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Lead-Free Hunting Outreach in the NEAFWA Region

Reflections from Law Enforcement, Big-Game
Managers, and Non-Agency Stakeholders



DJ CASE
+ associates

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Executive Summary

Research has shown that scavenging wildlife can be exposed to lead poisoning by unintentionally ingesting fragments left behind in the remains of animals that are shot with lead-core hunting ammunition. The North American Lead-free Partnership (The Partnership) encourages a variety of strategies whereby hunters can take voluntary steps to reduce lead exposure to wildlife, including the use of lead-free ammunition. In 2025, in collaboration with the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA), the Partnership delivered a series of educational engagements across the NEAFWA region. Offered for agency staff and stakeholder group leaders, the workshops shared information on the unintended impacts of using lead hunting ammunition. The workshops also provided information on ways hunters can voluntarily reduce these impacts to protect wildlife, ensure optimal performance from hunting ammunition, and promote the future of hunting.

In November 2025, DJ Case & Associates (DJ Case) conducted a focus group with big-game managers and non-agency stakeholders involved in big game management, as well as interviews with state conservation law enforcement staff. The focus group and interviews were intended to yield insights into the effectiveness of the Partnership’s current outreach and how efforts to encourage voluntary adoption of hunting ammunition best management practices could be enhanced in the NEAFWA region.

Participants in the focus group and interviews expressed strong, positive impressions of the Partnership and of workshop content, messaging, and delivery, and identified specific practical barriers (e.g., cost, availability, uncertainty about performance, personal ammunition stockpiles) and philosophical barriers (e.g., distrust, fear, generational resistance, lack of concern about scavengers) to the adoption of hunting ammunition best management practices.

Participants also identified factors that would help them more effectively communicate and promote hunting practices that disrupt the introduction of lead into food webs. In addition, participants shared insights into what communication approaches and tools they had found effective to date (e.g., focusing on cartridge and bullet performance), as well as other opportunities for advancing the Partnership’s mission in the NEAFWA region and beyond (e.g., establishing ammunition trade-in opportunities, engaging regional influencers, promoting superior performance for moose hunting).

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



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Introduction

The North American Lead-free 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 for ingestion by 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 to wildlife associated with unintended ingestion of 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 2025, the Partnership delivered fifteen outreach workshops across the NEAFWA region. Of the fifteen workshops, five were meant for state and federal agency staff, two for hunter education volunteer instructors, and eight for hunting organization and community leaders. 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 qualitative research with workshop participants.

In November 2025, DJ Case conducted a focus group with SFWA big-game managers as well as volunteers representing stakeholder organizations involved in big game management. DJ Case also conducted research with SFWA law enforcement staff; due to scheduling constraints, individual interviews were conducted in place of a focus group.

The primary research objectives were (1) to gather insights into workshop effectiveness, key messages, and capacity gaps for SFWAs and non-governmental stakeholder organizations; (2) to identify regionally specific barriers to and opportunities for stakeholder engagement; (3) to generate ideas for revisions or additions to base survey instruments; and (4) to clarify the value of Partnership support to SFWA staff and other stakeholders.

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

This report presents findings from the NEAFWA big-game focus group and law enforcement interviews.

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 excellent tool for eliciting various perspectives on virtually any topic.

Individual interviews, which have been central to social science research for centuries, offer participants the opportunity to express their views in a one-on-one conversation. In interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to attend closely to, and inquire into, one person's perspective.

Focus group and interview 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 widespread in the broader population. Focus groups and interviews do not generate "statistics," and care must be taken not to extrapolate findings across a broader population. Most importantly, these methodologies allow participants to express their concerns, fears, and hopes in ways that survey methodologies cannot, and they generate information and insights regarding local audiences and issues that otherwise might be overlooked.

For this project, DJ Case conducted one focus group via Zoom with fish and wildlife agency big-game managers as well as representatives of big-game stakeholder organizations. The research team originally intended to conduct a second focus group with state agency law enforcement staff, but staff work schedules made this impractical. Instead, the research team pivoted to individual interviews. The focus group lasted approximately two hours. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes. All focus group and interview participants had attended at least one NEAFWA Multistate Conservation Grant-funded Partnership workshop in the previous 12 months.

Working closely with the Partnership staff, the DJ Case team developed a topic guide (Appendix A) that was used to guide focus group discussions while allowing the facilitator to probe deeper into relevant points of conversation. With minor adaptations (e.g., omission of ground rules), the team employed the same topic guide for individual interviews.

