

October 12, 2026

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Re: Colorado Amendment 83 (Constitutional Right to Hunt and Fish) and the Harms of Lead-Based Ammunition to Wildlife and Human Health

I have been a wildlife biologist for nearly 50 years. I served as a National Park Service scientist and as the agency's Chief of Biological Resources, and I have worked on the impacts of lead on wildlife since the mid-1990s, from California condors on the Colorado Plateau to bald and golden eagles from the west coast to the Midwest to the Atlantic. I am deeply concerned that Amendment 83 would prevent Colorado from ever considering let alone acting on what the scientific and conservation communities definitively know about lead in the environment.

I know what impacts of lead does to wildlife because I have seen it. I worked on the restoration of the California condor at Grand Canyon National Park and other parks throughout the system. When these awe-inspiring birds returned to the skies over the Colorado Plateau for the first time in a century, scientists, advocates, and the public collectively celebrated their return from the brink. We celebrated the first wild-laid eggs and the first wild-hatched chick in over 100 years. But then we also watched in dismay birds we knew by their identification numbers sicken and die after feeding on gut piles and carcasses left in the field with lead bullet fragments dispersed throughout the carcasses. I have personally come to the assistance of dying condors and bald eagles, and rushed others to veterinarians for the painful treatment of chelation-some animals recovering, some not.

We changed National Park Service policy to switch away from lead to dispatch road-injured animals more than twenty years ago for exactly the reason of not providing lead-tainted carcasses for wildlife to feed upon.

The science is indisputable. Lead bullets fragment on impact into hundreds of tiny pieces that scatter well beyond the wound channel and into the carcass and gut pile. Condors, eagles, ravens, fox, coyote, and bear that scavenge those remains ingest it. And it's not just wildlife that can be impacted. Hunters and their families who eat the meat, and the families who receive donated game through food banks are exposed to the hazards of lead. For humans, wildlife, and the environment, no amount of lead is safe.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banned lead shot for waterfowl hunting in 1991, and we would not have the trumpeter swans, loons, and diversity of waterfowl we have today without that ban. California phased-out lead ammunition for all hunting with documented benefits to wildlife and with no resulting disruption in hunting participation. Effective non-lead ammunition is on the shelf now, and ethical hunters use it every day.

Amendment 83 would write hunting "by traditional methods" into the Colorado Constitution without ever defining what that phrase means. That vague language could place practices such as the use of lead ammunition beyond the reach of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission and ordinary policy making, stifling future wildlife protections before the discussion can even begin. CPW is a science-based agency managing our wildlife as a public trust. Its decisions should rest on data and open public debate. Hunting in Colorado is a privilege, conditioned on licenses, seasons, and rules, just like driving. Making it a constitutional right turns that on its head and would reopen practices Coloradans have already voted to end, such as bear baiting and leghold traps. This sends Colorado scrambling backwards.

Colorado must keep its ability to follow the science on lead, and other ethical and humane wildlife management practices, as other states already have. I urge Coloradans to vote NO on Amendment 83.

Respectfully submitted,

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