



Attn: House Committee on Environment & Natural Resource Finance & Policy
Re: House File 2368
Date: March 7, 2023
Position: Oppose

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment & Natural Resource Finance & Policy,

I write you today on behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation in opposition of House File 2368, which would ban the use of lead sinkers in waters designated as "swan resting areas" by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The language applies to a significant portion of the state's waters and does not adequately describe what criteria would constitute designation under this proposed law. Further, wildlife management decisions made by state agencies across the country, including the Minnesota DNR, are made at the population-level rather than based on individual instances, and there is no known scientific evidence that suggests lead sinkers impact fish and wildlife species, including swans, at the population-level. I respectfully request the members of this Committee to reject the passage of this bill.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

This bill does not specify the conditions that would warrant the Minnesota DNR to designate waters as swan resting areas, except that the water must be within the swan migration corridor. Presently, the DNR states that the swan migration corridor occupies the entire Mississippi River Valley,¹ which is essentially all waters in the State. This language is extremely broad and, without a list of narrow criteria, subjects nearly the entirety of Minnesota to a ban on lead sinkers. Earlier this year, DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen reversed an emergency rule that would have required non-lead ammunition while hunting on specific state lands, citing that such ammunition is "not readily available and could significantly reduce participation."² Like non-lead ammunition, there is not enough functionally equivalent, non-lead sinkers to meet the demand of the many sportsmen and women that annually contribute to Minnesota's storied outdoor traditions and bolster its economy.

¹ *Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*, Tundra swans, Accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/birds/swans/tundra.html>

² *Minnesota State Register*, 47 SR 394, October 24, 2022. https://mn.gov/admin/assets/SR47_17%20-%20Accessible_tcm36-544924.pdf

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation

A functional ban on lead sinkers would jeopardize the state’s recreational fishing industry as anglers would have significant difficulties in complying with the requirements of this proposed bill and would therefore be unable to participate. Minnesota enjoys extreme benefits from its recreational fishing industry. According to the Minnesota Sportfishing Foundation Coalition, fishing supports over 28,000 jobs and generates more than \$4.4 billion annually for the state’s economy, and more than a quarter of Minnesotans participated in fishing in 2022.³ Further, through the unique “user pays – public benefits” approach of the American System of Conservation Funding, state fish and wildlife management agencies derive significant portions of their funding through license sales and excise taxes on outdoor goods such as fishing rods, tackle, motorboat fuel, and other angling-necessities.⁴ Because anglers would be challenged to fully comply with the requirements of HF 2368, they would likely be discouraged from purchasing a fishing license or these outdoor goods. In 2021, the sale of fishing licenses alone provided the Minnesota DNR with more than \$36.5 million, and excise taxes on outdoor goods generated an additional \$14.7 million.⁵ Banning lead sinkers creates a significant barrier to participation and puts this much-needed conservation funding at risk.

Finally, science-based management decisions made by state fish and wildlife agencies across the country are not made based on individual instances, but rather at the population-level, and yet there is no scientific evidence that suggests that lead sinkers impact fish and wildlife populations at the population-level. Management of swan populations should not follow a different standard than is applied to other Minnesota species managed by the DNR.

I respectfully urge the honorable members of this Committee to oppose the passage of House File 2368. There is no scientific evidence that indicates lead sinkers threaten fish and wildlife at the population level in Minnesota, but lead sinkers are a foundational component of an extremely strong and important pillar of Minnesota’s economy and conservation funding. Without adequate parameters for what constitutes swan nesting areas other than the broad migration corridor that encompasses essentially all waters of the state, many Minnesotans would be unable to participate in fishing, a time-honored tradition that has supported the state for generations, due to a significant lack of available functionally equivalent and affordable non-lead sinkers. I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue and welcome any questions.

Sincerely,



Robert Matthews

Senior Coordinator, Great Lakes States

Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

rmatthews@congressionalsportsmen.org | 517-210-2890

³ *MN-Fish*, “State of Minnesota Fishing Summit ‘Great Success’” Accessed January 27, 2023.

https://mn-fish.com/state-of-minnesota-fishing-summit-great-success/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=state-of-minnesota-fishing-summit-great-success

⁴ *Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation*, “American System of Conservation Funding,” Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/ascf>

⁵ *Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation*, “ASCF Fact Sheet – Minnesota.”