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Lead-Free Hunting Outreach in the NEAFWA Region

Reflections from Workshop Participants



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Executive Summary

Research has determined that wildlife that scavenge the carcass remains of hunter-harvested animals can ingest harmful lead fragments. The North American Non-Lead Partnership (The Partnership) encourages a variety of strategies whereby hunters can take voluntary steps to reduce lead exposure to wildlife, including use of lead-free ammunition. In 2024, in collaboration with the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA), the Partnership delivered a series of outreach workshops across the NEAFWA region. Offered for fish and wildlife agency staff as well as volunteer hunter education instructors, the workshops shared information on the unintended impacts of using lead hunting ammunition and on how hunters can reduce these impacts.

In early 2025, DJ Case & Associates (DJ Case) conducted two focus groups with workshop participants: one for agency personnel and one for volunteer instructors. The focus groups were intended to yield insights into the effectiveness of the Partnership's current outreach and how efforts to encourage voluntary adoption of lead-reducing practices could be enhanced in the NEAFWA region.

Participants in the two focus groups expressed universally positive impressions of the Partnership and of workshop content, messaging, and delivery, and both groups identified similar barriers to the adoption of lead-free ammunition.

Participants also identified several key factors that would enable them to more effectively communicate and promote hunting practices that disrupt the introduction of lead into food webs: (1) additional training, skills, and guidance; (2) informational and educational tools; and (3) ongoing engagement with a team of other committed advocates. In addition, participants shared insights into what communication approaches and tools they had found effective to date, as well as suggestions for outreach and ideas for other ways in which the Partnership might be able to advance its mission in the NEAFWA region and beyond.

The DJ Case team is hopeful that participants' reflections and suggestions will encourage the Partnership's efforts in the NEAFWA region and provide actionable insights for increasing their reach and efficacy.



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Introduction

The North American Non-Lead Partnership (The Partnership) has a strong history of promoting voluntary, incentive-based programs that support the continuation of hunting and address the unintended consequences of using lead hunting ammunition. The Partnership's efforts are intended to improve the sustainability of hunting practices and enhance public support for well-regulated hunting programs by encouraging hunters—through education, outreach, and incentives—to voluntarily adopt practices that make lead less available to wildlife.

The Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) formally joined the Partnership in 2019 and is committed to a non-regulatory approach to addressing the risks associated with lead ammunition.

NEAFWA's member State Fish & Wildlife Agencies (SFWAs) requested assistance in developing and coordinating cohesive messaging. This includes building best practices for public outreach and engagement and ensuring a connection between regional efforts and national and international outreach and incentive-based programs. One effective way to achieve these objectives is by ensuring that relevant personnel are well-informed about hunting ammunition, including the technical, economic, ecological, and social aspects of choosing lead-free ammunition and/or other practices that reduce or eliminate the availability of lead from hunting ammunition to wildlife.

In 2024, the Partnership delivered two outreach workshops for state and federal agency staff, three for hunter education volunteer instructors, and two for hunting organization and community leaders across the NEAFWA region; these seven workshops were supported by the NEAFWA Multistate Conservation Grant. Also in 2024, the Partnership delivered three outreach workshops for state and federal agency staff and three outreach workshops for hunting organization and community leaders in the NEAFWA region; these six workshops were delivered under a United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Region 5 fee-for-service contract. Participants from workshops conducted under the USFWS Region 5 fee-for-service contract were included in the population of focus group participants to enable in-depth understanding of regional challenges.

To provide effective guidance for future programming and evaluation of voluntary, lead-free agency programs, the Partnership contracted with DJ Case & Associates (DJ Case) to conduct focus groups with agency staff and hunter education volunteer workshop participants in early 2025. The focus groups' primary objectives were to gather insights into workshop effectiveness, key messages, capacity gaps for SFWAs, and regionally specific barriers to stakeholder engagement; to generate ideas for revisions or additions to base survey instruments; and to assist in identifying the value of NANP support to SFWA staff.

Insights from this focus group project and report may inform future stakeholder engagement efforts in the region, including the further development of outreach strategies to increase public hunting communities' implementation of best practices to reduce the availability of lead from hunting ammunition to wildlife.

This report presents findings from the NEAFWA state agency staff and volunteer focus groups.

Methods

Focus groups are facilitated group interviews that allow participants to build on one another's comments in response to a scripted set of open-ended questions. They are an ideal tool for eliciting various perspectives on any topic. Participants are not randomly selected or statistically representative of the entire population. Sometimes, participants are selected precisely because of a particular viewpoint or situation they represent that may not be "usual" in the broader population. Focus groups do not generate "statistics" the way surveys do, and care must be taken not to extrapolate focus group findings across a broader population. Most importantly, focus groups allow participants to express their concerns, fears, and hopes in ways that survey methodology cannot, and they generate information and insights regarding local audiences and issues that otherwise might be overlooked.

