

White Nose Syndrome

December 9, 2010

CURRENT STATUS

The Bureau of Land Management in Colorado recently identified White-nose Syndrome (WNS) monitoring zones congruent with each field office boundary and is preparing to enact temporary, seasonal closures for caves and abandoned mines with known hibernating bat species to reduce the exposure to the fungus.

The BLM will continue working with public and agency partners to review the potential exposure to the fungus, the status of bat species present, and timing and duration of bat use within caves and abandoned mines. The monitoring zones will also be used as pre-determined areas for cave closures if and when WNS is detected.

Exemptions will be made for search-and-rescue operations, approved WNS-related monitoring and research, underground abandoned mine surveys and closures, and authorized use granted by the Mining Law. Decontamination procedures will be required for all exempted parties.

Currently, BLM Colorado maintains a website with information on the fungus, important links, gear decontamination procedures and a form to report evidence of WNS. Here is a link to that site, www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/recreation/White_nose_Syndrome.html.

BACKGROUND

In August, the national BLM office issued interim guidance on WNS to support data collection and local coordination with user groups. Since then, the BLM has been part of an Inter-agency National Response Plan for managing WNS in bats.

WNS is an emerging disease that affects hibernating bats. The disease is often characterized by a white fungus (*Geomyces destructans*) on the membranes, ears, and noses of affected bats. More than a million bats have died from the disease in the eastern U.S., including some species of high conservation concern. BLM Colorado supports about 16 – 18 species of bats. Bat-to-bat contact is likely the primary means of transmission for WNS, but strong circumstantial evidence suggests that humans have contributed to its spread as well.

Efforts to curb WNS are already in place under the BLM “Stay out, stay alive” campaign. This campaign discourages the public from entering underground abandoned mine features on public lands to reduce the risk of injury or death, and of transferring WNS among vulnerable bat populations. The Colorado Cave Survey and the National Speleological Society indicated they will cooperate with the BLM in developing a responsible strategy for curbing the spread of WNS.

