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Suit Filed to Protect Wildlife From Lead Poisoning in Arizona's Kaibab National Forest

PHOENIX, *Ariz.*— Conservation groups sued the U.S. Forest Service today for failing to protect wildlife from toxic lead in spent ammunition in Arizona's Kaibab National Forest. The Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club and Grand Canyon Wildlands Council filed suit under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, a federal law governing disposal of hazardous waste. Lead bullet fragments from hunting contaminate the food supply for Arizona wildlife such as condors, bald and golden eagles, northern goshawks, ferruginous hawks and ravens; and are also a hazard to human health for those eating game shot with lead ammunition.

"The Forest Service has a duty to prevent the buildup of toxic materials and the needless lead poisoning of wildlife in our national forests," said Jeff Miller with the Center. "There's no justification for continuing to use ammunition that poisons the food supply for birds, *and* for people who eat game meat, when nonlead alternatives are readily available for all hunting activities in the Kaibab National Forest."

"We've effectively used federal toxics laws to remove lead from water pipes, gasoline, paint, cooking utensils and even wheel weights, and now it's time to get the lead out of hunting ammunition for the benefit of our wildlife," said Kim Crumbo with Grand Canyon Wildlands. "The use of nonlead ammunition for hunting waterfowl the past two decades has saved millions of birds from lead poisoning, and Arizona's forests and wildlife stand to gain the same benefits from requiring lead-free ammunition for big game hunting."

"Because lead is so dangerous to people and wildlife, even at very low levels, it is imperative that we take this important step to transition ammunition to less toxic alternatives and remove lead from the food chain," said Sandy Bahr with the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter. "The Forest Service should require nonlead ammunition for hunting on public land as an important step in limiting lead exposure for condors and other wildlife."

The plaintiffs are represented by the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center of Lewis & Clark Law School.

Find more information about the lead poisoning threat at www.GetTheLeadOut.org.

Background

Hunting is allowed in most of the Kaibab National Forest, and no restrictions have yet been imposed on the use of lead ammunition by either the Forest Service or the Arizona

Game and Fish Department. For the past few years, however, Arizona Game and Fish has been encouraging hunters to use nonlead bullets — even going so far as to provide free copper ammunition to deer and elk hunters within the condor range around the Grand Canyon, since condors often scavenge remains of deer or elk killed by hunters.

But despite a reported 80 percent to 90 percent of deer hunters in the Kaibab using copper rounds, lead ammo is still used by some hunters, leaving hundreds of lead-tainted deer carcasses, plus an unknown number of lead-contaminated carcasses of other game, in the Kaibab every year. Lead poisoning is the leading cause of death for endangered California condors in Arizona. Earlier this year, scientists said the rare birds would not recover until the threat of lead poisoning from ammunition is eliminated.

Forest Service compliance with the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act will not impede hunting in the Kaibab. The cost of ammunition is typically a fraction of what hunters spend on a hunting trip and nonlead ammunition is becoming less expensive. For some ammunition, copper rounds are now the same price as equivalent lead rounds. Hunters in other areas that *do* have restrictions on lead ammunition have easily transitioned to hunting with nonlead bullets. For example, there has been no decrease in game tags or hunting since state requirements for nonlead ammo went into effect in significant portions of Southern California in 2008 to protect condors from poisoning.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department publishes a [list of nonlead rifle ammunition available](#) for big-game hunters, including more than 100 bullets in various calibers produced by 14 ammunition manufacturers, as well as seven manufacturers that provide custom-loaded nonlead rifle ammunition. In recent post-hunt surveys in Arizona, 90 percent of hunters approved of the use of copper bullets, and 88 percent of successful hunters who used nonlead ammunition said it performed as well as, or better than, lead bullets.

The [Center for Biological Diversity](#) is a nonprofit conservation organization with more than 375,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The [Sierra Club](#) is a conservation organization with 1.4 million members and supporters nationwide and 12,000 members in Arizona, whose mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth.

The [Grand Canyon Wildlands Council](#) is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring the existence, health and sustainability of native species and natural ecosystems in the Grand Canyon ecoregion.