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Arizona Game and Fish Department**NEWS RELEASE**

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Arizona Game and Fish announces report from focus groups about lead ingestion by wildlife

PHOENIX — The Arizona Game and Fish Department in February held focus groups on the effects of ingested lead from spent ammunition on wildlife. The report is available at www.azgfd.gov/lead.

To further communicate the department's existing voluntary lead reduction program the focus groups were held by D.J. Case and Associates, known for their expertise in communicating natural resources conservation, was contracted to access the knowledge, concern and opinions of five groups.

The department solicited thirty-nine participants including active hunters and other wildlife conservationists for the study. The focus groups were held in Phoenix, Payson and Tucson. Although anecdotal by nature, the report offers input and guidance on how the department will continue to communicate and engage the public on its existing voluntary program about lead and wildlife.

The voluntary program began in 2003 to help in the recovery of the endangered California condor. In 2009, approximately 85 percent of the hunters in the condor region took voluntary lead reduction actions by either using non-lead ammunition or removing the carcass and entrails of harvested game from the field to prevent scavenging by condors.

"The Arizona Game and Fish Department has no intentions to ban or regulate lead for hunting or angling use," said Director Larry Voyles. "However, this subject continues to gain increased attention by wildlife professionals, industry, academia, and citizens nationwide. As the state's wildlife agency and through the direction of the Commission, we have a responsibility to stay informed on this issue and communicate accurate and factual information with our constituents."

Effectively gathering the viewpoints and opinions from our constituents was important to help inform future planning needs for potential communications, educational outreach programs, or needs for further assessment.

Voyles added, “One of the first steps in this long-term process is asking our customers what they think.”

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies have identified “ingested lead and wildlife” as an important issue in wildlife management. As the state’s wildlife management agency, Arizona Game and Fish has a responsibility to educate ourselves on this issue and share this knowledge with our constituents. The next step is to engage the public in a dialogue regarding ingested lead and wildlife, gather feedback from the public, and present the results to the Commission in late summer or early fall, 2010.

Note: The Arizona Game and Fish Commission’s direction to the director of the department on this issue is stated in Goal and Objective #8:

“The Department will expand our dialogue with the public regarding wildlife mortality due to ingested lead and possible voluntary strategies to minimize that mortality over the next 10-15 years. The Commission understands that any meaningful progress on this issue will only occur with full public participation and cooperation, and successful voluntary or incentive-based programs developed in cooperation with the conservation community, the sporting goods industry and state wildlife agencies.”

The director’s goals and objective are set annually during regularly scheduled public commission meetings. The Game and Fish Commission, established in 1929, is comprised of five members (serving staggered five-year terms) appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. No more than one commissioner may be from any one county. No more than three may be from the same political party.

To learn more about the Arizona Game and Fish Department, visit www.azgfd.gov.

alternative format, please contact the Game and Fish Deputy Director as listed above or by calling TTY at 1-800-367-8939.