For this project, DJ Case conducted two focus groups via Zoom: one with agency staff implementing lead-free voluntary programs, and one with volunteers (i.e., hunter education instructors) who attended workshops for informational purposes. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours.

Working closely with the Partnership staff, we developed two focus group topic guides (Appendix A) that were used to guide focus group discussions while allowing the facilitator to probe deeper into relevant points of conversation.

Recruitment

The two focus groups were recruited from among agency personnel and hunter education instructors who voluntarily provided their contact information to the Partnership after participating in one or more outreach workshops.

The Partnership staff made initial contact with state wildlife agency directors to notify them of the focus group discussion opportunity and encourage their staff to respond to an upcoming email from DJ Case. The Partnership staff also sent emails directly to potential participants. DJ Case followed up with an email invitation to potential focus group participants requesting their participation in the focus group discussion. That email contained a registration link specific to each audience's scheduled date. Ninety-four people on the agency staff list and 50 on the volunteer list received the invitation; of these, 12 from the agency list and 10 from the volunteer list registered to participate. DJ Case had recommended that each group be limited to 10 participants and did not exclude anyone who registered.

DJ Case sent a follow-up confirmation email and calendar invitation with logistical details to all registrants. A day prior to the focus group, DJ Case staff made reminder phone calls to remind people of the meeting, leaving voice messages for those who did not answer. On the day of the focus group, we sent a reminder email, then texted anyone not present online within five minutes of the start of each group. Email templates used by DJ Case can be found in Appendix B. Once

recruitment was finished, DJ Case deleted the contact lists provided by the Partnership, out of respect for subjects' privacy.

Of the 12 people from the agency list who registered to participate, 10—from Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and West Virginia—attended the agency focus group; one of these identified as a member of a state wildlife commission and head of a nonprofit, rather than as an agency staff member. Of the 10 hunter education volunteers who registered, nine—from Maine and Vermont—attended the volunteer focus group; in addition to being hunter education volunteers, a few also said they served in leadership roles in conservation- and hunting-focused nonprofits.

DJ Case conducted the two focus groups in January 2025. No incentives were offered for participation. At the beginning of each focus group, the facilitator provided participants with more detailed context for the study and explained how participants' responses would be used. DJ Case asked for and received consent from all participants to record the meetings and capture transcripts.

Analysis

The research team used discussion transcripts for primary analysis, referring to recordings as needed for clarification. We reviewed transcriptions of both focus group discussions (four hours total), identified thematic patterns, and compiled excerpts and notes for each. In compiling excerpts and notes, and then in writing this report, we removed participants' names and location-specific references to ensure that response data cannot be linked to individual participants.

Once excerpts and notes were compiled by thematic pattern, the research team reviewed and analyzed the discussion data relevant to each theme. In assembling this report, the team prioritized themes most clearly relevant to this project's objectives and the Partnership's broader aims.

Findings

This section summarizes the research team's primary findings based on the two focus groups conducted in January 2025. This summary of findings is not an exhaustive description of the two groups' discussions or of participants' responses to all questions posed by the facilitator. Rather, this summary highlights the findings most clearly relevant to the above-mentioned objectives.

Because related themes and ideas surfaced throughout each group's discussion, the findings are organized and presented by thematic and topical focus rather than in the order questions were asked.

The Partnership and current efforts

Several of the questions asked during the focus groups aimed to elicit feedback about the Partnership and its workshops. The facilitator asked what stood out in participants' memories about the workshop, how the workshops might have fallen short or could be improved, and how the workshops may have helped participants in their professional or volunteer roles.

Impressions of the Partnership

In both focus groups, participants conveyed very positive impressions of the Partnership.

Agency staff described the Partnership and its primary representatives—especially workshop presenters—as knowledgeable, adaptable, engaging, approachable, easy to work with, receptive to feedback, and evenhanded (i.e., understanding of differing perspectives). Volunteers echoed similar sentiments, described them as knowledgeable, authoritative, trustworthy, organized, articulate, and enthusiastic.

Participants' positive evaluations of workshop delivery were inextricably enmeshed with mentions of the above characteristics.

Assessments of the workshops

In both focus groups, participants spoke highly of the workshops they had participated in. In some cases, participants also described workshops they had observed.

Strengths

Focus group participants praised both the workshop content and its delivery. They called special attention to several features of the workshops.

"[They] were very understanding of both sides."

—Agency staff

"I was really kind of impressed by just the way the instructors put on the workshop, and the way they presented the information: kind of their objectivity, willing to listen to folks, and if someone was kind of skeptical in the back row... they handled it really well."

—Volunteer

"I think anyone would have a hard time poking holes in the presentation and the demonstration."

