



News Release

U.S. Forest Service

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOREST SERVICE ISSUES CAVE AND MINE CLOSURE ORDER TO PROTECT ENDANGERED BAT SPECIES

Milwaukee, Wi. – In response to the uncontrolled spread of white-nose syndrome affecting bat species, all caves and mines on National Forests in the Eastern Region have been closed by Forest Service managers for one year. The closures will allow scientists time to study the white-nose fungus and learn more about how it is spread.

Nearly 500,000 bats have died as a result of white-nose syndrome in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states, including almost 25,000 endangered Indiana bats. White-nose syndrome is named for a white fungus that appears on the faces, ears, wings, and feet of hibernating bats. The disease causes bats to come out of hibernation severely underweight, often starving before the insects – on which they feed – emerge in the spring. Once a colony is infected, it spreads rapidly and has the possibility of killing over 90% of bats within the cave in just two years.

Scientists believe the fungus is spread bat-to-bat as they cluster in caves and mines, and there is evidence that it can be unknowingly transferred from one cave/mine to another on the footwear and gear of humans. There have been no reported human illnesses attributed to the fungus. Infected caves and mines may not show obvious signs of its evidence.

"White-nose syndrome has already infected mines on the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont and caves on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia," said Logan Lee, Deputy Regional Forester. "Staying out of caves and mines is the one thing we can do right now to slow the further spread of the fungus. We will enforce this closure order in hopes of protecting some of the largest bat populations in the United States."

Many national forests in the Eastern Region are home to several species of bats, including the federally endangered Indiana bat, Virginia big-eared bat, and gray bat. Bats are a natural and important part of the forests, making a significant contribution towards the control of forest and agricultural insect pests.

The Eastern Region encompasses 14 national forests and one tallgrass prairie in a 20-state area.

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Note reporters: map of white-nose syndrome and infected bats on next page.



04/22/09
Bat White Nose Syndrome (WNS)
Occurrence by County*

-  Feb. 2006: 1st detected in Schoharie Co., NY
-  Mortality- Winter 2006/07
-  Confirmed in 2007/08

Fall/Winter/Spring 2008/09

-  Confirmed
-  Likely but not confirmed

*Confirmed
 Confirmed by state.

*Likely
 WNS symptoms reported but not confirmed by state.

