

House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Testimony submitted by Nina Fascione, Executive Director, Bat Conservation International,  
on behalf of the undersigned conservation and research organizations, regarding FY 2011  
funding to address the bat disease White-nose syndrome.

March 19, 2010

On behalf of the undersigned conservation and research organizations, with combined supporters exceeding 1,289,100, we submit the following testimony in requesting an additional \$5 million in designated federal funding to support research and management on White-nose Syndrome (WNS) in FY 2011. We also encourage approval of the pending appropriations requests from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). This funding is urgently needed to understand the cause, transmission and control of WNS and to reduce the impacts of this devastating disease.

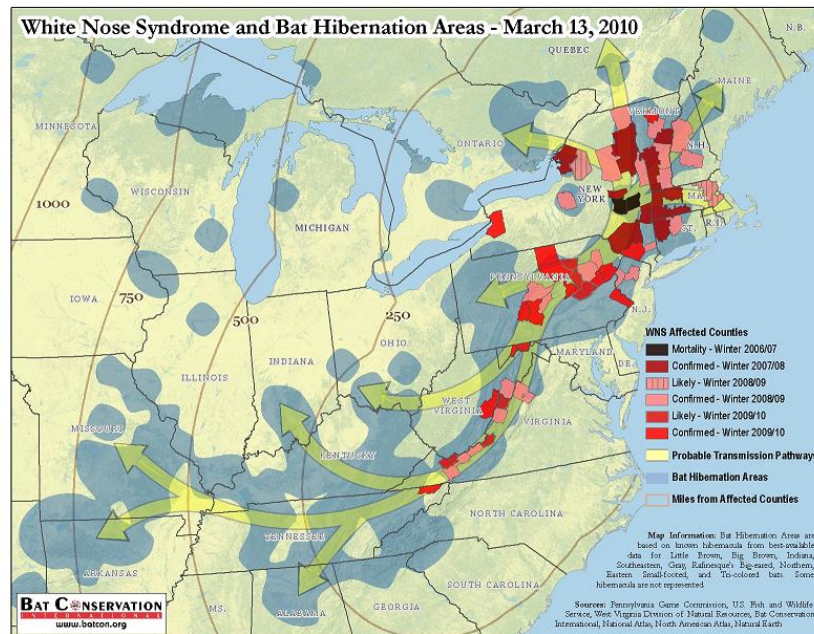
WNS is an infectious disease that has already killed at least one million bats throughout the northeastern United States. The disease is named for a newly described fungus that grows on the noses (and sometimes wings, ears and tails) of affected bats. Hibernating bats affected by WNS experience some or all of the following symptoms: 1) frequent arousals during hibernation, leading to depleted fat reserves; 2) suppressed immune system; 3) damage or scarring of the wings; and 4) abnormal behavior (for example, bats emerge too soon from hibernation and are often seen flying around in midwinter, which usually means they will freeze or starve to death).

The unprecedented mortality associated with WNS has caused “the most precipitous wildlife decline in the past century in North America,” with significant ecological and economic consequences throughout the U.S. In the northeastern U.S., where WNS was first discovered in 2006, mortality rates of nearly 100 percent are reported for some bat colonies. Over the past two years, this disease has spread rapidly beyond the Northeast, most recently reaching West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee and Maryland. It has already killed thousands of endangered Indiana bats and now threatens some of the largest hibernating populations of endangered gray bats, Virginia big-eared bats and Ozark big-eared bats. Ultimately, more than half (25 of 46) of bat species in the continental U.S. are at risk.

Bats play a critical role in maintaining the balance of nature. They are primary predators of vast numbers of insects, including pests that annually cost American farmers and foresters billions of dollars. Additionally, the droppings of bats that live in caves support unique ecosystems, including microorganisms that potentially could provide invaluable resources for detoxifying industrial wastes and producing safer pesticides and antibiotics. Loss of bats would have serious, potentially irreversible consequences, both ecologically and economically.

In June 2009, bat expert Dr. Thomas Kunz of Boston University presented testimony to Congress that outlined a need for WNS funding in excess of \$45 million dollars over a five-year period, with \$17 million in the first year. This was developed through extensive collaboration among scientists and wildlife managers deeply concerned about the possible causes and consequences of WNS. Congress appropriated \$1.9 million for WNS in the FY2010 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Recovery of Listed Species program. Of these appropriated funds, FWS distributed \$1 million to WNS research, \$450,000 to state WNS response activities and \$450,000 to FWS WNS coordination efforts.

