

Toxic Tackle: Wolfe Lake program promotes lead-free fishing

Monday, 25 April 2022

289 Hits

1 Comment

The Wolfe Lake Association is making it easier for anglers to get the lead out of their tackleboxes – and out of the ecosystem.

For the next year, anglers who hand in their toxic lead sinkers, jigs and other lead tackle at participating retailers will receive a \$10 voucher to spend on alternative lead-free gear. They can also exchange their old lead gear for lead-free tackle at various community events planned throughout 2022.

The program has been sponsored by a generous grant from South Frontenac Township as well as through funding support from the Alastair and Diana Gillespie Foundation.

WLA's fishing director Margie Manthey said the vouchers and exchanges will help incentivize local anglers to make the necessary switch to safer, lead-free products, which are pricier.

Lead tackle may be cheap, but it's also deadly, particularly for loons, eagles and other aquatic birds. It's estimated that lead poisoning kills up to 1 in 5 loons and contributes to as much as 45% of all loon deaths in some regions.

Loons eat grit off the lakebed, inadvertently swallowing toxic lead sinkers and other tackle.



This cycle can have a devastating impact on local populations, since loons are slow to mature and have a low reproduction rate. Lead can also be harmful for humans handling the tackle, particularly kids.

"Lead is a neurotoxin, and whether you're a bird or a human it impacts us," said Manthey.



Can you spot the lead tackle hiding among the pebbles?

Loons eat lead when they swallow small pebbles and grit from the lakebed to help with digestion. It's almost impossible to see a lead sinker or jig mixed in with natural pebbles, and just one small piece can kill them.

Both loons and eagles also ingest lead when they catch or scavenge fish that have swallowed lead tackle or those with a broken line and lead gear attached.

RVCA's aquatic biologist Jennifer Lamoureux said the change will have an immediate positive impact on wildlife and our natural resources.

"This is such a great way for anglers to protect wildlife and enjoy the many benefits of being outdoors fishing the many lakes and rivers in the watershed," Lamoureux said.

Many lead-free options are now available.

There are many lead-free tackle options available that perform well and don't kill wildlife. Sinkers, split shot, jigs, bullet weights, drop shots, spinnerbaits and more are being manufactured from safer materials like tungsten, tin, steel, bismuth, metal composite, glass and even stone.

A recent study found the average Canadian angler would only see a 1 to 2% increase in annual costs by switching to lead-free tackle, Manthey added.

"The more people that buy it, the more the prices will come down," Manthey said. "Our natural resources are priceless and we're going to get to a point where we push them over the edge."

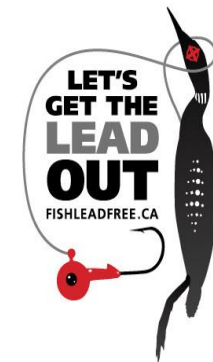


Now sure how to tell it's lead? There are a few signs: Lead is a soft metal easily dented with your fingernails or pliers. It's dull and gray in color and will leave a mark when scratched on paper. Lead doesn't react to a magnet. Even painted lead tackle is deadly, as any coating is very quickly eroded in the bird's gizzard, exposing the lead.

How the program works:

Anglers can bring their lead tackle – the more, the better – to participating retailers in the Westport area. They'll receive a \$10 voucher (while supplies last) toward the purchase of lead-free gear at any of the participating stores. Participating retailers include:

- Norris Bait and Tackle – Westport
- Big Rideau Tackle - Smiths Falls
- Manotick Bait – Manotick
- Baitcasters - Carleton Place
- Westport Hardware – Westport
- Home Hardware & Building Centre, Hartington
- Verona Hardware



Lead tackle can also be dropped off at the Westport Lions Reuse and Recycle Centre in exchange for a voucher, and the WLA will offer product exchanges and lead-free samples at community events throughout the year.

For more information visit www.fishleadfree.ca.