

**CONTACT:**

Skegemog Raptor Center
info@skegemograptorcenter.org

WEBSITE:

www.skegemograptorcenter.org

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BALD EAGLE'S DEATH HIGHLIGHTS LEAD POISONING THREAT AHEAD OF MICHIGAN DEER SEASON**Skegemog Raptor Center encourages nonlead ammunition and community support ahead of anticipated lead-poisoning cases**

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — October 26, 2026 — As Michigan approaches its regular firearm deer season, Skegemog Raptor Center (SRC) is raising awareness about the dangers of lead ammunition to Bald Eagles and other scavenging wildlife following the loss of an eagle admitted earlier this month with severe lead poisoning.

The adult female Bald Eagle was admitted on October 10 with an extremely high blood lead concentration. Although she initially lacked some of the more severe symptoms associated with advanced lead poisoning, her condition deteriorated during treatment as her blood lead levels declined. She developed significant neurological abnormalities and was humanely euthanized on October 23.

Lead poisoning can cause widespread damage to a bird's brain, nervous system, kidneys, liver, and heart. It can also interfere with digestion and cause anemia. Even when treatment reduces circulating lead, damage to vital organs is often irreversible.

DEER SEASON AND PREVENTABLE EXPOSURE

Although Michigan's regular firearm deer season doesn't begin until November 15, several hunting opportunities have already taken place, including the Liberty Hunt, early antlerless firearm season, and Independence Hunt. Tribal deer hunting seasons are also underway.

As the regular firearm season approaches, SRC anticipates an increase in lead-poisoned eagles. Bald Eagles frequently scavenge deer remains, including gut piles, unrecovered deer, and remains from butchered deer that are returned to the field. When those remains contain fragments of lead ammunition, eagles can ingest the fragments and suffer severe, often fatal, lead poisoning.

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“Even after years of treating lead-poisoned eagles, it remains difficult to watch the devastating effects this preventable condition can have on these birds,” said James Manley, Executive Director of Skegemog Raptor Center. “Lead poisoning can cause extensive damage throughout the body, and in severe cases, much of that damage has already occurred before treatment begins. Even with aggressive treatment, the chances of recovery are often very poor. That's why prevention is so important.”

WORKING WITH HUNTERS TO PREVENT LEAD POISONING

SRC encourages hunters to learn more about nonlead ammunition through its conservation partner, Sporting Lead-Free (www.sportingleadfree.org), an organization of hunters dedicated to promoting nonlead alternatives for hunting and fishing. Sporting Lead-Free provides practical information about copper ammunition and other options that allow hunters to continue their traditions while helping protect eagles and other scavenging wildlife.

SRC also recognizes hunters as important conservation partners and is grateful to those who donate venison harvested without lead ammunition. These donations provide an important food source for the raptors in the Center's care.

SUPPORT RAPTOR REHABILITATION

As Michigan approaches the busiest part of deer season, SRC is preparing for an anticipated increase in eagles suffering from lead poisoning. Treating these critically ill birds requires costly chelation medications, lead-testing supplies, laboratory diagnostics, and ongoing supportive care. SRC must have these resources available when an eagle arrives, often with little warning.

SRC is asking the community to help replenish these essential supplies now, before additional cases arrive. Donations of any amount help ensure the Center is prepared to provide immediate care to sick and injured raptors.

To support these efforts, visit: <https://www.skegemograptorcenter.org/donate>

Preventing lead exposure is the most effective way to protect eagles from this often fatal condition. SRC hopes that increased awareness and cooperation with Michigan's hunting community will help reduce future cases.

ABOUT SKEGEMOG RAPTOR CENTER

Skegemog Raptor Center rescues, rehabilitates, and releases raptors, advances research on raptor health and human impacts, and inspires communities to protect the ecosystems we share.

For more information, visit www.skegemograptorcenter.org.

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