

Take a Stand for Wildlife: Use Non-Lead Tackle and Dispose of Monofilament Line

Get the Lead Out

Lead is banned in paint, gasoline, and most other products used today. Every year lead tackle and discarded monofilament line kills aquatic wildlife dependent on Wisconsin's lakes, rivers, and streams. The smallest lead sinker will kill a loon. Take a stand for wildlife and choose a non-toxic equivalent for slightly greater cost. And properly dispose of or recycle your monofilament line so wildlife will not become entangled.



How do loons ingest lead tackle?

- Loons need to consume small stones to grind food in their gizzards. Loons mistake small lead sinkers for stones.
- Loons catch slower moving fish that have been impaired by lead tackle and fishing line, and eat the fish that have lead tackle in them.
- Loons chase fishing tackle when fishermen are fishing too close by, and swallow the lead tackle. Some fishermen cut the line, leaving the loon to die from lead poisoning and/or getting entangled in the monofilament line.

Even a small lead split shot is 100 percent fatal if swallowed.

Canada, the European Union, New Hampshire, Maine, New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts have banned the use or sale of lead tackle. One of the last actions of the Obama administration was to ban lead ammunition and fishing sinkers on most federal lands. However, in Wisconsin there are no bans on the sale or use of lead weights and jigs.

What can you do?

- Use non-toxic tackle when fishing. Find an expansive list of non-lead manufacturers and retailers on our website northland.edu/loonwatch and click on **Protect Loons**.
- Never fish near loons. Use the 200 foot rule.
- Encourage your family, friends, and local tackle shop to use and carry non-lead tackle.
- Dispose of your lead tackle at your local hazardous waste facility. For a list of facilities throughout Wisconsin, go to our website northland.edu/loonwatch and click on **Protect Loons**.

There are many alternatives to lead tackle which include tin, steel, bismuth, ceramic, glass, tungsten and composites of these materials. Many of these choices are available at a similar or slightly higher price compared to lead.

Above left: A selection of lead-free tackle made from tin, steel, bismuth and other non-toxic materials. At left: Staff at the Raptor Education Group, Inc. remove tangled monofilament line from a loon's beak. Photo by Marge Gibson.

Recycle Monofilament Line

Most fishing line in use today is monofilament, a single-strand of strong flexible clear plastic. Most monofilament line is not biodegradable and will last hundreds of years in the environment. Often discarded near the shoreline, monofilament line provides hazards to birds and other wildlife.

Because it is thin, clear, and difficult to see, animals often become entangled and suffer from injury, loss of limbs, drowning, strangulation, or starvation.

What can you do?

- Participate in the WI DNR's pilot program to recycle monofilament line. Learn how to build a collection bin and engage your organization in the program: dnr.wi.gov/topic/Recycling/FishingLine.html
- If you are not near a collection bin, create your own bin for your boat with an empty tennis ball container and Velcro tape. Bring your fishing line to one of the participating DNR Service Centers listed on the above website.
- If you are not close to a DNR Service Center, cut the fishing line in small pieces less than six inches long and dispose of them in a secure garbage receptacle.

The Berkley Conservation Institute recycles monofilament line and provides materials for states to institute their own monofilament recycling programs. The monofilament line is melted down into pellets that are used to create products such as tackle boxes, spools for fishing line, toys, and fish habitat structures.

Other states including Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont all have monofilament recycling programs.

The WI DNR worked with LoonWatch to roll out their new monofilament recycling pilot program this year. Help make this a permanent program by starting your own collection program and encourage the DNR to spread this program to all Service Centers.