—Volunteer

- **Range demonstrations:** In both focus groups, people described the range portion of the workshop—during which lead and lead-free bullets were fired into ballistic gels and all fragments captured in water barrels—as essential and powerful.
- **Visual, technical, and hands-on elements:** Similarly, participants in both groups spoke of visuals (e.g., slides showing the dispersal of lead fragments in animal carcasses), technical details (e.g., the results of scientific studies; bullet performance specs), and hands-on teaching tools (e.g., epoxy pucks showing terminal expansion and fragmentation) as especially compelling.
- **Resonant messages:** Both agency staff and hunter education volunteers expressed strong approval for the workshop’s emphasis on education and voluntary use of lead-free ammunition, as opposed to prohibition of lead ammunition. In both groups, people also expressed appreciation for messages focused on hunters as conservationists and the importance of hunters leading on this issue; several participants mentioned their desire to lead on this issue as a primary motive for attending the workshop. In the agency staff group, a participant additionally expressed appreciation for the message that lead can be kept out of the food chain in multiple ways (e.g., removing gut piles is a viable alternative to using lead-free bullets); similarly, a hunter education instructor expressed appreciation for being able to talk with anyone who prefers to keep hunting with lead bullets and help them understand the need to “clean up” and “take care of gut piles and carcasses properly.”

Underscoring their uniformly positive assessments of the workshops, a few participants said that, before attending, they had been personally skeptical about the value of the workshop and/or about the importance of using lead-free ammunition. These participants said they had completely changed their minds and now strongly believed in both the workshops and the importance of going lead-free.

Likewise, participants described the workshops as surprisingly effective in overcoming resistance on the part of and earning buy-in from other initially skeptical participants.

“When they took us outside and actually shot the ammo and got it in that gel and put it in the water, that was like, ‘Wow, okay, this is what they’re talking about.’”

—Agency staff

“If there’s one thing that really impressed me the most, it was realizing the fragmentation and the loss of lead in the carcass. And it’s really hard to argue with that.”

—Volunteer

“I walked in there kind of, honestly, being a non-believer... But I definitely walked out of there being an ‘ambassador,’ I guess, trying to change everybody’s mind.”

—Volunteer

“You could just tell by the body language. There was a lot of resistance to the topic. But I felt like, by the end of the workshop, hearts and minds are changing.”

—Agency staff

Potential improvements

When the groups were encouraged to identify potential workshop improvements, they had relatively little to say, though a few participants noted minor gaps.

In the agency staff group, a few participants noted that the workshop would be even stronger if data on impacts were more localized (e.g., to northeastern landscapes and scavenger species) and consistently covered and demonstrated a wider range of firearm types (e.g., shotguns and small caliber rifles; not only centerfire rifles, which are prohibited in some states).

Other ideas for potential improvements were mentioned by a few participants. For example, one participant in the agency group mentioned that a couple of the scientific studies referenced were older or based on research conducted outside the United States, suggesting that more recent studies conducted in this country might be more compelling. Another said the workshop downplayed the degree to which the limited availability of lead-free ammunition (especially in some calibers) poses a barrier to hunters. A couple of volunteer participants expressed the desire for additional technical clarification (e.g., on how lead fragmentation differs in water versus in ballistic gels and game animals).

“I was actually shocked at the buy-in from some of the folks. A lot of eyes were opened.”

—Agency staff

Benefits already realized

Participants in both focus groups said that attending the workshops had already made positive differences in their efforts.

Agency staff described how the workshops had given them helpful ideas for presenting and communicating information about the impacts of lead ammunition and lead-free options, as well as a common framework and set of facts that had proved useful in conversations across agencies.

Volunteers described how the workshops had provided them with good information to pass along to others, especially younger hunter education students. Participants said ideas and materials from the workshops particularly informed the ethics discussions they led in hunter education courses.

The current situation

In assessing the status of lead-free hunting best management practice adoption and related outreach efforts, participants in the two focus groups identified similar barriers and offered similar anecdotal reflections.

Barriers

When asked about current barriers to adopting lead-free hunting best management practices in the Northeast, participants in the two focus groups generated similar lists. Few, if any, of the barriers mentioned appear to be regionally specific.

- **Cost:** Participants in both groups said that the cost of lead-free ammunition is a significant barrier. They noted that many hunters are looking for—or already have a stockpile of— inexpensive, reliable, familiar cartridges with lead bullets. They described some hunters' reluctance to purchase boxes of new, more expensive cartridges to test without any guarantee that they will work well.
- **Availability:** Participants in both groups likewise described lack of availability of lead-free ammunition as a key barrier, especially in big box stores, in rural areas, in states where online ammunition purchase is prohibited, and in less popular cartridges.
- **Production:** Directly related to availability, participants spoke of the relatively low volume of lead-free ammunition production by industry as a significant barrier.
- **The .22 Catch:** Given the overwhelming popularity of the .22 long rifle cartridge in particular, participants in both groups said that a lack of good lead-free options is a barrier to the widespread use of lead-free ammunition.
- **Resistance:** Agency staff and volunteers spoke of resistance to lead-free hunting ammunition, rooted in tradition, skepticism, political stances and suspicions, and general reluctance to change.

