

**INTERAGENCY RESPONSE PLAN FOR NEW MEXICO
WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME (WNS)
November 8, 2010
Albuquerque, NM – BLM District Office**

In attendance were the following:

NAME	GROUP	E-MAIL	Phone Number	If WNS help is needed I am interested
William Merhege	BLM	bill_merhege@nm.blm.gov	505-954-2168	
Bobbie Barrera	USFS			
John Corcoran	FSCSP	John_J_Corcoran@msn.com	505-892-9651	Yes
Kayce Cook Collins	NPS	Kayci_cook@nps.gov		
Dorothy Corcoran	FSCSP	cavergma@gmail.com	505-892-9651	Yes
Lee Skinner	FSCSP	skinner@thuntek.net	505-293-5723	Yes
Susan Bryon	AP	smontoy@sp.org	505-822-9022	
Jennifer Foote	NSS	bigredfoote@yahoo.com		
Pete Lindsley	FSCSP/NSS	caverpete@gmail.com	505-918-1978	Yes
Nancy Rose	USFS			
Steve Peerman	FSCSP/SUR	gypcaver@comcast.net	575-521-8630	Yes
Jim Stuart	NMDG&F	james.stuart @state.nm.us	505-476-8107	
Jim Everett	SURNSS	nmcaver@comcast.net	505-888-2456	
Tom Buekley	USFWS	tom_buckley@FWS.gov	505-248-6455	
Cindee Watson	USFWS	cyndee_watson@FWS.gov	512-490-0087	
Clay Bowers	NMSLO	clay_bro@slo.state.nm.us	505-827-5096	
Diana Northrup	UNM	dnorthrup@unm.edu	505-277-5232	Yes
Kaitlyn Hughs		KJHughs@unm.edu		Yes
Joe Hummel	FSCSP	<u>Caversx2@yahoo.com</u>	505-466-3355	Yes
Paul Barrett	USFWS	<u>paul_barrett@fws.gov</u>		
Peter Youngbauer	NSS	wnsliaison@caves.org	802-272-3802	Yes
Tom Gow	BLM	Tom_gow@blm.gov	505-761-8900	

After introductions, Bill asked that those individuals from the grottos take a case of de-contamination chemicals that have been made available to them.

Kayce Cook-Collins indicated that the purpose of the meeting is to talk about how the New Mexico response plan came to be and what the overall objective is. Everyone present received a copy of the plan. The plan is about working together as agencies and interested parties to make sure that the bat populations in NM don't suffer the horrible declines that have been seen in the eastern part of the United States. The agencies have spent the last three months working together to discuss issues that were brought up in the last meeting about advancing research. Questions and answers have come back and they are looking to see how they can best be approached by the agencies. The plan is just the strategic level and there is still a lot that has to be done. This is just the beginning and the agencies will all have to take a different approach depending on agency policy and so forth.

Another reason for holding a meeting tonight is to discuss how the agencies can be helped with human power that they do not have. For example where are the significant bat roosts? She knows that there is a lot of knowledge in the room and it would be great to share information so they can further protect the bat populations in the state.

Finally who is willing to work with the agencies to implement the plan and where will the action be taken?

Kayce said Bill Merhege would give an introduction as to how the plan is going to shape up and Bobbie Barrera will go through the plan. Kayce asked that questions be held until Bobbie has finished.

Bill asked if significant bat roosts could be identified after the plan is reviewed. There is a process and a form will be sent out to those individuals that are interested in assisting.

Bill said that back in July, the combined agencies met in Carlsbad, Las Cruces and Albuquerque and his personal opinion was that they were three of the best public meetings he's been associated with in a long time. They received constructive and helpful comments. He learned a lot from the public, agencies and cavers. Basically the result and the comments from those meetings are in the plan.

The response plan has the most current research that is out there and each agency has their own plan. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to back out of the process and go through a national plan, so they are now an interested party instead of a cooperating agency. Part of the process is to have an inter-agency working team who will take a scientific look at the three options that were discussed back in July. Back in July it was no closure, total closure or something in between. They went with something in between. Everything has to be considered. Each agency does things a little different and has their own set of rules. What the plan does is address concerns that resource managers have of the disease and spread of the fungus and where to go with it if it gets to New Mexico and to the bats that are on the endangered species list in New Mexico.

