

To anyone wishing to assist with White-Nose Syndrome monitoring:

This winter, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are looking to the caving community to help monitor the distribution of White-Nose Syndrome (WNS) in West Virginia by conducting entrance surveys at caves to look for unusual bat behavior. Bats affected by WNS often fly out of the caves during the day, and dead bats can sometimes be found on the ground, or on rock faces, buildings, etc. near the cave entrance. This behavior is most evident later in the winter, so we suggest surveys be done between February 13 and March 14. If you would be willing to conduct surveys, please complete and submit the attached data sheet for each survey.

We are asking people not to go into the caves, but to observe the cave entrance from the outside for at least 30 minutes. Stay far enough back from the entrance that your presence will not discourage bats from exiting the cave. Biologists in Pennsylvania have noted that activity at cave entrances is greatest on warm days, especially following a cold spell, so when your schedule permits, try to pick a warm day.

When possible, it would also be best to select caves known to have a good number of bats in the winter. If you can see into the cave a ways without going into the cave, check the entrance area before you leave the site and note the number of bats near the entrance and whether or not the bats appear to be active, show any signs of WNS, etc.

Please look for dead and dying bats on the ground near the cave entrance. Photographs of the bats would be good for documenting the situation, but, at this time, we are not asking for any of these bats to be collected. Please do not touch or handle any dead or dying bats.

Please complete the table at the bottom of the data sheet indicating the time spent (including travel time to get to the caves) and miles driven to conduct these surveys. The WVDNR will be able to use the time and miles to help match a federal White-Nose Syndrome grant the state received. The grant requires that 25% of the project costs come from non-federal sources, so we need to come up with a match in order to spend the federal monies. Volunteer time can be used as part of the match.

Because these surveys will not detect all affected caves, you should assume that all caves, and the soil outside the cave entrance, are potentially affected by WNS and clean and disinfect your footwear before wearing them to another cave entrance. One option we plan to explore is the use disposable footwear covers to keep boots from getting contaminated. The most recent decontamination protocols can be found at:

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

To maximize the number of sites visited, I would encourage people to coordinate within your grotto and between grottos if possible. However, there is no harm in visiting a site more than once during the season if two groups chose to monitor the same cave. It is probably more important to get out there and survey than to spend too much time

coordinating and not getting surveys done. Most of you are probably aware that Hellhole in Pendleton County appears to be affected by WNS. The WVDNR will be monitoring this cave, so please focus your efforts on other caves.

If you suspect a site is affected by WNS, please report this information ASAP to craigstihler@wvdnr.gov rather than waiting until all surveys have been completed to turn in your forms. Please return forms for all the surveys that you complete to Craig at the address provided no later than March 31.

Note that it is not unusual to see an occasional bat flying on a warm day in the winter; these are usually red bats or big brown bats, so not every bat flying in winter is an indication of WNS. Many of these bats probably roost in buildings or other sites where temperatures are less stable than in caves. However, if you see a number of bats flying and feel something is "just not right," please report those sightings.

Thank you in advance to all who plan to help in the 2010 survey.

Sincerely,

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