“We can show them this is a positive thing, but if there is no way for them to get it readily, it’s not going anywhere.”

—Agency staff

A participant in the agency staff group said that a lack of clear, consistent labeling for lead-free ammunition poses a barrier, making it hard to tell the difference between solid copper and copper-jacketed bullets.

In the volunteer group, a participant identified his own state wildlife agency's unwillingness to join the Partnership or publicly advocate using lead-free ammunition as a barrier.

Progress to date

When asked about local and regional progress in getting hunters to consider using lead-free ammunition, participants in both focus groups shared a wide-ranging mix of anecdotal impressions of adoption and resistance, as well as of awareness and lack thereof.

These instances provide a representative sample:

- One state agency staff participant mentioned that he feels lead-free ammunition is gaining acceptance in his state, but he has no data to indicate how much progress has been made. Lacking such data, his impressions are based only on anecdotal evidence. He happened to be calling into the focus group from SHOT Show and reported hearing very little conversation about lead-free ammunition there.
- A federal agency staff participant mentioned that many of the hunters she interacts with aren't aware that lead-free ammunition is a consideration beyond waterfowl hunting.
- A hunter education volunteer said that most of his fellow volunteers have been using lead-free ammunition for years, while many of the people he hunts with won't even consider it.

Moving forward

In response to specific questions about what kinds of support and assistance could help advance outreach and education efforts, as well as in responding to other questions, participants in both focus groups described factors they believe are needed to move this work forward. They also expressed consistent enthusiasm for and commitment to the effort.

Building skills

In the agency focus group, staff described needing and wanting additional skills and guidance. For example, they expressed a desire for direct coaching and mentoring in how to teach others what they learned in the workshop—a “train the trainer” process, as one agency staff member put it. Making related points, participants expressed interest in getting guidance on how to do outreach and get people to attend workshops, as well as pointers on effectively communicating messages in the kinds of brief interactions they most often have with hunters.

Acquiring tools

In both focus groups, participants said they needed informational and educational tools. The tools described fall into these broad categories:

- Quick verbal communication tools for brief interactions (e.g., talking points).
- Hands-on, tangible communication and education tools (e.g., epoxy pucks to show; resources to hand out).
- Visual communication, education, and marketing tools (e.g., slides, short videos).

One agency participant spoke of wanting a “teaching trunk” like those she has used and helped develop for teaching about different animal species—a kit that would include educational tools like those listed above, combining succinct information and tangible/visual teaching tools in a package that could be used by almost anyone almost anywhere.

Another agency participant described wanting information on how to overcome (and help others overcome) technical challenges with lead-free ammunition performance when they occur.

“I went to this class, and it’s a great thing... [but] I still don’t think I can do it justice.”

—Volunteer

“I didn’t know if there is a way to... get those of us that are trying to get the public in, or get more agency folks involved, trained up so we’re really knowledgeable, of how do we structure that outreach, that message, to reach those people.”

—Agency staff

“We want to go out there and start working on this and move the ball down the field, so to speak. But it’s kind of hard without a ball. We need the tools to do that.”

—Volunteer

“I would love to have one of those [epoxy pucks]... just to be able to pass it around the room. I found people have been really responsive to that. They get it.”

—Volunteer

“I think it would be great in almost like a train-the-trainer type of process where they can sort of condense it down into a version that we can communicate quicker.”

—Agency staff

Becoming part of the team

Discussing their desire for skill-building, coaching, and mentoring, agency staff expressed interest in continued engagement with the Partnership beyond the workshop experience.

In a related vein, the volunteer group engaged in a striking discussion about not feeling like “part of the team.”

Participants spoke of wanting to feel that they belong to, are connected to, and are part of something larger and ongoing.

They mentioned, for example: a desire for the initial excitement and momentum of the workshop to lead to something more, a desire for regular touchpoints with a core group of advocates, and a desire to be able to join the Partnership as individuals. One hunter education volunteer mentioned that he was participating in the focus group partly because the invitation to do so had been the first follow-up he had received since the workshop.

Communicating effectively

Echoing the workshop features they identified as especially effective, participants in both focus groups said that talking with hunters about these issues is greatly aided by hands-on and visual communication tools. An agency staff member, for example, said that epoxy pucks—now carried by law enforcement officers on the refuge and available to refuge managers and biologists—have been especially effective in conversation with visitors. Similarly, hunter education volunteers described the effectiveness of sharing images they had found online (e.g., of lead dispersal in an animal carcass) or photos they had taken of slides during the workshop.

