ratio makes sense, because, as the introduction states, "The hunter survey included 33 questions in order to get more specific information on current firearm and ammunition usage for big game and unprotected mammal and furbearer hunts. Therefore, the general public survey consisted of fewer questions. Both groups responded to a subset of questions that allowed comparisons of opinions, knowledge, and preferences between the two groups."

The first response I noted—mostly, because, it reassured me that news, and print isn't dead, and people still read papers—is the answer to a question that was posed to both groups, regarding their sources of information associated with the effects of lead ammunition.

Topping the list of sources of information used by hunters, sportsmen's magazines, ranked at about 63%, followed by mass media, and other hunters, both at about 60%.

The public responded with the top three sources as mass media, at about 65%, followed by hunters they know, at about 46%, and conservation/environmental organizations, at about 43%.

Both groups were then asked to rate the reliability of their sources of lead ammunition information. This is where predictably, among other specific responses, the two groups largely disagreed.

Sportsmen's magazines received the top score for reliability for hunters, at about 40%, however, mass media, the second-ranked source for the group, received only about 18% reliability, and other hunters, the third-ranked source, received a score of about 26% reliability.

On the other hand, the public, whose top three sources were mass media, hunters they know, and conservation/environmental organizations, also ranked those sources in the same order, as the top three in reliability scoring, at about 35%, 28%, and 28%, respectively. Interestingly, both hunters, and the public ranked the OSU Extension Service, and ODFW employees near the bottom, in both a cited source of information, and reliability.

Several key points were noted, as the survey provided some insight, regarding lead ammunition use, and hunter versus public opinion. The following was asked of both groups: "If Oregon were forced, such as by legislation or regulations, to phase out use of ammunition that contains lead, by which year do you believe it would be realistic for the State and its hunters to adopt the change?" According to the survey, the public supports an almost immediate phase out, while hunters support a gradual change, by around 2024.

"If a program to reduce use of or eliminate ammunition that contains lead were created in Oregon, how would your participation in hunting change, if

at all?" the survey asked hunters. The response was, overwhelmingly, that hunting activities wouldn't change.

When asked how knowledge of the effects of lead has influenced whether hunters consume, or use game meat harvested with lead ammunition, the survey noted, "Most hunters have not stopped consuming game meat because of what they have learned about lead. Others are minimizing their exposure by trimming meat, or using non-lead ammunition."

The hunters cited the need to know about non-lead ammunition's performance, as the top influence, whether to switch to non-lead ammunition, for hunting big game.

The lowest-ranked influence cited was if the cost was 25%-50% higher than lead-based ammunition. When asked what would influence the switch to non-lead ammunition, for hunting unprotected mammals, or furbearers, the highest percentage responded that the switch would not be made, under any circumstances.

The lowest-ranked influence was, again, if the cost was higher than lead-based ammunition.

The survey shows that, if a program in the State were initiated to reduce lead exposure to both humans and wildlife, it could be said that both hunters and the public basically would agree on regulations to prohibit lead-based ammunition solely in regions with demonstrated wildlife lead ingestion concerns.

When asked about Statewide regulations to prohibit the use of lead-based ammunition, the public shows strong support, while hunters show strong opposition, as predicted.

More notable proof that the two groups can agree periodically is offered in the following suggestions, receiving strong opposition from both hunters, and the public, according to the survey:

"Region-specific regulations to allow use of lead-based ammunition, but require removal of gut pile from hunting field; Statewide regulations to allow use of lead-based ammunition, but require removal of gut pile from hunting field; Voluntary coupon incentive program only in regions with demonstrated wildlife lead ingestion concerns."

A voluntary coupon incentive program—which includes a voucher for non-lead ammunition, for example. Statewide? Hunters strongly oppose it, while the public strongly supports it, according to the survey.

Well, there it is, sports fans.

It's not a 100% complete picture of the state of the lead debate, but, an overview.

Sometimes, hunters and the public can agree, and sometimes, they come dangerously close to finding the nearest UFC cage, in order to battle it out.

I am 100% certain about one thing, though: we haven't heard the last of it...

