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HEADLINE: Lead shot hunting debate mishandled

BYLINE: the TH Editorial Board

BODY:

where we stand When lawmakers passed dove hunting, they should have made time to sort out the lead shot issue. When Iowa dove hunters take to the timber next month, whether they are packing lead ammunition will be up to them. That might not be what's best for the environment, but that's where the debate landed after several volleys. Here was a case of a poorly implemented policy if ever there was one.

If you blinked last March, you might have missed the House Republicans approving a dove hunting measure and Gov. Terry Branstad signing it into law. It all happened quickly and without an opportunity for public comment. Lawmakers rejected amendments, including one that would have prohibited the use of lead shot. Rep. Rich Arnold, R-Russell, who floor managed the bill, said the Natural Resources Commission could establish those kind of rules. So it did. The Iowa Natural Resources Commission began hearing public comment on the lead shot issue in May. Those in favor of the ban say the lead fragments can cause lead poisoning to animals in their environment, or be ingested by eagles and other animals that feed on remains left behind by hunters. Two-thirds of states ban lead ammo in some situations. Lead shot was federal banned in waterfowl hunting in 1991. Those who oppose the ban say so-called "nontoxic" shot can cost about a third more than lead. The National Rifle Association and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance believe the lead ban is a veiled attempt to discourage hunting by increasing the cost. The commission weighed those arguments and voted 7-0 to ban lead shot. But that wasn't the last word. A legislative panel said the decision was beyond the commission's responsibility and sent the matter back to the Legislature to deal with next year. That means lead is legal for this season. Branstad backed up that position this week saying the Natural Resources Commission greatly overstepped its bounds in voting to ban lead shot, even calling it an abuse of power. That seems a little strong. After all, let's recall that one of the sponsors of this bill said the specific rules would be best left to this commission. And when the commission started holding public hearings on the great lead shot debate in May, no one spoke up and said it wasn't their decision to make. Given the fact that the federal government found lead dangerous enough to ban from waterfowl hunting nearly two decades ago, there must be some merit to the argument for the ban. Though the danger of lead poisoning in the environment of dove hunting is more difficult to discern, it would seem in creating a new hunting season, the state would adopt rules that reflect the way the trend is moving. Either way, it's a discussion worth having, and it should have been had in the first place. When we as a state decided to undo a nearly century-old

ban on dove hunting, we shouldn't have been in such a rush so as to have no time to determine the rules that would govern that sport. Whether banning lead shot is the right way to go is at the very least worthy of discussion. The one group that did take the time to examine the issue found unanimously in favor of the ban - and then was overruled and backhanded by the governor. That's a disappointing start to this newest hunting season. Editorials reflect the consensus of the Telegraph Herald Editorial Board.

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