In the volunteer group, participants also identified specific approaches they had found effective in talking with other hunters: (1) speaking from personal experience and telling stories of how well lead-free ammunition had performed for them in hunting situations and (2) describing lead-free ammunition as a new and innovative technology (especially when speaking to younger hunters). One participant noted that he had found it effective to engage people with questions.

In both focus groups, participants concurred that it is counterproductive for people to hear that lead-free ammunition will be mandated eventually, or to hear about the issue for the first time as part of a regulatory lead-ban process.

“One thing we’ve talked about is the continued engagement post-workshop. A lot of people, you know, hear the information, and it lands really well [but they] might need a little more coaching or mentoring.”

—Agency staff

“I hear every month another report from either a refuge manager or one of our biologists that, like, ‘Hey, that puck was so helpful. It just created that visual experience where we could have a conversation.’”

—Agency staff

Exploring opportunities

Focus group participants offered various ideas for expanding awareness about the impacts of lead and promoting the use of lead-free ammunition.

In the agency group, participants suggested:

- Including information and/or QR codes in agency rulebooks and digests, as at least one agency represented in the group had already done.
- Conducting workshops and presentations in the context of existing events already drawing audiences.
- Getting hunting organizations and outdoor publications to share information about lead-free options, as the National Wild Turkey Federation has done about tungsten shot (TSS).
- Conducting outreach and education efforts focused on trappers, who use firearms (especially in smaller calibers, fired at short range) to dispatch significant numbers of animals in a season and who often discard carcasses; participants suggested outreach during annual trappers' conventions and gatherings, as well as providing a box of lead-free .22 cartridges with every trapping license.

Agency participants also offered ideas for alternative workshop models. One suggested the possibility of a hybrid model, with an online portion focused on information and requiring less initial time commitment from participants and an in-person portion devoted to the range demonstration. Another mentioned a model that had worked well with duck hunters, in which hunters were invited to bring and test their personal firearms with ammunition provided on site and with experts on hand and available for consultation; this hands-on, interactive, in-person model had, they said, consistently drawn attendees; this approach, they suggested, could mitigate the problem of a hunter purchasing lead-free ammunition, finding that the particular cartridge they bought doesn't work well in their firearm, and being discouraged from further exploration of lead-free options.

In the volunteer group, participants suggested:

- Focusing outreach on young hunters, who seem easier to convince than older hunters.
- Promoting lead-free ammunition as more ethical and effective (much as tungsten shot has been promoted).
- Integrating related content into hunter education programs across the country.

Participants in both groups suggested that social media could be used effectively and that influential figures—whether national (e.g., Steve Rinella) or local/regional (e.g., Northwoods Whitetails)—could have a significant, positive impact by promoting and talking about the use of lead-free ammunition.

Looking to the Partnership

When asked how else the Partnership might be able to help them expand the use of lead-free ammunition, participants in the volunteer group reiterated the need for informational and educational tools.

Participants in the agency group added that the Partnership could support their efforts by:

- Brokering more incentives and/or arranging for samples (e.g., 50 free rounds of lead-free .22 cartridges handed out with every trapping license) to help get more people to try lead-free ammunition, as state agencies are limited in their ability to take such action directly.
- Documenting the effects of lead ingestion on a wider range of wildlife species beyond eagles and condors.
- Helping connect wider networks of partners (e.g., 4H clubs, shooting ranges) that can reach wider audiences, especially new hunters and shooters.

Participants also expressed the hope that the Partnership will be able to get more big organizations on board (e.g., NSSF, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Safari Club, National Deer Association).

Bans and mandates

Though the facilitator did not pose any questions regarding bans or mandates related to the use of lead hunting ammunition, the topic surfaced organically in both focus groups.

In both groups, participants expressed a dislike for bans and mandates and a strong preference for voluntary, education-based approaches.

In the agency group, a few staff members mentioned thinking that lead hunting ammunition would be banned someday; though the question was not put to the group as a whole, no one expressed disagreement. In the volunteer group, following a similar comment, the facilitator asked everyone to share their thoughts on the inevitability of a ban; virtually every participant expressed a version of the opinion that, though unfortunate, a ban was likely or certain to be imposed at some point in the future.

Despite expressing the view that future bans were likely or inevitable, participants in both groups described believing in the importance of the Partnership's work—and the work they can do in their professional and volunteer roles—to educate hunters and encourage voluntary adoption of lead-free options. Some suggested that voluntary adoption still had a chance of scaling up enough to forestall a ban. Others suggested that hunters' leadership on this issue will have a positive impact on the future of hunting even if a ban comes later. Others suggested that educational efforts and voluntary adoption in the short term will ease the transition process should a ban ever occur. Participants frequently equated the Partnership's work on this issue as an integral part of what it means to engage in conservation.

