



News Release

Monongahela National Forest

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Emergency Closure Issued for Six Caves in the Monongahela National Forest

(Elkins, WV) Monongahela National Forest Supervisor Clyde Thompson has taken the unusual step of issuing an emergency, year-round closure to public entry in six caves in the Forest in attempt to prevent the spread of a deadly disease to the bats residing there. The six caves; Cave Hollow Cave, Arbogast Cave, Peacock Cave, Big Springs Cave, Cave Mountain Cave, and Two Lick Run Cave; all harbor populations of threatened or endangered bats. These caves already had some form of seasonal closure in place to protect the bats during critical times such as hibernation or raising of young. The expansion to a year-round closure to public entry was taken because of the importance of these caves to the overall species' survival, and recent concerns with the massive die offs of bats in other northeastern states due to a little-understood fungus.

Called "white-nosed syndrome" for its appearance on the muzzles of affected bats, the disease has alarmed wildlife and other natural resource officials across the northeast. Mortality of bats from the disease has been as high as 97 per cent in some New York caves. The disease has also been found in bat populations in Vermont and Massachusetts. Unfortunately at this point biologists have not determined what causes the illness, how it is spread, or how to treat it.

Given the lack of understanding about the methods of spread, and the critical value of the six caves in the Monongahela for the endangered species which use them, Thompson followed the advice of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WV DNR bat specialists, and Forest Service biologists in issuing the year-round closure.

At this time the rest of the caves in the Monongahela remain open to spelunkers. "The members of the WV caving community have been very understanding about the urgency we feel in keeping people out of these six caves at this time," noted Thompson. "We're fortunate to have a good working relationship with both cave users and biologists who are dedicated to maintaining and protecting the bats."

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