

Recommendations from the Western Bat Working Group for addressing White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in western North America 4-29-08

In 2007, some 8,000 to 11,000 bats died in several cave hibernacula in the vicinity of Albany, NY— more than half the wintering bat population in those caves. Many of the dead or dying bats had a white fungus on their nose, thus the mysterious disease was dubbed White Nose Syndrome (WNS). In 2008, biologists have documented symptoms associated with WNS in hibernating bats in New York, southwest Vermont, northwest Connecticut, and western Massachusetts.

At least one of the affected species, the Indiana bat, is protected by the US Endangered Species Act. Little brown bats have sustained the largest number of deaths, although northern long-eared, eastern pipistrelle, small-footed myotis and other bat species also have been affected.

Bats with WNS often have a white ring of fungus around their muzzle and their wings or tail membrane. It is not known whether the fungus is causing the deaths or whether it is symptomatic of disease. There is no evidence that people are affected by WNS, but they may transmit the fungus between caves or mines.

To date, there is no documentation of WNS in the West. However, until we have a better understanding of WNS, we ask that anyone entering roost sites, including caves, mines, buildings, bridges, and other structures, take precautions to prevent the possible spread of WNS and be attuned to evidence of WNS. To this end, we provide the following recommendations for the western US, Canada, and Mexico:

- Individuals (such as those from grottos, minerals personnel, bridge engineers, or facilities personnel), who frequent bat-roosting habitat need to be aware of the symptoms (see links at the bottom of this advisory).
- Avoid unnecessary entry to known bat roosts until there is a better understanding of WNS and how it is transmitted.
- Do not enter a western roost site with equipment or clothing that has been exposed to eastern (east of the Mississippi River) roost sites without following a decontamination protocol (see USFWS website: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html#containment>).
- If you travel from the west to visit eastern roost sites, particularly caves and mines, take disposable clothing, footwear, and gear that you can discard in the east before returning west to avoid potential transportation of contaminants. Also, avoid contamination of your vehicle by changing out of clothes used in eastern sites and disposing of or sealing them prior to getting in your vehicle.
- Post information on WNS at popular cave sites and include decontamination requirements for clothing and equipment previously exposed to eastern sites as part of entry permits.

- If WNS is suspected at a roost site, contact your state or provincial wildlife agency or local USFWS office immediately, as well as inform your WBWG State or Provincial Representative (see www.wbwg.org for representative contact information).
- Cavers are critical partners for identifying and monitoring bat roosts associated with caves. Partner with local grottos to collaboratively identify and monitor cave roosts and encourage cavers to keep detailed cave logs.
- Work with your federal, state, and provincial wildlife agency personnel to establish a centralized baseline for roost-site location information. Inclusion of sites that are most likely to be entered by people who also have been exposed to eastern roost sites is especially important so that they can be monitored.
- Engage your federal, state, and provincial wildlife agency personnel to establish a legitimate and credible monitoring strategy for roost sites, especially those sites with the highest risk of potential contamination such as popular caving sites that serve as hibernacula. It is important that any monitoring effort is conducted by qualified, trained personnel to avoid inappropriate intrusions on bats that also can cause bat fatalities.

For specific information and current status of WNS, please see the following links:

| Western Bat Working Group www.wbwg.org

National Speleological Society

<http://www.caves.org/committee/conservation/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm>

US Fish and Wildlife Service WNS http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html

Bat Conservation and Management <http://www.batmanagement.com/cgi-bin/yabb2/YaBB.pl?num=1199773599/0>