

Hook, Line and Sinker - Let's get the Lead Out

In conversation with Margie Manthey, Fishing Specialist (and Environmentalist) with the Wolfe Lake Association (Westport) by Jean Dabros

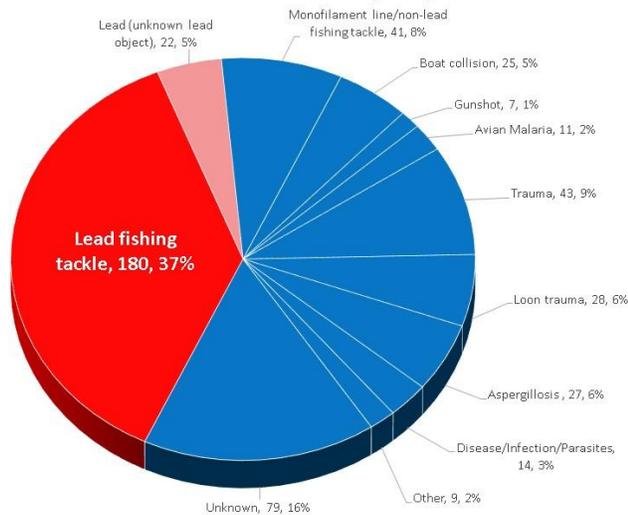


Photo credit: Justin Hoffman

Lead is the number one killer of Loons.

This pie chart reflects the causes of loon mortality as studied by one of the leading loon conservation groups/ biologists/ veterinarians. Loons ingest lead when they eat a fish that has ingested lead tackle (or has tackle attached to it) or when they scoop up pebbles from the river bottom to aid their digestion and one of the “pebbles” is actually a lead weight. Lead ingested by a loon makes its way into the gizzard and

Documented adult loon mortalities in New Hampshire, 1989-2024



In this x-ray of a dead loon the fishing tackle it ingested is clearly visible (red circle)

Credit: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Credit: Dr. Tiffany Grade – Loon Preservation Committee

from there the loon's fate is sealed. The lead attacks the bird's nervous system, causing blindness, decreased reproductivity, and seizures, eventually resulting in a slow and painful death over 2–3 weeks. Even small amounts of lead can impair a bird's ability to feed itself, nest properly, or care for its offspring. Lead affects not only Loons but any aquatic birds that eat fish (Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, Osprey to name a few). Interestingly lead shot was banned from ammunition used for hunting over the water more than twenty years ago due to the risks involved to the aquatic environment. Lead is also harmful to humans having been banned in paint and gasoline

In 2021, Margie Manthey and Donna Garland of the Wolfe Lake Association got the Lead-Free movement off the ground in Ontario by offering a lead buy-back program in the Wolfe Lake and Westport area, known as the "Let's Get the Lead Out!" movement. *This movement is an initiative to reduce toxic lead fishing tackle from accumulating in the environment where it is responsible for the deaths of millions of birds and other wildlife annually* Fishleadfree.ca hosted by <https://wolfelake.org/toxins-in-your-tackle-box>

First steps – replacing any lead products that are 1 ounce or less will greatly reduce the chances that a loon will choose that pellet as a pebble to eat. Try tungsten, steel, bismuth, brass, ceramic or glass as a replacement. I have it on good authority that tungsten is a far superior fishing choice. Go to the website <https://wolfelake.org/toxins-in-your-tackle-box> to see a list of retailers in their area that will exchange lead tackle for an opportunity to be entered in a monthly draw.

Follow these links for more details:

- [FishLeadfree.ca](https://fishleadfree.ca)
- [Loon.org](https://loon.org)
- [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](https://www.mn.gov/Minnesota-Pollution-Control-Agency) and
- [Government of Canada](https://www.governmentofcanada.ca)
- fishleadfree.org

TIA Anglers – drop off your lead tackle for a chance to win!

Margie Manthey will be on hand collecting lead fishing gear during the **Thousand Islands Association AGM, July 19, 2025**, just look for her booth. Anyone who drops off their lead will be given a coupon to enter into a draw to win a generously donated prize. Special lead-free packages for children!

