

Legislation to Protect Loons Signed by Governor, Becomes Law

We did it! Governor Maggie Hassan has signed Senate Bill 89 into law. SB 89 bans the sale and freshwater use of lead fishing sinkers and jigs weighing one ounce or less. This tackle is the largest known cause of New Hampshire adult loon mortality.

Thank you again to all of our members, volunteers and partners who have played a crucial role in securing this victory for our loons. Your calls and emails to senators and representatives and your attendance at hearings were pivotal to this outcome.

Sometime in the coming weeks, a small group of volunteers and staff representing the Loon Preservation Committee, NH Lakes Association, and NH Audubon will gather for a ceremonial bill signing with the Governor to commemorate this important legislation's enactment into law.

We are tremendously grateful for the work of our legislative champions this year, who have carried on the late Senator (and former LPC board member) Carl Johnson's tradition of passionate advocacy for our loons.

Senator Forrester has worked tirelessly in support of this bill, as have its cosponsors: Senators Bob Odell (R-Lempster), Martha Fuller Clark (D-Portsmouth), John Reagan (R-Deerfield), Andrew Hosmer (D-Laconia), David Pierce (D-Etna), Peggy Gilmour (D-Hollis), and David Watters (D-Dover); and Representatives Ben Lefebvre (D-Grantham), David Kidder (R-New London), Lynne Ober (R-Hudson), and Neal Kurk (R-Weare).

Representatives Lefebvre and Kidder provided tremendous time, effort, and leadership to the House efforts to pass this bill. Thank you also to Representatives Kurk and Ober, who were important advocates for SB 89. Finally, thank you to House Majority Leader Steve Shurtleff (D-Penacook) and Representatives Steve Ketel (D-Dover) and John Manley (D-Bennington), who provided strong

remarks in support of the bill on the House floor.

Senate Majority Leader Jeb Bradley (R-Wolfeboro), another longtime and effective advocate for our loons and other wildlife, was also instrumental in the passage of SB 89. Senator Bradley's efforts to protect our state's loons date back to 1994, when he (as a Representative) and Rep. Rose Marie Rogers (D-Rochester) sponsored the first bill (HB 1527) to restrict the sale and freshwater use of lead fishing sinkers and jigs. Opponents defeated that bill.

In 1998, Rep. Bradley and the late Senator Carl Johnson sponsored a similar bill (HB 1196). Unfortunately, at the urging of opponents, that bill's protective standard was greatly reduced by the Committee of Conference that reconciled differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. As a result, the bill signed into law banned only the use of lead sinkers *weighing* one ounce or less and lead jigs *measuring* one inch or less on NH's lakes and ponds.

In 2004, Sen. Johnson sponsored successful legislation (SB 487) that banned the sale of these lead sinkers and jigs and expanded the ban on their use to include all freshwaters of the state. Then, in 2005, we had to defend our legislative achievements for loons against a bill to weaken restrictions on lead sinkers and jigs (HB 211). Fortunately, we succeeded.

Still, by 2011, it became clear that opponents' efforts to limit the 1998 bill's restriction on lead jigs had reduced that bill's protective standard to a point of ineffectiveness. Lead fishing sinkers and jigs caused nearly half (49%) of the NH adult loon mortality between 1989 and 2011, and the majority of these lead-related deaths were due to currently legal lead jigs.

While the one ounce or less weight standard for lead sinkers is sufficient, the one inch or less length standard for prohibited jigs has proven completely inadequate. All of the lead jigs removed from dead NH adult loons have measured well over one inch, and most have measured more than two inches.

Effective June 1, 2016, SB 89 will remedy our current

law's major deficiency by banning the sale and freshwater use of lead sinkers and lead jigs weighing one ounce or less. Implementing the same standard for prohibited lead sinkers and lead jigs will make the law adequate and clear. The three-year phase in period gives anglers and retailers time to transition to non-lead tackle.

It has taken nearly two decades and an incredible team effort to secure the vital protections for loons finally signed into law this year. These protections will help ensure that the outstanding work of many volunteers to rebuild NH's loon population will not be erased by easily preventable lead mortality.

The Loon Preservation Committee (LPC), NH Lakes Association (NH LAKES), and NH Audubon have worked closely together in support of SB 89. Thank you again for the valuable role that you--our members, partners, and volunteers--have played.

Have a safe and pleasant 4th of July weekend, and please enjoy the loons that you have done so much to protect. Thank you for your past and continued support!

Sincerely,

Harry Vogel
LPC Executive Director