Conclusion

Though limited to a relatively small number of participants, the two focus groups DJ Case conducted in January 2025 paint a consistent picture. Agency staff and volunteers alike offered high praise for the Partnership and its representatives, workshops, and messages; identified a similar set of barriers to the widespread adoption of lead-free hunting ammunition; and shared mixed, anecdotal assessments of progress to date.

Based on the factors these two groups identified as key to advancing outreach efforts, DJ Case offers the following recommendations for consideration by the Partnership and affiliated entities, including SFWAs.

- **Provide tools.** Given the strong and consistent emphasis both groups placed on the need for additional tools to advance outreach efforts, we recommend exploring opportunities to develop and deliver a prioritized set of informational and educational tools, likely including talking points and visual/hands-on elements.
- **Provide additional training and support.** Considering the emphasis placed, especially by agency staff, on needing further instruction, coaching, and/or mentoring, we recommend exploring design and delivery of training and support focused on building skills and confidence in conducting outreach.
- **Provide options for ongoing participation and connection.** Participants in both groups—most notably in the volunteer group—articulated a strong desire for ongoing connection with other advocates and for the experience of being part of a team. To build and maintain momentum, especially among volunteers, we recommend exploring potential models for long-term engagement, whether nationally, regionally, or at a state level.
- **Maintain quality and type of workshop content.** The current blend of workshop content received consistently high marks from participants. Though evolution of content—as well as customization for specific audiences—is to be expected, we recommend that any future iteration retain core portions of the current content, including visual, hands-on, and/or range demonstration elements.
- **Maintain caliber of workshop delivery.** Participants' positive evaluations of workshop delivery were inextricably enmeshed with mentions of their positive impressions of the Partnership and the workshop presenters. Key style and personality characteristics (e.g., perceived level of knowledge, trustworthiness, and authenticity; perceived evenhandedness and understanding of different perspectives) are clearly central to the effectiveness of the workshops and their ability to sway and inspire skeptics. To maintain its track record and continue to reach potential resistant audiences, we strongly recommend that the Partnership take measures to continue to ensure this level of quality.

Appendix A: Focus Group Topic Guides

Agency Staff Focus Group Topic Guide

Preface

Thank you all for agreeing to share your thoughts and experiences related to the use of lead-free hunting ammunition. My name is _____, and I'm a team member at DJ Case & Associates. We're a research and communications firm focused on conservation and natural resources issues.

For this project, DJ Case was contracted by the North American Non-Lead Partnership, which I'll just call the Partnership, to gather feedback on their workshops for fish and wildlife agency staff. You were invited to participate in this focus group because you attended one of their workshops in the not-too-distant past.

Our goal is to get your thoughts on the workshop and the Partnership, plus any insights you can offer from other related experiences you've had implementing programs and interacting with hunters about this issue. Your input will help make our focus groups with hunters more effective and will improve the Partnership's workshops and content.

Before we get started, a few housekeeping items:

Time

First, we have two hours scheduled for this conversation, but we may not need that entire time. We'll wrap up sooner if we can.

Recording and observation

Second, we are recording today's meeting so we can transcribe and carefully consider this conversation. No one except our research team will have access to the recording. And no one's name will appear in any report based on today's discussion.

A couple other members of our research team are also observing our conversation in real time through a video feed.

Ground rules

Third, we have a few simple ground rules to make sure our discussion is efficient and inclusive.

1. We do not allow participation in focus groups while driving.
2. Please keep your cameras on during the discussion unless you are experiencing bandwidth issues.
3. Please remember to mute your microphone when not speaking.
4. Please show respect to participants whose opinions differ from your own.

Is everyone comfortable with these basic guidelines?

Roles

Before we dive in, I want to say a few words about our roles.

- My role is to help move the conversation along. Mostly, I'll be asking questions.
- There may be times when I need to interrupt in the interest of time, or to steer us back to the topic at hand, or to make sure others have an opportunity to speak. If that happens, I apologize in advance.
- Your role—naturally—is to talk. I invite you to think of this as a living room conversation. I'm here to help move things along, but I encourage you to jump in and talk with each other, to interact and respond to each other's thoughts, like you would if you were sitting in someone's living room.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Introductions

Let's begin with introductions. Please tell us your name and affiliation, and why you attended the Partnership's modern hunting ammunition workshop.

Workshop

1. What do you recall most about the workshop?

Probe: Is there anything else about the workshop (e.g., approach, process, message) you think was especially valuable or impactful?

Probe: Is there any other specific part of the workshop that you think made an especially powerful difference?

2. Has the workshop you attended helped you better do your job as an agency staff member? If so, how has the workshop helped you in your work?

Probe: How do you imagine it might help you in the future?

3. What didn't work so well? Where did the workshop fall short? What was missing?

Probe: Do you see gaps in the tools the Partnership provided?

