



Attn: House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy
Re: House Bill 944 – Lead Tackle
Date: February 9, 2023
Position: Oppose

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment & Natural Resources Finance & Policy,

I write you today on behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation in opposition of House Bill 944, which would ban the sale, manufacture, and use of lead fishing tackle. There is no documented evidence that anglers' use of lead tackle has deleterious impacts on fish and wildlife at the population level in the United States. To ban lead fishing tackle would be detrimental to Minnesota's economy as a whole, funding for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the traditions enjoyed by the state's strong community of sportsmen and women. I respectfully urge the members of this committee to oppose the passage of H 944.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Minnesota enjoys extreme benefits from its recreational fishing industry. According to the Minnesota Sportfishing Foundation Coalition, fishing supports over 28,000 jobs and generates more than \$4.4 billion annually for the state's economy, and more than a quarter of Minnesotans participated in fishing in 2022.¹ Lead tackle is overwhelmingly the industry-standard option for these anglers. Approximately 80% of fishing weights and jig heads sold are lead sinkers weighing a half-ounce or less.²

¹ *MN-Fish*, "State of Minnesota Fishing Summit 'Great Success'" Accessed January 27, 2023.

https://mn-fish.com/state-of-minnesota-fishing-summit-great-success/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=state-of-minnesota-fishing-summit-great-success

² *Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation*, "Lead Ammunition and Fishing Tackle Bans," Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/lead-sinker-ban>

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation

The ban proposed by this legislation on lead tackle, which is in extremely high demand in a very important sector of this state's economy, would create a vacuum that simply cannot be filled by non-lead alternatives. Companies that produce fishing tackle simply do not have the infrastructure in place to produce lead-alternative tackle capable of meeting this state's high demand.

In late August of 2022, Minnesota Commissioner of Natural Resources Sarah Strommen issued an emergency rule that banned lead ammunition from special hunts and on specified public lands.³ This order was reversed by a second emergency order less than two months later in October. In this reversal, Commissioner Strommen stated, "Ammunition that meets non-toxic requirements for hunting in state park special hunts is not readily available and could significantly reduce participation this year. This would reduce the deer population management benefits of these special hunts, adversely affecting other natural resources in state parks."⁴ Like non-lead ammunition, there is not enough functionally equivalent, non-lead tackle to meet the demand of the many sportsmen and women that annually contribute to Minnesota's storied outdoor traditions and bolster its economy. Banning lead tackle would decimate the state's recreational fishing industry as anglers would simply be unable to comply with the requirements of this proposed bill and would therefore be unable to participate.

There is no scientific evidence that suggests that lead tackle impacts fish and wildlife populations at the population level. Science-based management decisions made by state fish and wildlife agencies across the country, including the Minnesota DNR, are not made based on individual instances, but rather at the population-level. The use of lead tackle should not be handled any differently.

Additionally, House Bill 944 would have significant negative impacts on conservation funding for the Minnesota DNR. Through the unique "user pays – public benefits" approach of the American System of Conservation Funding, state fish and wildlife management agencies derive significant portions of their funding through license sales and excise taxes on outdoor goods such as fishing rods, tackle, motorboat fuel, and other angling-necessities.⁵ Because anglers would be unable to comply with the requirements of H 944, they would have no need to purchase fishing licenses or these outdoor goods. In 2021, the sale of fishing licenses alone provided the Minnesota DNR with more than \$36.5 million, and excise taxes on outdoor goods generated an additional \$14.7 million.⁶ Banning lead tackle creates a significant barrier to participation and puts this much-needed conservation funding at risk.

³ *Minnesota State Register*, 47 SR 152, August 29, 2022. https://mn.gov/admin/assets/SR47_09%20-%20Accessible_tcm36-538940.pdf

⁴ *Minnesota State Register*, 47 SR 394, October 24, 2022. https://mn.gov/admin/assets/SR47_17%20-%20Accessible_tcm36-544924.pdf

⁵ *Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation*, "American System of Conservation Funding," Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/ascf>

⁶ *Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation*, "ASCF Fact Sheet – Minnesota."

I respectfully urge the honorable members of this committee to oppose the passage of House Bill 944. There is no scientific evidence that indicates lead tackle threatens fish and wildlife at the population level in Minnesota, but lead tackle is a foundational component of an extremely strong and important pillar of Minnesota's economy and conservation funding. To prohibit the use of lead tackle, the industry-standard option for anglers, would render many Minnesotans unable to participate in fishing, a time-honored tradition that has supported the state since time immemorial. I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue and welcome any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "M".

Robert Matthews

Senior Coordinator, Upper Midwestern States

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

rmatthews@congressionalsportsmen.org | 517-210-2890