



White Nose Syndrome: Message to Cavers (February 13, 2008)

In 2007, thousands of hibernating bats died in several New York caves. Many of the dead bats had a white fungus around their mouth and nose. Bats with this white-nose syndrome have been observed again this year in New York and Vermont. White-nose syndrome has not been observed in Oklahoma. It is unknown whether the fungus is causing the deaths or is symptomatic of a disease. Research efforts are underway to identify the cause of the outbreaks and unprecedented die-offs, and to learn how it spreads.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) applauds the caving community's strong conservation ethic and long-time support of bat conservation efforts, and we ask for your continued cooperation and assistance as we address white-nose syndrome. We request that cavers continue to observe all cave closures and advisories (none to date in Oklahoma), and to avoid caves or passages of caves containing large hibernating populations of any bat species. The Service is not encouraging individual cavers or caving groups to systematically search for bats with white-nose syndrome in caves or mines.

We ask that you take the following precautions to prevent the possible spread of white-nose syndrome ("caves" includes all caves, fissures, mines, portals, etc.):

Interim Guidelines

If, while caving this winter, you observe a hibernating bat with a white muzzle or other odd white, fungus-like patches, please follow these guidelines:

- Do not touch any bats (living or dead), especially those with a white muzzle or nose.
- If you have a camera with you, please take a few photographs of the potentially affected bat(s).
- Exit the cave immediately, avoiding contact with other bats.
- Contain and decontaminate your clothing, footwear, and gear following the procedures below.
- Contact Richard Stark of the Oklahoma Ecological Services Field Office (918/382-4520) or Steve Hensley, manager of the Ozark Plateau National Wildlife Refuge (918/775-9073) to report your potential white-nose syndrome observations.
- Report any dead bats found outdoors or any unusual numbers of bats outside during cold weather, especially near a cave where bats hibernate.

Containment and Decontamination Procedures

The Service asks that cavers please follow these procedures for containment and decontamination in the circumstances identified above. Prior to each caving outing, please check this Service's white-nose syndrome Web page for updates to these procedures (http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html).

- When you exit the cave, scrape or brush off any dirt and mud from your clothes, boots, and gear. When you get to your vehicle, remove your clothing, boots, and gear, put them in a plastic/garbage bag, and seal the bag closed to prevent contamination of the vehicle's interior and trunk (and subsequent re-contamination of your gear). Remember to bring extra clothes for the drive home.
- Wash your caving clothes using hot water, detergent, and a normal bleach cycle. Dry the clothes thoroughly at hot temperatures.
- Wash your boots thoroughly with detergent and then soak them in a 10 percent bleach solution (1 part chlorine bleach: 9 parts water) — soak porous boots longer than nonporous boots.
- Wash your gear thoroughly with detergent and then soak in a 10 percent bleach solution.
- Dry items in sunlight if possible.