Recruitment

Focus group and interview participants were recruited from among agency personnel and non-agency stakeholders 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, inviting them to participate in the discussion. The email contained a scheduling link to afternoon or evening time slots on specific dates. This allowed participants to sign up for dates that worked best for them, and DJ Case selected the date with the greatest participation. The fall season posed challenges in scheduling participants, particularly law enforcement staff.

Shifting from a focus group to interviews allowed law enforcement staff to sign up for interviews based on their individual schedules. Sixty-four people on the big-game manager and stakeholder list and 19 on the law enforcement list received the original invitation; of these, six from the big-game stakeholder list and six from the law enforcement list agreed to participate. DJ Case recommended limiting the focus group to eight participants and did not exclude anyone who registered.

DJ Case sent a follow-up confirmation email and calendar invitation with logistical details to all focus group registrants. A day before the focus group, DJ Case staff made personal phone calls to remind people of the meeting, leaving voice messages for those who did not answer. On the day of the focus group, DJ Case sent a reminder email and phone calls. Interviews were scheduled individually. Once recruitment was finished, DJ Case deleted the contact lists provided by the Partnership out of respect for subjects' privacy.

Of the six people from the big-game managers and stakeholders list who registered to participate, five—from Maine, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—attended the focus group. Of the six law enforcement staff who agreed to be interviewed, all—from Maine, Maryland, and Pennsylvania—completed interviews; one of the six indicated playing a role in the state's hunter-education program, housed within the SFWA's law enforcement division.

DJ Case conducted the focus group and interviews in November 2025. No incentives were offered for participation. At the beginning of the focus group and interviews, the facilitator provided participants with more detailed context for the study and explained how participants' responses would be used, as scripted in the topic guide. DJ Case obtained consent from all participants to record the meetings and capture transcripts.

Analysis

The DJ Case research team used discussion transcripts for primary analysis, referring to recordings as needed for clarification. The team reviewed transcriptions of the focus group discussion and interviews (5.5 hours total), identified thematic patterns, and compiled excerpts and notes for each. In compiling excerpts and notes and in writing this report, DJ Case 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 focus group and interviews conducted in November 2025. This summary of findings is not an exhaustive description of the focus group discussion or of interviewees’ responses. Rather, this summary highlights the findings most clearly relevant to the above-mentioned objectives.

Because related themes and ideas surfaced throughout the focus group discussion and interviews, the findings are organized and presented by thematic and topical focus rather than in the precise order in which the questions were asked. The findings begin with participants’ experiences of the workshop and Partnership, then proceed to broader and more forward-looking issues.

Throughout this report, focus group members and individual interviewees are both referred to as “participants.”

The Partnership and current efforts

Several of the questions asked during the focus group and interviews 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 the focus group and interviews, participants conveyed very positive impressions of the Partnership.

Participants described the Partnership and its primary representatives—especially workshop presenters—as approachable, welcoming, honest, genuine, authentic, credible, convincing, knowledgeable, capable, open-minded, skilled at lowering suspicion levels, understanding of conflicting sentiments, and not condescending.

Participants’ positive evaluations of workshop delivery were inextricably intertwined with mentions of the above characteristics.

Assessments of the workshops

Participants spoke highly of the workshops they had participated in. Many emphasized the effectiveness of both the presenters and the shooting range demonstration in making the case for lead-free hunting.

“I would say very informative, very approachable.”

—Law enforcement officer

“They live it, too... They're practicing all this stuff.”

—Big-game manager

“[If] somebody comes at them with a question... they clear up the question, they don't candy coat it, they're just clear, concise, and you feel like you could trust those guys.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“It was a great learning environment.”

—Law enforcement officer

Strengths

Participants praised both the workshop content and its delivery. Participants described the workshops as an effective combination of classroom and hands-on time and called special attention to several features.

- **Range demonstrations:** Participants consistently 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.
- **Hands-on pieces:** Similarly, participants spoke of hands-on teaching tools (e.g., epoxy pucks showing terminal expansion and fragmentation) as more compelling than hearing about the data or even seeing it on a slide.
- **Resonant approaches:** Participants expressed strong approval for the workshop’s emphasis on education and the voluntary adoption of hunting ammunition best management practices, including the use of lead-free ammunition, as opposed to the prohibition of lead ammunition. They also spoke of the importance of providing people with the opportunity to exercise their own common sense, helping people change their opinions without pressuring them to reach foregone conclusions swiftly. And they drew attention to the presenters’ ease and skill in engaging with a wide variety of audience members and dealing with “suspicion” and “naysayers.”