4. What else would you like to learn about modern hunting ammunition?

Region-specific progress and barriers/opportunities

5. How would you characterize the progress to date in getting hunters to consider lead-free options in your state or region (e.g., New England, Mid-Atlantic, NEAFWA)?
6. Can you point to any specific **barriers**—unique to your state or region—that deter hunters from considering lead-free hunting ammunition and/or management practices?
7. What specific **opportunities** do you see for getting hunters to consider lead-free hunting ammunition and/or management practices in your state or region?

The Partnership's personality (aka “brand identity”)

8. During the workshop or in other interactions, what has your experience been of the Partnership? Does this differ from your perception prior to attending a workshop?

Probe: If the Partnership was a person, how would you describe its personality?
(single adjectives)

The Partnership's value

9. In what ways do you think the Partnership can be of most value to your agency and other agencies in the region?

Potential probes:

- Beyond providing additional capacity, what do you imagine the Partnership might be able to do?
- Are there particular kinds of challenges that are especially difficult for your agency and that the Partnership might be able to help navigate? (For example, we could mention politics if we want to lead the witness...)
- What specific kinds of assistance would you most value?

10. Why do you think the Partnership could be especially effective/valuable in these ways? (To get at underlying perceptions, ideas, etc.).

Lessons from previous efforts

11. If you have conducted previous efforts to encourage hunters to use lead-free ammunition and/or adopt best management practices, what messages or efforts have been most successful? What has been least successful?
12. In addition to the things we already talked about—that the Partnership might be able to help with—what else would enable your agencies to be more effective in working on lead-free ammunition issues? What gaps do you see in your agencies (e.g., in expertise, capacity, collaboration, etc.)?

NEAFWA Volunteers Workshop

Focus Group Topic Guide

Preface

Thank you all for agreeing to share your thoughts and experiences related to the use of lead-free hunting ammunition. My name is _____, and I'm a team member at DJ Case & Associates. We're a research and communications firm focused on conservation and natural resources issues.

For this project, DJ Case was contracted by the North American Non-Lead Partnership, which I'll just call the Partnership, to gather feedback on their workshops for volunteers. You were invited to participate in this focus group because you attended one of their workshops in the not-too-distant past.

Our goal is to get your thoughts on the workshop and the Partnership, plus any insights you can offer from other related experiences you've had interacting with hunters about this issue. Your input will help make our focus groups with hunters more effective and will improve the Partnership's work.

Before we get started, a few housekeeping items:

Time

First, we have two hours scheduled for this conversation, but we may not need that entire time. We'll wrap up sooner if we can.

Recording and observation

Second, we are recording today's meeting so we can transcribe and carefully consider this conversation. No one except the research team will have access to the recording. And no one's name will appear in any report based on today's discussion.

A couple other members of the research team are also observing our conversation in real time through a video feed.

Ground rules

Third, we have a few simple ground rules to make sure our discussion is efficient and inclusive.

1. We do not allow participation in focus groups while driving.
2. Please keep your cameras on during the discussion unless you are experiencing bandwidth issues.
3. Please remember to mute your microphone when not speaking.
4. Please show respect to participants whose opinions differ from your own.

Is everyone comfortable with these basic guidelines?

Roles

Before we dive in, I want to say a few words about our roles.

- My role is to help move the conversation along. Mostly, I'll be asking questions.
- There may be times when I need to interrupt in the interest of time, or to steer us back to the topic at hand, or to make sure others have an opportunity to speak. If that happens, I apologize in advance.
- Your role—naturally—is to talk. I invite you to think of this as a living room conversation. I'm here to help move things along, but I encourage you to jump in and talk with each other, to interact and respond to each other's thoughts, like you would if you were sitting in someone's living room.
- Most of the time, I'll invite you to jump in whenever you have thoughts to share. For some questions, I go around the room and ask everyone to respond; you're welcome to pass.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Introductions

Let's begin with introductions. Please tell us your name, what agency or organization you volunteer with, what your volunteer role is, and why you attended the Partnership's modern hunting ammunition workshop.

Workshop

1. What do you recall most about the workshop?

Probe: Is there anything else about the workshop (e.g., approach, process, message) you think was especially valuable or impactful?

Probe: Is there any other specific part of the workshop that you think made an especially powerful difference?

2. Has the workshop you attended helped you better serve as a volunteer? If so, how has the workshop helped you?

Probe: How do you imagine it might help you in the future?

3. What didn't work so well? Where did the workshop fall short? What was missing?

Probe: Do you see gaps in the tools the Partnership provided?

4. What else would you like to learn about modern hunting ammunition?

Region-specific progress and barriers/opportunities

5. How would you characterize the progress to date in getting hunters to consider lead-free options in your state or region (e.g., New England, Mid-Atlantic, NEAFWA)?
6. Can you point to any specific **barriers**—unique to your state or region—that deter hunters from considering lead-free hunting ammunition and/or management practices?
7. What specific **opportunities** do you see for getting hunters to consider lead-free hunting ammunition and/or management practices in your state or region?

