

Wolfe Lake Association Wants All Fishers To "Get The Lead Out"

by Jeff Green

Margie Manthey is a naturalist, a writer, and also the fishing coordinator for the Wolfe Lake Association.

About a year ago she wrote an article about the impact of lead fishing tackle on the aquatic bird population, particularly loons, for one of her regular columns in the Westport Rideau Re-view Mirror newspaper.

Wolfe Lake is located in between Burridge and the Village of Westport, in South Frontenac.

"I kind of went down a rabbit hole after that," she said in a phone interview this week, "re-searching all of the dangers to wildlife that are the result of the use of lead in fishing and hunting," she said.

Because lead is very pliable, very heavy, and very cheap, it has been the metal of choice for fishers and hunters for many decades.

Lead sinkers for fishing lines are the most common sinker, by far, in North America. The use of lead sinkers goes back centuries, even millenia, as there are references to the use as far back as in Egyptian times.

Lead fishing tackle and lead shot, whether ingested directly from lake beds when it is mistaken for grit or swallowed when birds catch or scavenge fish or other prey containing lead, can have a devastating impact, especially on common loon and bald/golden eagle mortality rates.

"Good science is key to credibility and raising public awareness," said Manthey, "For example, we know for a fact that just one small lead sinker or pellet can kill an adult loon or duck, and that, in the meantime, lead toxicity causes great physical suffering, as poisoned birds often die slowly, wasting away over a period of three to four weeks."

She points to a large scale study that was done in New Hampshire on the loon population over a 30 year period. It showed that 40% of mortality was the direct result of loons ingesting lead fishing tackle, and a further 5% came from lead poisoning from an unknown source.

"It is not only loons that die from lead poisoning. Eagles and Swans, ducks and other water-fowl are also at risk," she said.

Lead in buckshot has been identified as a major risk to bird populations and it has been banned for waterfowl hunting in Canada for over 20 years.

In the case of lead sinkers, The Wolfe Lake Association,

led by Margie Manthey and Donna Garland, have taken on an education and voluntary replacement campaign between March 31, 2022 and March 31, 2023, aided by South Frontenac Township and local retailers.

In 2021, South Frontenac established the Lake Ecosystem granting program, and one of three successful applicants to the first intake of the program was the Wolfe Lake Association. The grant of over \$6,000 is being used to fund the "Lead Fishing Tackle Buy Back" program at re-tail outlets that sell fishing tackle in the region.

Any angler, whether they are from South Frontenac or elsewhere, can bring in lead fishing tackle to participating outlets, and will receive a \$10 gift certificate that can be exchanged for non-lead fishing tackle, which the outlets are all stocking.

The program runs for a full year, through the walleye and bass seasons that are upcoming, and beyond.

Retailers who have already signed on to participate include: Norris Bait and Tackle, Big Rideau Tackle, Manotick Bait, Bait Casters, Westport Hardware, Verona Hardware, and Atkin-son Home Hardware & Building Centre in Hartington.

Lead fishing tackle can also be dropped off at the Westport Lions, Reuse and Recycle Centre.

Team volunteers will visit participating stores once each month, through the program duration, to collect exchanged lead and reimburse retailers for used vouchers.

The Wolfe Lake Association (WLA) will make sure that all of the lead that is recovered is safely disposed of. But first it will be weighed. At the end of the program they will announce how much lead has been safely removed from the environment through the work of the project.

The WLA is also creating educational opportunities at Camp lawah and the Sandy Pines Wild-life Centre and the Ottawa Wild Bird Centre.

"We will also introduce safer alternatives by offering product exchanges at community events. For example, an angler turning in lead sinkers will receive a comparable lead free tackle sample, while supplies last," said Manthey.

The program is by no means limited to any particular lake, individuals or lake association executives. Anyone who is organising a community event in the region is welcome



to check the website that has been set up for the project, fishleadfree.ca, or contact Manthey directly at Manthey, margie@gmail.com or Donna Garland at donnagarland@rogers.com

For South Frontenac, supporting this program has already been a success.

"Initiatives such as this are exactly what Council was hoping for when they decided to establish the Lake Ecosystem Grant Program," said Mayor Ron Vandewal, one of the politicians who have personally endorsed the program, along with Township of Rideau Lakes Mayor Arie Hoogenboom, and MP Scott Reid.

"The program was designed to encourage the preservation, restoration, monitoring and analysis of lake ecosystems within South Frontenac, and the Wolfe Lake Association's lead buy back program embodies these goals by

Continued on page 3

Wolf Lake Cont. from p1

taking action to protect our wildlife and water bodies, while also providing a program that has the potential to positively impact a large portion of the community," he added.

Ultimately, a permanent ban on the sale and use of lead sinkers, and lead shot as well, would result in an end to the threat posed by lead as a material that is used in the sporting industry, but this is not something that Manthey, Garland, or the WLA are currently working on.

"This is an educational, voluntary program that we have set up and are hoping to expand throughout Frontenac and Lanark Counties and across Eastern Ontario as well," said Manthey. "That should keep us pretty busy this year."

For further information, go to Fishleadfree.ca. ■