Some participants came to the workshop already committed to using lead-free hunting ammunition. Others came to it without much previous knowledge of the subject. Others came to—and, in at least one case, left—the workshop with some doubts about the importance of switching. Across this range of positions and perspectives, participants shared positive assessments of the workshops.

Potential improvements

When participants were asked where the workshops fell short, they offered virtually no critique. But a few did share specific observations and suggestions.

More than one noted that the length of the workshop (a full day) was a deterrent. One, who played a key role in organizing the workshop for his agency, said that the duration nearly dissuaded him from holding the workshop at all; despite hearing from people how crucial the range demonstration was, he was tempted to skip it and do only the classroom portion, as he was reluctant to schedule such

“We actually used ammunition that someone had from their duty rifle.”

—Law enforcement officer

“This is something our people could relate to and the way these guys presented... they could literally bring them through an evolutionary process.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“It’s one thing to talk about it, it’s another thing to demonstrate it... I think letting people come to that conclusion organically... I think that is super effective at actually getting people to make that swap.”

—Law enforcement officer

“We had really light attendance... I think people struggled with the amount of time... People were hesitant to dedicate a whole day.”

—Big-game stakeholder

a long event. Another suspected that the light attendance at a workshop his agency hosted was a consequence of the whole-day commitment. Both suggested that a briefer version might serve a valuable purpose and help the Partnership reach more people.

More than one participant suggested using a wider variety of firearms in the range demonstration to show that lead-free hunting ammunition works in all types of actions and to show use of firearm types (e.g., lever-action rifles) typical of hunters in their state.

One participant suggested dividing people into three or four small groups during the range demonstration, rotating through more than one station to increase firsthand engagement and minimize downtime and side conversations.

Another said that the most significant lingering doubts about lead-free hunting ammunition, in his mind and among participants in the workshop, centered on ballistics and whether lead-free rounds can match lead rounds across all measures. He thought it would be valuable to cover ballistics performance in more detail, from inside the firearm to terminal impact.

Another participant suggested devoting more attention to best management practices for “leaving no trace” by making carcasses of animals killed with lead ammunition unavailable to scavengers.

Benefits already realized

Participants described ways in which the workshop experience had informed and enhanced their professional or volunteer work.

Several mentioned that simply being able to describe what they saw and learned, especially during the range demonstration, had given them a new set of communication tools. A few mentioned the powerful effect of augmenting their firsthand accounts with visual props from the workshop (e.g., photos they had taken, a copper slug they had been given).

Another mentioned the value of understanding the science in more depth, including the fact that this issue is not just “a West Coast thing” and that emerging research in the Northeast points to “broader impacts of lead on the landscape.”

Another spoke of how non-hunters concerned about endangered species had reacted very positively to the topic of the workshop and to the fact that a significant number of hunters cared enough to engage in it.

The current situation

In assessing the status of lead-free hunting best management practice adoption and related outreach efforts, participants painted a consistent picture of progress to date and identified several widespread and localized barriers.

“Just that one thing from that workshop, I'm able to convert people just by that visual without even going to the workshop, just by seeing it, and then the storytelling around it.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“I'm able to discuss, you know, the pros and cons, as well as be like, hey, I saw it shot through ballistic gel side-by-side, and kind of describe that to them.”

—Big-game manager

Progress to date

When asked about local and regional progress in getting hunters to consider using lead-free hunting ammunition or adopting other best management practices, participants said there was a long way to go.

Several mentioned that a subset of hunters, especially those highly engaged in conservation efforts, has already switched to lead-free and predicted that more will do so, especially as prices come down. A few mentioned that they have started seeing lead-free options in some local sporting goods stores or are occasionally surprised by who has already switched.

Overall, though, participants' assessment was that the effort was still in its infancy and that it will take significant time and effort to get to the point where a large proportion of hunters are aware of and considering the issue. A few noted that it would take time and effort to get people on board even within their own agency.

Barriers

When asked about current barriers to adopting hunting ammunition best management practices in the Northeast and in their specific states, participants mentioned some that are largely technical and others that are largely attitudinal.

