

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2009

**National Speleological Society
Huntsville, Alabama**

White Nose Syndrome Policy Statement

The National Speleological Society's Board of Governors today issued the following statement on White Nose Syndrome following its spring meeting last weekend in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The National Speleological Society (NSS) has taken a leadership role over the past year in addressing the crisis of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) that is currently killing bats across the Northeastern United States. WNS has now spread to the Mid-Atlantic Region and threatens to spread farther, endangering bat colonies and even bat species, as well as cave ecosystems.

The NSS believes it and its 12,000 members must continue to lead, providing our expertise and resources in collaborating with the federal and state wildlife officials, scientific researchers, cave conservancies, and other non-governmental organizations who are working on WNS.

The NSS' goals in this matter are the following:

- To help determine the cause of WNS and limit its spread in the interim;
- To protect the bats and other fauna and flora which live in the caves on the NSS Nature Preserves and the caves and preserves themselves;
- To protect the strength of the NSS itself and its internal organizations, especially its local grottos.

In furtherance of these goals, the NSS Board of Governors:

- Voted to add an additional \$10,000 to the WNS Rapid Response Fund. Previously, the NSS has raised and expended nearly \$30,000 in support of four separate research projects to help determine the cause of WNS;
- The Rapid Response Fund has recently supported additional research to specifically test decontamination protocols on caving equipment, including rope and other load-bearing textiles;
- Urges our members and internal organizations to contribute to the WNS Rapid Response Fund, and is extremely grateful to those who already have given;
- Has decided to close the caves on its Preserves within the 17 state region covered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Advisory of March 26, 2009, until May 15, 2010. This date may be changed based upon science and management considerations at the time. Cavers are directed to contact the specific Preserve manager for local exceptions and the status of the surface Preserve, which in many cases remains open. The caves may be accessed for WNS research.

- Asks cavers to honor all cave closures requests on private and government properties;
- Asks cavers to follow the USFWS decontamination protocols found at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html>, and especially do not use caving clothing or gear that has been used in the advisory region outside the region, or in a WNS-free cave.
- Will work, through the WNS Liaison, with the USFWS to improve the efficacy of their cave advisory of March 26, 2009 toward our common goal of limiting the spread of WNS.
- Voted to provide the NSS WNS Liaison committee with \$5,000 to support its work, including the development and distribution of educational outreach materials to the public locally and more widely through the show caves network;
- Asks NSS members and internal organizations to take the lead locally in educating the public on WNS, including groups such as the scouts, camps, church youth groups, and other outing clubs, using the materials developed and provided. The NSS recognizes that only five per cent of cave visitation is by organized cavers, and that our members are looked to by their local communities for advice on safe and conservation-minded caving. Making a special effort to seek out and maintain contact with non-organized and casual cavers, informing them of WNS and how they can help is an important leadership role for the NSS and for our individual members.
- Asks NSS members to assist local cave conservancies and other land managers in addressing the challenges of WNS and appropriate cave visitation;
- Urges cavers to volunteer to assist in WNS-related research projects. Our knowledge and skills in the underground environment can provide valuable and necessary resources to researchers, and provide needed match for grant funding that allows the research to move forward.
- The NSS is developing a communication plan to promote the NSS, its goals and objectives and to maintain a positive reputation of cavers with the media

The NSS continues to recognize the serious nature of the WNS crisis and it's role as a leader toward finding a solution. Please refer to the NSS Web Site at the following link <http://www.caves.org/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm> for current detailed information. It also recognized that not all cavers or parts of the country have yet experienced the ravages of WNS, and the ensuing limiting of access to caves. By understanding that we are all partners, we believe we will enhance and expedite a solution to WNS and the return to normal cave access and caving activities.

NSS Mission Statement

The purpose of this Society shall be to promote interest in and to advance in any and all ways the study and science of Speleology, the protection of caves and their natural contents, and to promote fellowship among those interested therein.

Gordon Birkhimer
NSS President