



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST ISSUES EMERGENCY CLOSURE ORDER

Harrisburg, IL, March 24, 2009 - The Shawnee National Forest Supervisor Allen Nicholas signed an Emergency Closure Order prohibiting public access and use of all Forest caves or mines that support bat populations. The closure will be in effect for one year and includes at least nine caves on the Forest with winter and summer bat populations.

This closure order is a precautionary measure to help prevent the spread of white-nose syndrome by humans to the bat populations on the Forest. The restriction is necessary to protect state-listed and federally-listed endangered, threatened and sensitive bat species. White-nose syndrome is not known to be in Illinois yet, but it is rapidly moving in this direction.

All closed areas are posted and/or gated as closed unless authorized to protect endangered, threatened and sensitive species by prohibiting users from:

- Entering or damaging the cave;
- Causing or maintaining a campfire within 200 feet of the entrance to the cave or mine; and
- Prohibiting the free movement of any animal into or out of the cave or mine.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a disease or symptom of a disease that kills native bats in large numbers. It is identified by a white fungus that appears especially on the nose, but also on the wings, ears and/or tail of many affected bats. Although the fungus does not appear on all affected bats, they may display abnormal behaviors such as flying outside during the day in winter or you might see dead or dying bats on the ground or on buildings, trees or other structures.



For additional information on the white-nose syndrome, contact Steve Widowski at (618) 253-7114.

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