At this point Bobbie Barrera went through the plan. This plan is an interagency effort. The federal co-operators include BLM, USFS and NPS. State cooperators are NMDGF and NM SLO. The USFWS does not own a lot of land and have closed all their caves. It does not mean that they are not an interested party. While all the agencies agree on the plan they might be operating it a little differently in terms of what might be closed for various reasons.

The plan is a pre-fungus plan for New Mexico. A set of objectives has been established and the primary objective is to implement management for the winter of 2010-2011 that will focus on preventing human transmission of the fungus into New Mexico.

The Interagency Communication Team will educate the public about the fungus and the importance of bats. They will create an e-mail list of interested parties and provide updated information, presentations and a web page as an avenue to get the information out to the public. The plan is to avoid the spread of the disease and early detection.

Agencies have implemented decontamination requirements before entering caves. Agencies have decided on actions depending on policy and have determined that access to caves and mines be closed to bat roosts and be approved to researchers and others only when decontamination and gear dedication procedures are followed.

Discussion and Questions

Are there other mammals or insects affected by the organism other than the bats?
Not to their understanding.

There are caves on tribal lands. Have any attempts been made to contact the pueblos or reservations about the problem and get them involved? They met with Acoma on August 23 and there were representatives from BIA, Acoma and Laguna Pueblo. They have the same concerns about protecting the bat populations too. They have also prepared an internal document that contains tribal considerations. Fish and Wildlife is hosting a workshop and tribal liaisons have been invited.

Member of the audience said he sees in the plan if the fungus arrives in the state what can be done but he does not see anything if there are changes. Bobbie said the plan is pre-white nose syndrome and is adaptable. They do plan on writing a post white nose syndrome plan.

Does the plan address Carlsbad Caverns because of the huge bat populations?
Kayce said the plan is not written for specific areas yet. The visitor area is not located where they would come in contact with the bats. They will be looking at the decontamination process that Mammoth Cave has in place. They have not implemented anything for tours in the parks yet. Mammoth Cave has a decontamination station in the visitor center.

What does "submerge gear for 15 minutes imply?" Is it intended to be part of the protocol?
It is USFWS protocol. Bill said the plan may change depending on circumstances.

Diana Northrup commented that you can cause more harm by not wanting to cause harm to the bats. She has found some gear that works and that can be decontaminated easier than other. She is experimenting with some equipment that is easier to clean.

Regarding emergency closures there should be something in the document that says it will be re-evaluated at some point.

Bill indicated that if the fungus shows up in the state the plan will be re-evaluated. There is a lot of research going on and at some point it will have to change. Something had to be done real quick or the issue would have been total closures.

Diana said it would be good to meet every 6 months to see what is going on. Bill said maybe even after the winter to see if any bats show up dead.

Diana asked what else is going on in the state and who should they coordinate with. Bobbie said this is something that has not been addressed in the state yet.

Bobbie said she thinks that the National Response Plan has a component part that tells they are intending an implementation in certain states. In this respect New Mexico is ahead on that they are looking at the implementation plan on a statewide level. She feels that New Mexico could come up with some sort of share point site or data base as they tier down from the National Response Plan.

Is it true that in the State of Minnesota, caves and abandoned mines are closed off to bat colonies as a management practice. Bobbie said she did hear that exact thing.

Is anyone working on a temperature range where this is not going to be found? Diane said they are doing fungus cultures at El Malpais and what grows at 6 degrees. There are literally hundreds of species of organisms that will grow at 6 degrees.

Do u think it might be useful to have a dead bat registry where people can report to an agency so it can be further investigated? NMDG&F periodically gets those calls. NMG&F said they generally don't act as a depository for that. There is a lot of concern but the State Department of Health will test animals occasionally. If there is not a human connection to WNS they don't get involved.

Diane said they are finding a lot of dead bats in El Malpais but nothing points to WNS.

If private landowners have caves and notice that there is a severe die off, there should be a place they could contact in there are concerns.

Gentleman noticed that bat colonies have been found in the town of Lincoln in buildings. He does not know if they are hibernating species.

Bill said that the State Director will probably meet with the new Land Commissioner after January and discuss this with him.