Public input sought on restoration project

PENDLETON, Ore. – In an effort to increase forest health across the Blue Mountains, the Ochoco, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests are proposing a landscape scale forest restoration and fuels reduction project on portions of approximately 1,270,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands.

"The current pace of active forest restoration on our forests is not keeping pace with forest growth, making them vulnerable to severe wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks," said Stacey Forson, Ochoco National Forest Supervisor. "In order to promote a healthy and productive forest, we must look at ways to do planning differently, at a larger scale and faster pace."

The Forest Resiliency Project aims to return the Blue Mountains to healthier conditions, reduce the risks of unusually large and severe wildfires, and reintroduce the natural role of fire to the landscape. The project will also contribute to local communities through reduced risk of fire spread to adjacent lands, increased jobs and supplemental benefits. The analysis area is located within the Blue Mountains in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington and encompasses portions of 13 counties.

The project proposes approximately 610,000 acres of thinning and prescribed fire treatments across the three National Forests in areas with the greatest restoration need. All forest treatments will be designed to create forest patterns that are more resilient to natural disturbance. Additionally, treatments will support safe and effective fire management. Proposed treatments by forest include:

- 118,000 acres of treatment on the Ochoco National Forest
- 212,000 acres of treatment on the Umatilla National Forest
- 280,000 acres of treatment on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

The proposal reflects Forest Service commitment to focus on the urgent need to restore dry forest landscapes in eastern Oregon and Washington. Decades of fire suppression, past timber management practices, and climate change have left more than 2.3 million acres of dry forests across the Blue Mountains overcrowded and vulnerable to unusual outbreaks of insects, diseases, and wildfires. The 2015 fire season set the record as the worst in U.S. history, with more than 282,000 acres reported as burned in the Blue Mountains. Because current forest project planning takes several years to complete, forest managers are unable to keep up with the pace of forest growth to restore these conditions.

"To really make a difference on the landscape, we must try new approaches to project design and analysis, test new ways to reach decisions differently, while working closely with tribes, communities, and forest collaborative groups," said Genevieve Masters, Umatilla National Forest Supervisor.

The Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team, a dedicated interdisciplinary team, was hired by the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region to tackle this critical issue and complete large landscape restoration plans, including the Forest Resiliency Project. The planning team intentionally designed this project at a large scale, explore new planning and analysis methods, and create flexibility for local units during implementation. The draft environmental impact statement (EIS) will be released this summer with the final EIS expected in December 2016. A separate Record of Decision will be prepared for each Forest and signed by the associated Forest Supervisor, but the analysis of effects will be completed in one EIS.

The success of this project depends on frequent engagement among a variety of interested stakeholders, tribes and communities. Three local collaborative groups within the project area (the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative, the Umatilla Forest Collaborative, and the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative) are actively engaged with the local forests on similar projects to integrate social values and address any local concerns about Forest Service project plans.

"We want to do what is right for the landscape, while balancing social and economic issues. We encourage all citizens to contribute to this important project," said Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor. "Your feedback will help guide and improve this proposal through the planning process."

The comment period is an opportunity for the public to be involved in the process and offer thoughts on alternative ways the Forest Service can accomplish the project purpose and need. Comments may be submitted during the 60-day scoping period, which begins with the Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register (anticipated to begin on February 5). Public engagement sessions will be scheduled during the month of March. Additional information on these meetings will be released in the future.

The Proposed Action and maps can be downloaded from the web site: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/forestresiliency-project. Comments can be submitted online or by email: rrestorationprojects@fs.fed.us. Written comments may also be submitted to: Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team, 72510 Coyote Rd., Pendleton, OR 97801.

The Forest Resiliency project is part of the Forest Service's broader strategy to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration in eastern Oregon and Washington to provide both healthy forests and healthy communities. More information can be found on the Eastside Restoration website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastsideRestoration> or by contacting Ayn Shlisky (541-278-3762, ajshlisky@fs.fed.us) or Darcy Weseman (541-278-3755, deweseman@fs.fed.us).

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