The Partnership's personality (aka “brand identity”)

8. During the workshop or in other interactions, what has your experience been of the Partnership? Does this differ from your perception prior to attending a workshop?

Probe: If the Partnership was a person, how would you describe its personality?
(single adjectives)

The Partnership's value

9. In what ways do you think the Partnership can be of most value to volunteers and agencies in the region?

Potential probes:

- Beyond providing additional capacity, what do you imagine the Partnership might be able to do?
- Are there particular kinds of challenges that are especially difficult for your program or agency and that the Partnership might be able to help navigate? (For example, we could mention politics if we want to lead the witness...)
- What specific kinds of assistance would you most value?

10. Why do you think the Partnership could be especially effective/valuable in these ways? (To get at underlying perceptions, ideas, etc.).

Lessons from previous efforts

11. In encouraging hunters to consider using lead-free ammunition, what messages or approaches have you found most effective or successful? What have you found least effective or successful? (These can be observations from organized efforts you've been part of, from informal conversations with hunters, or both.)
12. In addition to the things we already talked about—that the Partnership might be able to help with—what else would enable you to be more effective in working on lead-free ammunition issues? What gaps do you see in your programs or agencies (e.g., in expertise, capacity, collaboration, etc.)?

Appendix B: Email Communications

Notice to Agency Directors

Hello All,

I'm reaching out for your assistance as a director in encouraging participation in human dimensions work that is being conducted as part of the NEAFWA hunting ammunition multistate conservation grant (MSCG). As many of you already know, the North American Non-Lead Partnership (the Partnership) received funding through USFWS Region 5 and a multistate conservation grant to fund work regarding modern hunting ammunition in the Northeast in 2024/2025. Part of this work involves doing human dimensions work on the workshops and communications strategies with agency personnel and volunteer staff that attended the 2024 round of hunting ammunition workshops that occurred in the Northeast. This work is being conducted through a series of focus groups which will be facilitated by DJ Case and Associates later this month. This morning I sent out an email to volunteer hunter education instructors and agency staff that participated in these workshops. Below I've included the message that I sent to participants.

[Name]
North American Non-Lead Partnership

Prenotification email from the Partnership

At the North American Non-Lead Partnership, we are always working to improve the content and quality of our educational workshops. We will be holding a pair of online focus groups later this month—one with volunteer hunter education instructors and one with agency personnel. These focus groups consist of gathering your feedback about the workshop and hearing your suggestions for other ways the Partnership can support your work in the future.

In the next couple of days, you will be receiving an email from [Name] at DJ Case & Associates with instructions on how to sign up. Please check your spam folder in addition to your inbox. Your participation is very important to us.

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Thanks for your consideration,

[Name]
North American Non-Lead Partnership

Follow-up email from DJ Case

Hello-

I am working with Adam Miller of the North American Non-Lead Partnership to sign up focus group participants to share opinions about education on the topic of lead-free ammunition, including perceptions about the workshop you attended.

We are holding an online focus group for [agency staff/volunteers] on January [23rd/28th] from [2-4pm/6-8pm] Eastern Time. Space is limited to the first 10 people that sign up. You can register at this link:

«Registration_Link»

Feel free to reach out to me or Adam if you have any questions.

Thanks,

[Name]

DJ Case & Associates

Confirmation email after sign-up

Hi «First_Name»:

Thank you for registering to participate in a focus group on lead-free ammunition. You are scheduled to join us on «Date» from «Time». Here is the Zoom Link for the meeting:

«Zoom_Link»

«Meeting_ID»

«Passcode»

What you can expect:

- The focus group includes a small group of people who attended a workshop on lead-free ammunition. You will be asked to discuss your opinions about the topic and your perceptions of the workshop.
- The meeting will start promptly on time. You are encouraged to join a couple of minutes early to make sure your audio and video are working properly.
- Please make sure you are somewhere with stable internet or Wi-Fi connection.
- We record these sessions to make sure we capture everything accurately. Recordings are not shared with anyone outside of the research team, and your participation will remain anonymous.
- Participation while driving is not allowed.
- If for some reason you need to cancel, please let us know.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out. We look forward to meeting with you. Thanks for your willingness to share your valuable input.

[Name]
DJ Case & Associates

Day-before reminder to confirmed participants

Hi «First_Name»,

We are looking forward to hearing your thoughts about non-lead ammunition education at [Tuesday evening's/Thursday afternoon's] focus group.

We will start promptly at [2:00pm/6:00pm]. It can be helpful to sign on a few minutes early to make sure your audio and video are working,

I am sending you the meeting link so it's at the top of your inbox.

«Zoom_Link»

«Meeting_ID»

«Passcode»

Thanks,

[Name]
DJ Case & Associates