Since October 2009, when Congress appropriated this funding, WNS reached two additional states (Tennessee and Maryland) and entered the Southern Region (Region 4) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Figure 1). Within the impacted area, more than 19 additional counties were infected in 2010, and WNS now occurs within the range of two additional endangered species (the Virginia big-eared bat and gray bat). A cave used by the largest hibernating colony of Virginia big-eared bats (in Pendleton County, WV) has been diagnosed with WNS, and we expect the largest caves used by gray bats to be impacted within the next year. At the current rate of spread, WNS will very likely be within range of the endangered Ozark big-eared bat within one year.



**Figure 1.** Map showing the current distribution and predicted spread of WNS across the landscape of the Eastern U.S. Red areas depict counties where WNS has been detected, as of February 2010. Blue areas show regions in the U.S. where major hibernating colonies are present. Yellow arrows indicate probable transmission routes as the fungal infection spreads across the U.S.

In addition to the significant risk WNS poses to designated federally endangered species, the little brown bat, a relatively common and widespread species in the U.S., could decline to the point that it warrants petitions for listing. Already this year, the Center for Biological Diversity

has petitioned for endangered species listing of two bat species (Northern long-eared bat and Eastern small-footed bat) due to threats posed by WNS and other factors.

Listing species under the Endangered Species Act is very expensive. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO-06-463R), the average cost for recovery of an endangered species is \$15.9 million: the highest estimate on record is \$125 million to recover the whooping crane. Bat species affected by WNS have broad geographic distributions and complex life histories, which likely would require even higher recovery costs. The economic consequence of additional bat listings would undoubtedly affect the operational costs of a number of industries, including defense, energy, mining, timber, agriculture, construction, transportation, tourism/recreation and others. We believe it makes better economic sense to fund WNS research and prevention now, rather than bear the cost of endangered species recovery for years to come.

The need for support of research, monitoring, and management of WNS is substantial, but we recognize that the current economic climate may not allow for funding at previously proposed levels. Nonetheless, the geographic scope and expected ecological and economic consequences of WNS will require a substantial financial response.

With an additional \$5 million in appropriated funds for WNS, resources could be available for WNS research grants targeting control and treatment, disease transmission and spread, population genetics, and other topics critical to our understanding of this devastating disease and how to combat it. Funding could also support much-needed development and implementation of federal and state WNS-response plans, critical data collection, surveillance and monitoring and program administration. Finally, resources could be available to fund public outreach and communication efforts to disseminate information to the constituents of states within the impact zone of WNS and those expected to become infected within the next few years.

Congressional support is critical because other funding sources are extremely limited. State budgets have been drastically reduced and federal agencies cannot absorb this cost within their existing resources. We strongly urge Congress to approve the pending appropriations requests from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey. A portion of these requested funds will provide some support for WNS research, management and outreach activities, but the FY 2011 federal budget requests will not be sufficient to adequately address this devastating disease. For this reason, we are requesting an additional \$5 million in designated funds for WNS.

Unless additional funding is provided in the FY2011 budget, WNS will continue to spread across the landscape unchecked, killing enormous numbers of North American bats. We desperately need designated support for WNS research, monitoring, management, and outreach. Without targeted funds, agencies may be forced to expend their budgets on internal operating costs, leaving little or nothing to truly address the cause and possible cure of WNS. As a result, we may see significant ecological and economic changes that will have a negative impact on America's taxpayers and the U.S. economy, while adding new species to the ranks of endangered and extinct animals.

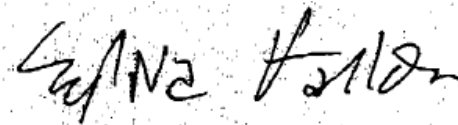
We appreciate the opportunity to share our position concerning this serious matter, and respectfully ask you to consideration our urgent request.

Sincerely yours,



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Nina Fascione, Executive Director  
Bat Conservation International



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Sylvia Fallon, Staff Scientist  
Natural Resources Defense Council



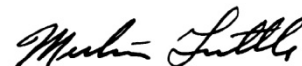
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