Stay up to date on lead tackle laws and turn in your lead to help loons!

BY LAURA WILLIAMS

FISH LEAD FREE, LOON RESTORATION PROJECT, LOONS, NEWS & NOTES · SEPTEMBER 25, 2026



Make sure you are aware of the latest laws around fishing tackle. After September 30, many zones in the state are closed to fishing on inland waters (check the state's website for details here) so now is a great time to clean out your tackle box and get rid of any lead tackle you may still have.

As of September 1, 2026, anglers on inland waters in Maine can no longer use painted lead jigs weighing 1 ounce or less or measuring 2.5 inches in length or less. This recent addition to Maine's lead tackle law now makes it so anglers cannot use **any** lead sinkers, bare, or painted lead jigs in that small size range. The lead tackle law is helping to reduce lead poisoning deaths in loons. Due to the timing of lead tackle loon mortalities and increased angling activity during July and August, the majority of loon lead tackle consumption is due to current fishing activity rather than old lost tackle accumulated on lake bottoms.

And it's working! The reduction of lead tackle use in the small size range coupled with education and outreach to anglers about the deadly effects lead can have on loons is reducing loon mortality in Maine. Studies show that lead poisoning deaths have declined from an initial 32% from 1987 to 2012 down to 17% in 2016. A recent *Maine Sportsman* magazine Readers Poll shows that 70% of readers have removed all lead sinkers, split shot, and jigs from their freshwater tackle boxes, an increase of 10% since the 2024 Readers Poll. These numbers are encouraging but we can still do more. Lead poisoning is preventable in loons with the help of anglers not using any lead tackle.

Maine Audubon has been educating anglers and helping them switch to lead-free tackle alternatives. Since 2020, we have removed and recycled 784 pounds of lead tackle! That is **A LOT** of lead, especially when most of the tackle pieces are weighing 1 ounce or less. Every piece of lead tackle recycled is one less piece that could kill a loon from lead poisoning.

If you still have lead tackle in your tackle box, drop it off at Maine Audubon and we will recycle it for you. You can drop lead tackle off at Gilsland Farm Audubon Center in Falmouth, Fields Pond Audubon Center in Holden, or Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife offices around the state.

If you have questions about your tackle (Is it lead? Is it legal for use or not?) reach out to us at fishleadfree@maineaudubon.org or visit our Fish Lead Free web page.



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