Recommendation for support of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Fish Program 2010-2011 Sportfishing Rule Proposal to ban lead in fishing tackle on common loon territorial lakes and a concept of a statewide ban on this tackle for wintering and nesting loons

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Recommendation

The Audubon Council of Washington supports the protection of Common Loons by eliminating a significant source of mortality from lead poisoning. Loons ingest lead fishing gear and die from lead toxicity. A ban on the use of lead fishing tackle in Washington State for all weights (1-inch or less in diameter) including split shot, artificial lures (two inches and less in length, measured with the hook attached), jigs, keel trolling weights, weighted flies or any other fishing gear that contains lead. the

Both wintering and nesting loons need protection. Currently, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) proposal in the Sportfishing Rules for 2010-2011, item #32 proposes a lead sinker ban act to prohibit the use of lead fishing sinkers (1.0 ounce or less in weight) and lead jigs (1.5-inches or less in length) at common loon territorial waterbodies or as recommended by WDFW. ACOW supports this proposal.

Additional protection for all habitat for loons needs to be protected by a statewide ban on the tackle described above. ACOW supports this concept being implemented in Washington State by WDFW.

Basis for Recommendation

The common loon (*Gavia immer*) is a charismatic symbol of Washington's lakes that faces a variety of threats linked to anthropogenic activities. Ingestion of lead fishing gear is the single largest cause of mortality of Washington's common loons, accounting for 39% of all mortalities in the state (Poleschook and Gumm 2008, Documents 5.0, 5.1 and 5.2).

Pokras and Chafel (1992) state: "In the United States and Canada, it is estimated that hundreds of tons of lead fishing tackle are deposited in marine and freshwaters annually, primarily through the loss of sinkers and jigs while fishing. More than 30 species of waterbirds, including loons, all dabbling ducks, eagles, other wildlife, domestic animals and humans, including children, have also inadvertently and/or intentionally swallowed lead sinkers with resultant lead toxicosis and even death."

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service state that 1.6 to 2.4 million waterbirds die from lead toxicosis in the Unites States per year, or about 4400 to 6500 per day. This is a likely contributor to the population decline of many waterbirds.

The common loon may inadvertently swallow sinkers or jigs when swallowing fish with attached lead fishing tackle, or mistake lost sinkers for small stones to help grind fish bones and other prey in their gizzard. Ingestion of even one lead sinker leads to lead toxicity and death. Research conducted shows lead poisoning due to lead fishing tackle ingestion is a significant cause of common loon mortality.

Lead toxicosis and loss of habitat are large contributors to the contraction of the common loon breeding range in the western United States to be moving northward, from northern California to northern

Washington, at an average of 15 miles per year since the late 1970's (Poleschook and Gumm 2008, Document 9.0)

There are many U.S. manufacturers that produce lead-free sinkers and jigs that are available in fishing tackle stores and retail outlets nationwide. They are known to be effective and comparably-priced to lead sinkers and jigs. It would be irresponsible to continue to allow the use of toxic products and their deposition in Washington waters.

References

Pokras, M.A. and R. Chafel. 1992. Lead toxicosis from ingested fishing sinkers in adult Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) in New England. J. Zoo. Wildl. Med. 23:92-97.

Poleschook, D., Jr. and V. R. Gumm. 2008. Washington common loon reference records. U. S. F. S. Report, Colville, WA