

MYSTERIOUS INFECTION KILLING EASTERN CAVE BATS

An infection, the nature and origin of which is presently not well understood, is spreading throughout the eastern cave region and is devastating bat populations in numerous caves.

The infection, known as “White Nose Syndrome” [WNS] for a white fungus that attaches to affected bats, was first found in a cave in upstate New York in the winter of 2007. Since that time it has spread into seven eastern states and has most recently been confirmed in caves in Virginia. In the infected caves, bat mortality from WNS has been observed to be as high as 90 per cent!

There is strong circumstantial evidence that the rapid spread of WNS has been, at least in part, due to the activities of organized cavers.

There is no evidence that WNS can infect human beings and no researchers have reported any adverse effects from handling infected bats.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has called for a 17 state moratorium on caving activities, a call that has been taken up by many organized caving groups, including VSS and ACC in our area. In addition to Virginia and Tennessee, **NORTH CAROLINA IS INCLUDED IN THE MORATORIUM AREA!**

The National Speleological Society maintains a comprehensive webpage at http://www.caves.org/WNS/WNS_Info.htm where you can get the latest information both on the scientific community’s efforts to understand the nature and origin of WNS and on the caving community’s responses to this ecological disaster. **PLEASE GO TO THE NSS WEBPAGE REGULARLY TO STAY UP TO DATE ON THE WNS SITUATION.**

In addition to the call for a caving moratorium, USF&WS has also prescribed a decontamination procedure that researchers believe can minimize the danger of spreading the infection by cavers. **AT PRESENT, THE DECONTAMINATION PROTOCOL DOES NOT SUPERSEDE THE MORATORIUM; IT IS TO BE FOLLOWED WHEN CAVING**

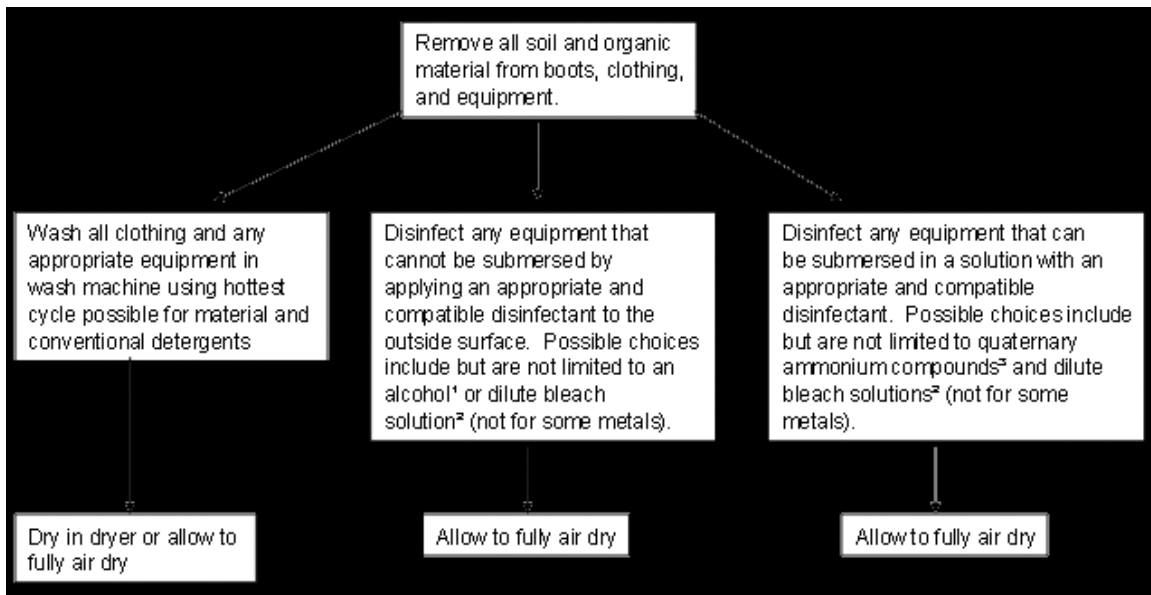
OUTSIDE THE MORATORIUM AREA. The procedure is simple, but it must be followed completely and consistently to be of any value.

EARLIER SPECULATION THAT THE FUNGUS IS KILLED BY HEAT HAS BEEN FOUND TO BE INCORRECT AND THAT HEAT, SUCH AS FROM A CLOTHES DRYER, CAN ACTUALLY CAUSE THE SPORES TO GERMINATE AND GROW. DO NOT USE HEAT AS A DECONTAMINATION PROCEDURE!!!

The decontamination procedures are fully set out and discussed at

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html>

and at various places on the NSS website. The procedures are summarized in this simple chart.



These procedures should be used consistently with any cleaning or maintenance instructions from the manufacturer of the gear being decontaminated.

FLITTERMOUSE GROTTO POLICIES RELATING TO WNS

Until further notice there will be no FMG cave trips to any caves in the USF&WS moratorium area.

Until such time as the Grotto lifts the moratorium on caving in the area affected by the USF&WS memorandum, Grotto gear shall only be used for training and other out-of-cave activities. After such time as the Grotto may authorize trips into caves in the moratorium area, Grotto caving gear shall only be used in Morrell Cave for the duration of the WNS crisis. Before being used in Morrell, and, before every trip thereafter, all Grotto gear will be completely decontaminated according to the USF&WS guidelines.

FMG members and friends are strongly encouraged to observe the USF&WS moratorium in regard to their personal caving.

In addition to having no trips into the moratorium area, FMG members and friends are strongly encouraged to completely decontaminate ALL personal caving gear according to the USF&WS guidelines before making any cave trip into any cave in the non-moratorium area and thereafter to completely decontaminate all gear immediately after each trip.

FMG members and friends are advised that they must also decontaminate their storage and transport areas for all cave gear in order for the decontamination procedures not to be compromised.

FMG members and friends are strongly encouraged educate themselves regarding the WNS crisis; to regularly visit the NSS WNS site of up to date information, and; to emphasize to other cavers – in conversations and by example – sound conservation practices in regard to WNS.