Practical barriers

- **Cost:** Though participants acknowledged that the cost difference between lead and lead-free hunting ammunition is not extreme, they noted that the difference (and perceptions of that difference) remain a significant barrier for some hunters, especially to trying a new load for the first time and especially in areas where average incomes are low.
- **Uncertainty about performance:** Closely tied to concerns about cost, participants noted that hunters are hesitant to invest in one or more boxes of new ammunition if they are uncertain about how well it will perform in their favorite firearm, especially in comparison to a load they already know and trust.
- **Availability:** Participants mentioned the barriers presented by a general lack of local availability—especially on the shelf in brick-and-mortar stores (e.g., Walmart, Cabela's, hardware stores)—and by lack of availability for older and less popular cartridges (e.g., .35 Remington) and for traditional roundball muzzleloading.

“It's still Remington Core-Lokt country up here.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“The concern of ‘I'm gonna buy a whole box of these, and it's not gonna work well with my firearm.’ I personally had that, because the bullet that I had used, I was pretty invested in. I knew how it would shoot, I knew the ballistics. I had spent a lot of time at the range with it, and I was concerned that what I'd go buy wouldn't perform to that level.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“I don't even think it has to be a stockpile. It's just we're Yankee frugal... ‘I'm gonna make the switch as soon as I use up the box I have.’”

—Big-game stakeholder

- **Existing ammo stashes:** Several participants mentioned that hunters' existing stashes of ammunition and the investment they represent pose a barrier to adoption of lead-free options. While some referred to the "stockpiles" or "caseloads" of factory-loaded ammunition or reloading supplies that some hunters have, another noted that a single box of hunting ammunition can last years.
- **Legal constraints on BMPs:** One participant mentioned that, on at least some public land in their state, it is illegal to dig, making it impractical to dispose of viscera on site.

Philosophical and political barriers

- **Distrust and credibility concerns:** Several participants noted that many hunters in their states harbor a deep distrust of government. Some hunters, they said, fear that the promotion of voluntary lead-free hunting practices might cross over into government regulation before long. More than one said that such worries—and the belief that "it's only a matter of time" before a lead ban comes along—make people disengage. In the focus group and in interviews, participants suggested that such concerns posed a barrier to more assertive action on the part of some hunting organizations and agencies. One participant said he was willing to share informational resources about hunting ammunition best management practices but didn't want "to be the front man" on the issue, thereby risking his own credibility.
- **Generational resistance:** A few participants said that older hunters—who make up a large proportion of the active hunting population—are particularly resistant to reconsidering, let alone changing, the ammunition they've been using for decades.
- **Lack of concern about scavengers:** Several participants indicated that, for at least some hunters in their states, protecting scavengers from the effects of lead ingestion might not be a significant motivator. They noted that bald eagle populations are high and people see them everywhere, so are unlikely to believe there is any population-level threat. One participant said that many hunters in his state are convinced that there are too many birds of prey. Another said that people are even less likely to care about vultures. In a related vein, one participant mentioned the fact that eagles are killed by vehicle strikes and illegal shootings; another said that local rehab data suggests that game carcasses used to bait coyotes in winter is a more significant factor than deer season gut piles in causing lead poisoning in eagles.

"They're engaged in the conversation, but are maybe a little bit more hands-off, not pushing, not wanting to be in the leadership on it."

—Big-game stakeholder

"How you approach support for something like that has to be careful and calculated as to not to shut people off."

—Law enforcement officer

"We have a large segment... of that Baby Boomer generation and even older... They'll probably hunt another five or ten years, and then they'll be done. That's a big uphill battle."

—Law enforcement officer

"If you switch to copper and save birds of prey, well, half those hunters are already thinking that we should have a bounty on them."

—Law enforcement officer

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 described actions and approaches they believed could be effective in moving this work forward and in addressing barriers they identified.

Training the trainers

Several participants said that “train-the-trainer” workshops would be essential in ensuring effective, high-quality delivery of information and ideas to the broader hunting public.

Showing proof

Participants expressed consistent interest in having more ways to show hunters tangible evidence of how lead bullets fragment and how lead-free bullets perform. As mentioned above, a few described the efficacy of using visual props from the workshop (e.g., photos they had taken, a copper slug they had been given). Participants also expressed interest in having epoxy pucks as “conversation pieces” at events and expos where they had booths. Another wondered whether partners might be able to acquire gel blocks at a discount. Running through their comments was a common theme: Telling people something only gets you so far; showing them tangible evidence is a game-changer. As one participant put it, “The proof is in showing.”

