

BLOOD-LEAD LEVELS OF FALL MIGRANT GOLDEN EAGLE IN WEST-CENTRAL MONTANA

Rob Domenech, Raptor View Research Institute, P.O. Box 4323, Missoula, MT 59 06

Heiko Langner, Environmental Biogeochemistry Laboratory, Geosciences Department,
University of Montana. Missoula, MT 59812

Tyler Veto, University of Montana. Missoula, MT 59812

Lead has long been documented as a serious environmental hazard to eagles and other predatory, opportunistic and scavenging avian species. Due to lead poisoning in the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting on federal and state lands was banned in 1991. At that time, this was thought to be the only major source of the lead exposure. More recently, lead poisoning from ingested lead-bullet fragments and shotgun pellets has been identified as the leading cause of death in California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*), leading to the recent ban of lead ammunition within the “California Condor Recovery Zone.” Another on-going study on common ravens (*Corvus corax*) and Bald Eagles in Wyoming has shown a direct correlation between very high blood-lead levels and the onset of rifle hunting season. Indeed, overwhelming evidence shows that lead toxicity is still prevalent in the environment, and mounting data points to fragmented rifle bullets as the source. We sampled blood from 39 Golden Eagles during fall 2006 and 2007 to quantify a suite of heavy metal contaminants with emphasis on lead. We performed a simple field test on 18 eagles and found eight to contain elevated blood-lead levels. All 39 samples were lab analyzed, and full results of this analysis were presented.