Ft. Stanton study is using a cave that knows it has hibernating bats. Decontamination procedures are subject to interpretation. Another aspect is that procedures from USFWS do not address what happens inside a cave. Should they use something on and not open their packs so it doesn't contaminate what is inside. There are a lot of issues that go beyond the decontamination protocol. It might be worthwhile to develop some guidelines for cavers to follow.

Another scenario is where should decontamination be done? In the entrance area of the cave? What about the airflow. Should there be a guideline as to where it should be done?

It might depend on the individual cave.

Diane said they put everything in a bag before getting into their vehicle. Diane said the bats are more transmitters than humans.

Member from Ft. Stanton Cave said they would like to work with BLM to see if they can come up with protocols that follow what is being mirrored in the plan at Ft. Stanton.

Bill said the plan could be tweaked if needed.

Caver said he is not sure what they are supposed to do. It is not clear. They will have contaminated gear that they can use in the same cave time and again. If you are going into multiple caves then it is a problem.

He understands that there are recommendations using decontamination product then what do you do with the decontamination containers.

Diane said you have to constantly think about what you are doing with the gear.

Bat researchers are grappling with all kinds of issues.

What have they done with the research in Texas? NMDG&F said most of these species are migratory.

Diane asked what is the funding for research?

USFWS said they just got funded for some projects and it should be on their web site. It is congressional monies. More information can be found on the USFWS web site.

The majority of cavers visiting a cave are grotto members and are dedicated cavers and will try to save the bats. How can they reach out to folks who are not members? It is not believed that humans are the cause of the spread of the fungus.

Caver said she thought that would be stated in the permit when they apply.

Information given at parks would help. Stores where gear is sold to cavers would be a good place to hand out information.

Bill asked if there is anyone here that would like to provide information on where there are bat roosts to please see him after the meeting.

WNS information including protocols should be passed out as soon as it can so it can be followed through.

There has been at least 2 major articles in the Albuquerque newspaper.

A man from Vermont said they start by giving the youth information. People differ with their views and the location they live in. In the Virginia's now, people are decontaminating all the time. Prevention is the main issue. If you have a New Mexico caver going into another NM cave he does not see the point in decontamination. It is a waste of chemicals. On the other hand he would make sure that no one has been near caves with WNS that could bring the stuff here. The thing is to practice caution. Do you have a place where you could interface with the public? They just did a presentation for 50,000 boy scouts on

WNS. Go to the gear stores and any community functions. Cavers are some of your best source to get the information out.

Diane asked if they know if the fungus is in the dirt here. No one knows for sure.

Man from Vermont mentioned that he worked on a project collecting sediment samples. The USGS got 850 samples and they ended up with 19 samples where four of them from White Nose sites had the spores in the sediments. The protocol was to take these samples directly from the sediment next to or underneath hibernating bats. They were taken concurrently. Samples taken from sites that did not indicate the White Nose did not show any fungus. There is a USGS Report that was published in October.

If they have a cave that meets the criteria, when will they implement the plan and start the cave closures?

Nancy Rose, USFS, said she thinks it will be on a forest by forest basis. They are working towards that direction now. It just depends on the different forests and one thing they have is disparity about caves in the national forest. In the Cibola where she works she can't tell how many caves they have let alone if the bats hibernate in them. It causes her great concern because with the lack of information, they can either close everything or try to find out the information. They will be talking to biologists, researchers, different grottos and anybody that has this information.

There are abandoned mines that need to be looked at and not ignored. This is a good place to do monitoring. There are monies available to close them.

Does the USFS have a GIS person that can tell you where the forest boundaries are?

Each individual forest has at least one GIS person so that there should be at least 5 in New Mexico.

Kayce said they got guidance from their National Office that if they have caves, they need to have an interim response plan done for each unit by the end of the calendar year. El Malpais has approximately 290 caves of which 285 have been closed. Five caves have been open and can only be accessed by permit. The remaining five will probably end up getting closed as a separate action from white nose simply to bring all of their caves under a uniform NPS policy.

Who would be the person to coordinate on USFS resources on the government side?

It would probably be a Public Affairs person in each forest or the regional office. It would be easier to work with the individual forest that they would want to cave on. Sheila Poole with the USFS can be contacted at 505-842-3291 for answers.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.