



Forest
Service

Southwestern Region
Regional Office

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File Code: 2600
Route To:

Date: August 30, 2010

Subject: White-nose Syndrome in bats

To: Forest Supervisors

The purpose of this letter is to transmit to you a recent guidance letter (enclosure 1), interim response plan (enclosure 2), and decontamination procedures (enclosure 3) from the Washington Office on White-nose Syndrome (WNS). As you may be aware, WNS is a condition affecting hibernating bats and has been responsible for the loss of 80-100 percent of hibernating bats in the northeastern United States within the last two years. WNS was first detected in 2006 in the state of New York. By spring of 2008, WNS was known to occur in four New England states; by 2009, it was documented in nine states; in 2010 it has spread into Canada and west of the Mississippi into northwest Oklahoma. As a result of this most recently documentation in Oklahoma, I feel it is important to immediately begin addressing this issue in Region 3.

The primary causal agent for WNS is considered to be the *Geomyces destructans* fungus. In addition to the presence of the fungus, it appears that the fat reserves of afflicted bats are prematurely depleted by mid winter, as opposed to persisting until spring. This depletion of fat reserves results in starvation and typically subsequent death. Although bat to bat transmission has been the focus of transmission studies, long distance jumps of WNS across the United States could have been a result of human transmission. Recent studies have shown persistence of the fungal spores on field equipment, clothing, and boots exposed to contaminated caves. In light of this information, it is imperative that individuals who must enter caves or abandoned mines follow the containment and decontamination procedures described in enclosure 3. Please read these procedures carefully. At this time, I am asking that these procedures be applied immediately for visitors to show caves. Furthermore, decontamination at all FS abandoned mines and caves must be implemented by **October 1, 2010**.

You may be aware that Regions 8 and 9 have been under emergency cave and mine closures for some time. Most recently (July 27, 2010) Region 2 issued an emergency closure order for all caves and mines. At this time, I am working with our state and federal agencies (New Mexico and Arizona Game and Fish Departments, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and others), tribes, and caving communities to gather information for the development of a response plan and a communication plan for our Region. I am also working closely with leadership of these agencies to decide what approach Region 3 will take regarding potential cave and mine closures. I hope to make a decision regarding this matter in the near future. Once a decision is made, I will inform you immediately and will provide supporting documents and information to assist you in meeting the expectations outlined in the WO WNS letter.



If you have any questions/concerns regarding WNS, please contact Don DeLorenzo, Director WFRP at (505) 842-3260 or Bobbi Barrera, Regional TES Program leader at (505) 842-3194 or blbarrera@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Corbin L. Newman, Jr.
CORBIN L. NEWMAN, JR.
Regional Forester

Enclosures (3)

cc: Daniel Rael
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