

Bureau of Land Management
White-nose Syndrome Interim Response Strategy
August 2010

- 1. Stakeholder Coordination:** Effective disease management requires a coordinated and consistent approach to the extent feasible. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will coordinate with appropriate internal and external stakeholders to prevent and contain the spread of white-nose syndrome (WNS). Stakeholders may include BLM program coordinators, state and other Federal agency partners, tribes, and concerned members of the public. The BLM values partners and relies on them for most of the “on-the-ground” cave management activities that occur on BLM-administered lands. The BLM will consider this valuable coordination in developing policies and actions.

- 2. Identify Sites with Important Bat Resources:** BLM offices will utilize the best available scientific information to assess and identify sites on BLM-administered lands that have important bat resources. The purpose of this assessment is to identify sites as potential disease surveillance locations and to assess sites for closure to public entry. Best available scientific information may include, but is not limited to state/district/field office files, Federal agencies, State wildlife agencies, State abandoned mine programs, bat researchers, speleological societies and other recreational caving groups, published accounts, and local experts. Assessment of the importance of bat use at a particular site is locally subjective and should be coordinated with state fish and wildlife agencies and other stakeholders, and assessment should consider local ecological factors. Examples of factors to consider when identifying sites that have important bat resources include the potential for the species to be affected (based on what is known at the time of assessment), status of the species present, number of individuals, proximity to human populations, frequency of human entry, and timing and duration of bat use. The BLM offices will coordinate with state fish and wildlife agencies as described in 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 24.4 in the assessment of importance of bat resources. For sites with no previous bat inventories, the BLM offices should evaluate their potential value as bat habitat using existing information and best professional judgment.

Bureau policy generally limits the duration of temporary closure or restriction orders to 24 months or less. The BLM must also generally comply with the National Environmental Policy Act prior to closing public lands to certain uses or restricting specific uses of the public lands. For additional information, Refer to IM 2010-28, Requirements for Processing and Approving Temporary Public Land Closure and Restriction Orders.

The BLM state offices will identify a state WNS point-of-contact within 30 days of the issuance of this Instruction Memorandum (IM). The identified contact will work with the BLM Washington and state offices in the coordination of the BLM’s response to WNS including the collation and transfer of data, as appropriate. For outreach and communication purposes, states will coordinate with the Washington Office regarding which sites, if any, are proposed for closure. To assist the Washington Office in facilitating the BLM response to

WNS, existing site data as described in Attachment 3, Site Feature Bat Inventory Spreadsheet, will be submitted to Jessica Rubado, Division of Fish, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, with copies to Erinn Shirley, Division of Environmental Quality and Protection, Abandoned Mine Lands Program, and James Goodbar, Division of Recreation and Visitor Services within 90 days of the issuance of this IM.

3. **Emphasize Ongoing Inventory Efforts:** The BLM conducts inventory of Abandoned Mine Lands that collect bat presence information; states will continue these ongoing efforts.
4. **Site Administrative and Physical Closure:** The BLM State Director will assess which, if any, sites at risk for spread of WNS will be administratively or physically closed. It is suggested that BLM State Directors utilize a targeted approach to closure that prioritizes sites with important bat resources. The BLM offices will carefully evaluate whether restricting access to caves and abandoned mines on BLM administered lands is appropriate to minimize the spread of WNS. Before recommending closure orders, managers will coordinate with land managers at other agencies and consider the effectiveness and level of public support relative to using voluntary restrictions and applying decontamination procedures.

Closure orders for sites with important bat resources will include exemptions for persons conducting search-and-rescue operations, approved WNS related monitoring, research, surveys, underground abandoned mine surveys and closures, and those authorized for activities granted by the Mining Law. The BLM offices will require decontamination procedures to be followed by all exempted parties.

5. **Identification of Potential WNS Surveillance Locations:** The BLM state offices will recommend locations to test for the presence of WNS at a subset of the sites that have been identified as having important bat resources. To facilitate the coordination of the ongoing national interagency response effort for WNS, the BLM states are directed to identify and submit to Jessica Rubado, Division of Fish, Wildlife and Plan Conservation, the locations, if any, they recommend for testing on BLM administered land within 90 days of the effective date of this IM.

The BLM will utilize its external partners in assisting with reporting the presence of the fungus and suspected WNS afflicted bats. Examples of groups assisting with reporting information include Federal and state agencies, recreational cavers, mining claimants, field personnel, and contractors.

A number of different documents outlining protocols for surveillance and monitoring are being developed by various Federal and state groups. In addition, the surveillance working group associated with the WNS national response planning process is preparing recommendations on how to conduct these activities.

6. **Containment and Decontamination:** The BLM offices will implement the attached BLM-WNS containment and decontamination procedures (Attachment 2) immediately for all site entries. The BLM states and district offices will collaborate with stakeholders as appropriate,

including caving organizations, concessionaires, abandoned mine contractors, state agencies, and other parties to apply containment and decontamination procedures for all caves and abandoned mine feature entries. Also refer to the USFWS White-Nose Syndrome Decontamination Protocols for Researchers located at:

http://www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome/ppt/NPS_Decontamination_Protocols_Webinar_June_9_2010.ppt.

- 7. Research:** Where practicable and feasible within budgetary constraints, the BLM will participate in and support WNS research efforts.

- 8. Outreach:** The BLM will educate its internal and external stakeholders through various forms of media and also participate in the educational efforts of other governmental and non-governmental organizations. The BLM Washington Office will create an external WNS web page to inform the interested publics of our efforts concerning WNS. An internal WNS web page will be created to share information amongst the state and district offices. The BLM will participate, where appropriate, in interagency media activities in cooperation with other organizations to heighten public awareness of WNS. A BLM WNS Communication Plan is under development.