

**USDA Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region**

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**FOREST SERVICE ISSUES EMERGENCY ORDER TO CLOSE
CAVES AND ABANDONED MINES TO PROTECT BAT SPECIES
FROM FATAL DISEASE**

DENVER, July 27, 2010—Deputy Regional Forester Tony Dixon is issuing an emergency order today that will close all caves and abandoned mines on National Forests and National Grasslands in the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service: Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. The emergency closure order will be in effect beginning Tuesday, July 27, 2010, for a period of one year.

This action is in response to the spread of White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), a condition associated with the death of more than one million bats in the eastern United States. WNS was originally detected in New England and mid-Atlantic states. It has spread to states in the South and Midwest, and more recently has been found at sites in Missouri and northwest Oklahoma ([progression map of fungus spread](#))—within 300 miles of the Pike and San Isabel National Forest in Colorado.

Bat mortality of nearly 100 percent has occurred in some WNS-affected caves and mines where bats hibernate. Nine bat species are known to have been affected since 2006, including the endangered Indiana bat and gray bat.

"Given the critical threat to bat populations that WNS poses, it is urgently necessary to take aggressive pre-emptive action to slow its spread," says Dixon. "The potential for collapse of regional bat populations, and the ecological and economic impacts that could result, are critical concerns."

"The Fish and Wildlife Service has witnessed how WNS has reduced or eliminated entire bat populations in the eastern United States. These measures will ensure regional bat populations continue to thrive. Bats are important to the ecological health of our landscapes, from providing natural pest control by eating harmful insects that can destroy crops and spread disease to pollinating plants and dispersing seeds," said Steve Guertin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director of the Mountain-Prairie Region.

Scientists are certain transmission of WNS is occurring bat-to-bat and cave-to-bat. Scientists also suspect transmission of WNS may be facilitated by human activity in caves where bats hibernate, because of the geographically discontinuous spread of the syndrome. People may be inadvertently transporting fungal spores from cave to cave, as fungal spores have been detected on gear exposed to affected sites.

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White-Nose Syndrome is named for a white fungus that appears on the faces, ears, wings, and feet of hibernating bats. The disease causes bats to come out of hibernation severely underweight, often starving before the insects on which they feed emerge in the spring. Once a colony is infected, it spreads rapidly and can kill over 90 percent of bats within the cave in just two years.

There have been no reported human illnesses attributed to the fungus.

The Southeastern and Northeastern Cave Conservancies, National Speleological Society and many states have closed some of their caves because of WNS. In 2009, the Forest Service closed its caves and mines in the eastern United States.

During the year-long closure of caves and abandoned mines in the Rocky Mountain Region, scientists will work to better understand the cause, spread, and management of WNS. The Forest Service continues to work with partners on statewide management strategies, and monitoring of bats and WNS.

The **U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service** is maintaining a web site with the latest information about WNS, including a list of all cave and mine closures across the United States:

http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html .



Likely WNS symptoms at Breathing Cave, Bath County, Virginia, late February 2009
Credit: Wil Orndorff, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation - Division of Natural Heritage