



File Code: 2600

Date: July 28, 2010

Route To: (2300), (2800 1900), (1600)

Subject: White-nose Syndrome

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

I want to stress the critical importance of addressing White-nose Syndrome (WNS) on National Forest System (NFS) lands. WNS is a condition affecting hibernating bats that originated in New York in 2006 and has spread westward to Oklahoma at an alarming rate. Affected hibernacula in the northeast have typically lost 80-100 percent of their hibernating bats within only two years. The Forest Service (FS) manages thousands of caves and abandoned mines used by bats for hibernation or roosting.

The *Geomyces destructans* fungus, considered the primary causal agent for WNS, is transmitted by bats. Evidence also indicates that it could be transmitted by people through inadvertent transfer from an affected site to an unaffected site, via fungal spores on their clothing or gear.

Our best responsive strategy is developing and implementing preventive and containment strategies for WNS before it spreads further. An interagency WNS National Response Plan (NRP) is being drafted under the guidance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the FS is an active participant. We will provide further guidance as the NRP develops. In the meantime, I ask that you implement the FS WNS Interim Response Strategy (see enclosure for more details):

- Work with your partners to develop and launch WNS awareness campaigns,
- Monitor, evaluate and prioritize caves and abandoned mines as habitat for bat species,
- Immediately apply decontamination procedures for visitors to show caves, and prepare for and apply decontamination at all FS abandoned mines and caves by October 1, 2010,
- Consider restricting access to caves and abandoned mines on NFS lands in your Region,
- Develop regional WNS response plans with interdisciplinary teams.

Please understand the urgency of this management challenge. Our wildlife, recreation, minerals and public relations staffs can assist you. We cannot afford to miss opportunities to slow the spread of the WNS threat to bats and the ecological and economic functions they provide.

/s/ Joel D. Holtrop

JOEL D. HOLTROP

Deputy Chief, National Forest System



Enclosures