

## BLM New Mexico White-Nose Syndrome Strategy and Closure Update

June 2014

We continue to work with our cave specialists, biologists, managers, and interagency partners to apply the latest scientific information in WNS research to the New Mexico Response Plan, our “significant bat roost” criteria, and resulting targeted cave closures. All recommendations from our analysis will be peer-reviewed by a team of southwest bat biologists before a decision will be made by BLM management to maintain or modify our WNS policy.

Our timeline for this analysis and decision is estimated to be six months. This is based on the need for internal and interagency coordination, the peer review process, and responding to the Southwest Region’s (SWR) Freedom of Information Act Request (FOIA). On June 9, the BLM contacted the SWR’s Federal Liaison (who was joined by two SWR officers and an “interested caver”) to discuss the possibility of narrowing the scope of the FOIA, which included 13 specific requests, but the SWR members declined to modify their FOIA.

Currently, the 28 caves identified as having “significant bat roosts” in the 2011 Federal Register Notice are being managed as significant, special areas, and subject to the authority of the Code of Federal Regulations 2932, (Use of Special Recreation Permits (SRP)). CFR 2932.26 states, “BLM has discretion over whether to issue a Special Recreation Permit”. This decision will be based on the following two factors to the extent that they are relevant.... (d) resource protection... (g) such other information that BLM finds appropriate.

“Other information that BLM finds appropriate” includes the following:

- WNS has continued to spread rapidly to the west, and is now confirmed in 25 states and five Canadian provinces. Currently the western-most positive incidence of *Pd* (the causative fungus) is at the Arkansas-Oklahoma border;
- the finding of microclimates in several New Mexico caves that matches the temperature and humidity conditions for *Pd* to persist and/or grow;
- data supporting potential for human transmission; and
- Presence of “karst corridor” from WNS positive area to NM

Since the 2011 closure of 28 BLM caves due to the threat of WNS, we have allowed 318 entries into the closed Fort Stanton cave and 304 entries into other closed caves for administrative, safety, or research purposes as allowed by the temporary closure notice.