Choosing effective messages

Alongside tangible evidence, participants emphasized message themes they felt were even more effective (i.e., relevant to more hunters) than the effects of lead on wildlife: performance and human health.

In the focus group and in interviews, several participants emphasized the effectiveness—especially with serious hunters and shooters—of demonstrating that lead-free hunting ammunition offers superior performance.

In interviews, several law enforcement officers also emphasized the relevance of human health, especially for hunters who have young children. Despite the fact that the Partnership’s presenters did not raise the issue of human health in the workshops and, when asked, explained that it is not part of their message, participants spoke of the issue’s importance in their own choice of hunting ammunition and how effective it can be in motivating others.

“I think the most valuable thing that could come out of this is some more training for the folks who will be delivering this message... to make sure it's done in a way to not put people in a defensive position.”

—Big-game stakeholder

“It's like the difference between a circumstantial criminal case and a case built on solid evidence that a jury can physically look at.”

—Law enforcement officer

“I think there'll be more switches for performance, initially, than the lead side of things.”

—Law enforcement officer

“Once they see the performance, then they're convinced that this is something worth buying.”

—Big-game stakeholder

Exploring opportunities

Participants offered a variety of ideas for expanding awareness about the impacts of lead and promoting lead-free hunting ammunition and other best management practices.

- **Regional influencers and content creators:** Participants recommended enlisting regionally well-known, credible figures to reach specific subgroups of hunters (e.g., Hal Blood to reach Northeast big woods bucks trackers who would likely be especially interested in cartridge performance), or inviting regional hunting content creators to participate in a workshop or other event.
- **Premium ammunition for moose:** One law enforcement officer suggested promoting the superior performance and penetration of lead-free centerfire ammunition for moose hunting in northern New England, as hunters are often willing to invest in premium ammunition when they are lucky enough to draw a permit.
- **Trade-ins and other incentives:** Multiple participants commented on the potential value of providing opportunities for hunters to trade a box of lead ammunition for a box of lead-free or other incentives (e.g., a coupon for attending a workshop; free ammunition or reimbursements for those hunting on state lands; rebates through retailers).
- **BMP education:** A big-game manager suggested offering learning opportunities focused on best management practices for making lead inaccessible to wildlife, possibly linking them to other practices and benefits (e.g., deboning and packing out deer to reduce the spread of chronic wasting disease).
- **Younger hunters:** Several participants, noting higher levels of resistance among older hunters, recommended focusing outreach (including social media and podcast outreach) on young hunters, who seem more open-minded and easier to convince than older hunters.
- **Hunter education:** A couple of participants wondered about integrating related content into hunter education curriculum and programs across the country, perhaps in collaboration with the International Hunter Education Association, to reach not only students but also the parents of younger students.
- **Agency channels and action:** Multiple participants noted that there may be valuable opportunities to build momentum by using agency communication channels (e.g., conservation magazines, hunting digest articles or ads) and facilities (e.g., public ranges), by reaching key political allies (e.g., sharing evidence with state legislators who can authorize agency action), and by enhancing alignment within agencies (e.g., improving knowledge levels among senior staff; issuing lead-free ammunition to officers for use in euthanizing injured animals, as one law enforcement officer reported his region has committed to doing).

“My primary thing is just the kids thing... I think most people that would switch because of the health concerns would be people with kids.”

—Law enforcement officer

Looking to the Partnership

When asked how else the Partnership might be able to help their agencies or organizations expand the use of lead-free hunting ammunition and the adoption of other best management practices, participants identified a few specific technical needs and also indicated a broader suite of opportunities for enhanced partnership.

- **Ammo acquisition:** Participants said that the Partnership could support its partners in the Northeast by helping agencies and/or gun clubs acquire—or access information on how to acquire—lead-free hunting ammunition, especially in quantity for trade-in or other incentive programs, ideally with fiscal support from third-party funders.
- **Message refinement:** Participants expressed interest in having clear, simple, tested messages and messaging guidelines for hunters in general and/or tailored to specific sub-audiences.
- **Outreach resources:** Participants expressed interest in educational and communication resources, such as brochures, social media content, data on regionally specific impacts of lead from hunting ammunition, and brief, compelling videos (e.g., on ballistics and performance; on the neurological effects of lead on individual eagles often seen by rehabbers and agency staff but rarely seen by hunters).
- **More integrated partnership:** Several participants indicated that there are opportunities for the Partnership to collaborate more frequently and closely with agencies and their partners (e.g., by having a booth, or sharing one with law enforcement, at an outdoor expo; by appearing on an agency podcast; by engaging in joint conversations with wildlife rehabbers; by providing technical assistance to agencies as needed).

