

**White Nose Syndrome Liaison Report  
to the  
NSS President and Board of Directors  
July 4, 2013**

Introduction:

The winter of 2013 has been one of continuing spread of White Nose Syndrome. States such as Tennessee and Kentucky saw a large growth in the number of counties reporting positive for WNS, and many other previously infected states reported significant declines in bat populations. This is consistent with the pattern of first identification followed a couple years later by the most serious impact on the bat populations. This winter was also the biennial Indiana bat survey sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for this federally-endangered species, but the population numbers won't be reported until this fall. As of this writing, July 4, 2013, WNS has been confirmed in 22 states and five Canadian provinces. The disease has been confirmed in seven bat species, and the fungus *Geomyces destructans* has been detected on three other species. This latter statement is based on the US Fish and Wildlife WNS website, which lists the Virginia Big-Eared bat has having been found to host the fungus. However, inquiries on my part have only gotten an email message from USFWS' Jeremy Coleman telling me that a couple of labs have confirmed this in a conference call, but there has been no published report anywhere. Thus, we have no link or citation to put on our NSS WNS website, consistent with our policy of only posting verifiable information.

Progress:

- \*Published a major WNS update in the Conservation issue of the NSS News ("Got Bats?" April 2013), including a detailed research bibliography.
- \*Assisted Dr. David Blehert in publishing a heartfelt thank you to the NSS and its members for assisting the U.S. Geological Survey with cave sediment sampling back in 2009. This one collaborative effort has resulted in at least four peer-reviewed scientific publications.
- \*Wrote an accompanying article, "The Rest of the Story," for the Blehert piece, both of which appeared in the June NSS News.
- \*Comments we filed with U.S. Forest Service Region 2 were influential in getting the Region to re-open caves this summer as part of an adaptive management plan for WNS. The Center for Biological Diversity filed an appeal, but USFS Region 2 denied it in June, and the caves will reopen.
- \*Recruited Cheryl Jones to organize a WNS session for Tuesday at this year's NSS Convention. I am unable to attend due to surgery. It went well, but the recovery is lengthy. I handed over my contacts and ideas and continue to provide input via email and phone.
- \*Gave two WNS PowerPoint presentations along with the NSS table top display and brochures: Whitney Center, Hamden CT, March 9, and Cutler Memorial Library, Plainfield, VT, May 30.
- \*Used WNS Liaison funds for NSS Sponsorship of Western Bat Working Group's April meeting to increase NSS profile in West.

\*Obama Administration for the first time proposed unique WNS funding in its 2014 budget proposal to Congress: @\$6 million in USFWS, USGS, and National Parks budgets.

\*USFWS in June announced \$950,000 in grant awards to 28 states. These are basically small grants to help offset state agency personnel time in monitoring WNS.

\*Continue to update the NSS' WNS website and correspond with agency personnel, researchers, and cavers across the country.

#### Problems:

\*WNS continues to spread, and no management techniques or scientific interventions have been found to prevent it.

\*The initial USFWS caving advisory from March, 2009, still remains outdated and unchanged. We were told in the Fall, and again in January by USFWS that a revision would be circulated for comment, but nothing has been forthcoming.

\*Similarly, USFWS told the Northeast Bat Working Group in January that Action Plans, with priorities and budgets, would be posted for all the National Plan working groups. This has not occurred, meaning that the broad outlines of the National Plan document remain, with not prioritization, and no funding specified. One practical impact has been that without a prioritization of research needs, it has been difficult for the NSS' Rapid Response Fund to target projects. We have not awarded any new grants in 2013; our current number of awards stands at 20. As of the last office report, our fund balance stood at roughly \$11,800.

\*WNS Spring Symposium was canceled due to federal budget sequestration. A smaller, invitation-only workshop is now scheduled for early September (3-6), in Boise, Idaho.

\*It is unclear how federal budget actions will affect availability of research and management funds for WNS, but my expectation is not positive.

\*In June, Monongahela National Forest (West Virginia) extended its cave closure order indefinitely. The VAR of the NSS and others had been expecting to participate in cave management planning and public input, but the order went through without any. A year ago, I drafted the VAR letter, but it received only a cursory response. I am working with local cavers, the VAR, grottos, and the WV Speleological Survey in an effort to assist the Forest Service in developing cave management plans.

#### Plans:

\*With federal funding extremely tight, the opportunities for the NSS and its affiliates to assist federal agencies in managing federal cave resources abound. This should be a focus of activities across the country. Thus, we will continue to encourage NSS members, grottos, regions, and affiliated organizations to actively participate in cave and bat monitoring with state and federal agencies. This is a mutually beneficial relationship, and can help with broader cave conservation goals and support the NSS' targeted versus blanket closure strategy.

\*Will support Jennifer Foote's attendance at the September 3-6 WNS Workshop as the NSS' Stakeholder Group Representative.

\*A repeat from last three reports, but we do need to work with NSS IT people to reorganize and update the NSS website, as well as editing down the volume in my wnsliasion email account, hopefully during and after my recovery.

\*Continue keeping the BOG advised of breaking WNS developments.

\*Continue to update the content of the WNS web page with Breaking News, Research posts, and Outreach and Education materials

#### Conclusion:

I expect little news in the coming months, with the possible exception of presentations at the September WNS conference. Several USFWS and NSS-funded projects have been underway, but results have not been published or publicly presented. I'm not aware of any earth-shaking news. Bats are not in hibernation now; the Spring WNS Symposium was canceled, and the North American Symposium on Bat Research, which normally meets in October, is meeting next month in Costa Rica in order to coordinate with the international bat conference. Late fall, we do expect to see the winter of 2013's Indiana bat survey results. It will be interesting to compare the actual field data with the projected extirpation of this species as described in the recently published USGS paper:

<http://www.caves.org/WNS/USGS%20thogmartin%20et%20al%202013.pdf> With agencies struggling for funding, my expectations are low in terms of new initiatives, or even the ability to keep up with promised work product – delays which we've already been experiencing for some time. Again, this creates a vacuum in which constructive proposals from the caving community can be positively received.

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