“If there was legislation like that... there would be... a lot more heartburn over it... If [my state] had just passed a law saying no lead ammo, I probably would have been pretty annoyed about it.”

—Law enforcement officer

Bans and mandates

Though the DJ Case research team did not pose any questions regarding bans or mandates related to the use of lead hunting ammunition, the topic surfaced organically in the focus group and in interviews.

Participants mentioned legislative proposals that had already surfaced in their own state or another state in the region. They universally expressed a strong preference for the voluntary, education-based path. Given Northeast hunters' likely reactions to a ban that might resemble California's, participants were confident that—if such a change ends up being legislated—lead-free ammunition would not be adopted in the same way or with as much positive sentiment.

Conclusion

Though limited to a relatively small number of participants, the focus group and interviews DJ Case conducted in November 2025 paint a consistent overall picture with some variations by state and by individual. Big-game managers, big-game stakeholders, and law enforcement staff alike offered high praise for the Partnership and its representatives, workshops, and messages, and identified a set of practical and philosophical barriers to the widespread adoption of lead-free hunting ammunition and other best management practices in the Northeast.

Based on the factors these participants identified as key to advancing outreach efforts, DJ Case offers the following recommendations—organized roughly from greatest to least change—for consideration by the Partnership and affiliated entities, including SFWAs.

- **Explore regionally relevant messaging and opportunities.** These participants cast some doubt on the degree to which lead's effects on scavengers will motivate large numbers of hunters to switch to lead-free hunting ammunition or adopt other best management practices. They suggested that other issues (e.g., superior bullet performance) are likely to be more salient for many hunters. In light of these insights and others (e.g., the relevance of regional influencers; moose hunters' interest in superior performance), we recommend considering and experimenting with messages and approaches tailored to the Northeast region.
- **Provide outreach resources.** Given the emphasis participants placed on the need for tools and resources to advance outreach efforts, we recommend exploring opportunities to develop and deliver a prioritized set of resources, likely including messages, messaging guidelines, hands-on learning tools (e.g., epoxy pucks), and communication assets (e.g., brochures, videos).
- **Maintain quality and type of workshop content.** The current blend of workshop content continues to receive 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 shooting range demonstration elements.
- **Maintain caliber of workshop delivery.** Participants' positive evaluations of workshop delivery were inextricably connected to mentions of their positive impressions of the Partnership and the workshop presenters. Key style and personality characteristics (e.g., perceived authenticity and credibility; perceived open-mindedness and understanding of conflicting sentiments) 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: Topic Guide

NEAFWA Big-Game Managers/Stakeholders and Law Enforcement Topic Guide

Preface

Thank you 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 Lead-free) Partnership to gather feedback on their workshops. You were invited to participate in this focus group because you attended one of those workshops.

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'm here to help move things along if needed, but I encourage you to jump in, interact, and respond to each other's thoughts.

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

Introductions

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

Workshop

1. What do you recall most about the workshop?

Potential probes:

- Is there anything else about the workshop (e.g., approach, process, message) you think was especially valuable or impactful?
- 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 in your professional, volunteer, or stakeholder role? [conservation law enforcement] If so, how?

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 best management practices?
7. What specific **opportunities** do you see for getting hunters to consider lead-free hunting ammunition and/or best 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?

Potential probes:

- If the Partnership was a person, how would you describe its personality? (single adjectives)
- Does this differ from your perception prior to attending a workshop?

The Partnership’s value

9. In what ways do you think the Partnership can be of most value to agencies or organizations 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 or organization 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?
- Why do you think the Partnership could be especially effective/valuable in these ways?

Lessons from previous efforts

10. If you've encouraged hunters to consider using lead-free hunting ammunition and/or adopt best management practices, what messages or approaches have you found been most effective or successful? What has been least effective? (These can be observations from organized efforts you've been part of, from informal conversations with hunters, or both.)

11. In addition to the things we already talked about—that the Partnership might be able to help with—what else would enable your agency or organization to be more effective in working on lead-free ammunition issues? What gaps do you see (e.g., in expertise, capacity, collaboration, etc)?