# Western Bat Working Group Rationale for Recommendations For Addressing WNS In Western N.A.
# 5/5/2008

The following are the rationale for the recommendations to prevent potential spread of WNS from eastern to western North America that were developed and adopted by the WBWG. In a situation like WNS, where there is a relatively sudden onset of lethal outcomes and there are more unknowns than knowns, approaches and recommendations are likely to evolve and vary in conservatism. There simply are no clear answers. The WBWG recommendations are different than those of NE FWS in 2 areas: 1) We ask that our recommendations be applied to all types of roost structures, not just caves (for which the FWS definition extends to mines and other rock features), including bridges, buildings and other structures where bats congregate and that are accessible by humans; 2) we recommend enlisting the decontamination protocol provided by the FWS for people who have had contact with bats and bat roosts east of the Mississippi before traveling west of the Mississippi to work with bats or at their roost. FWS currently focuses their decontamination recommendations to individuals moving out of the area that encompasses Vermont, NY, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The rational for "1" above is that in western N.A., we find bats roosting in a variety of structures, other than caves, mines, and rock features during hibernation. There is no indication from what we currently understand about WNS that it would necessarily be limited to bat colonies in caves so that the expansion to all roost structures is logical.

Also, if this is a syndrome limited to hibernacula, we know very little about where our bats hibernate in comparison to the east, so we're at a disadvantage for even recognizing if WNS was present in the West. Additionally, typical hibernacula we know of include tens to several hundred bats and are scattered across the west so that monitoring may be problematic.

The rational for "2" above includes the following primary elements:

- ∞ The hibernacula where WNS has been documented are populated by bats that disperse in spring to unknown areas and unknown distances. During warm weather seasons, these bats also may integrate with bats from other regions.
- ∞ If WNS is a contagion, there is at least some possibility that it could be transmitted between bats during seasons other than winter. Additionally, if it is a contagion, there is always a chance that there is a delay in symptoms or there are individuals that are asymptomatic vectors.
- ∞ Under any of the above possible scenarios, infected bats could infect sites outside of the NE, in turn, humans visiting those roosts could innocently become vectors of a contagion, before it is formally recognized or symptoms are apparent.
- ∞ Cavers, bridge engineers, mining engineers, and facilities personnel may move all over N.A. on a regular basis and we feel it is easier for them to keep in mind the

Mississippi R. than to check back with the FWS website for a current list of states of which to be aware.

The WBWG supports the NE FWS in their management and guidelines for WNS. We adopted our recommendations to complement, not contradict their guidance. The NE FWS's is focused on doing everything they can to prevent the potential spread of WNS by humans out of the NE, should it prove to be a contagion. To this end they have focused on defining an effective boundary around the NE and are applying appropriate recommendations for preventing potential human transmission. The WBWG, on the other hand, is focused on preventing human transfer of a potential contagion to western N.A. The larger scale upon which our recommendations are made, allow us to consider the possibility that a potential contagion may have already been spread beyond the NE and has gone undetected at this point in time. We consider our more conservative recommendations as complementary and as a second line of defense to the FWS recommendations. WNS is frightening mystery to anyone who works with bats and the WBWG is committed to working in concert with the FWS as well as other partners to understand and prevent the potential spread of WNS.

Recommendations from the Western Bat Working Group for addressing White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in western North America 4-29-08

In 2007, some 8,000 to 11,000 bats died in several cave hibernacula in the vicinity of Albany, NY— more than half the wintering bat population in those caves. Many of the dead or dying bats had a white fungus on their nose, thus the mysterious disease was dubbed White Nose Syndrome (WNS). In 2008, biologists have documented symptoms associated with WNS in hibernating bats in New York, southwest Vermont, northwest Connecticut, and western Massachusetts.

At least one of the affected species, the Indiana bat, is protected by the US Endangered Species Act. Little brown bats have sustained the largest number of deaths, although northern long-eared, eastern pipistrelle, small-footed myotis and other bat species also have been affected.

Bats with WNS often have a white ring of fungus around their muzzle and their wings or tail membrane. It is not known whether the fungus is causing the deaths or whether it is symptomatic of disease. There is no evidence that people are affected by WNS, but they may transmit the fungus between caves or mines.

To date, there is no documentation of WNS in the West. However, until we have a better understanding of WNS, we ask that anyone entering roost sites, including caves, mines, buildings, bridges, and other structures, take precautions to prevent the possible spread of

WNS and be attuned to evidence of WNS. To this end, we provide the following recommendations for the western US, Canada, and Mexico:

- Individuals (such as those from grottos, minerals personnel, bridge engineers, or facilities personnel), who frequent bat-roosting habitat need to be aware of the symptoms (see links at the bottom of this advisory).
- Avoid unnecessary entry to known bat roosts until there is a better understanding of WNS and how it is transmitted.
- Do not enter a western roost site with equipment or clothing that has been exposed to eastern (east of the Mississippi River) roost sites without following a decontamination protocol (see USFWS website: http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html#containment).
- If you travel from the west to visit eastern roost sites, particularly caves and mines, take disposable clothing, footwear, and gear that you can discard in the east before returning west to avoid potential transportation of contaminants. Also, avoid contamination of your vehicle by changing out of clothes used in eastern sites and disposing of or sealing them prior to getting in your vehicle.
- Post information on WNS at popular cave sites and include decontamination requirements for clothing and equipment previously exposed to eastern sites as part of entry permits.
- If WNS is suspected at a roost site, contact your state or provincial wildlife agency or local USFWS office immediately, as well as inform your WBWG State or Provincial Representative (see www.wbwg.org for representative contact information).
- Cavers are critical partners for identifying and monitoring bat roosts associated with caves. Partner with local grottos to collaboratively identify and monitor cave roosts and encourage cavers to keep detailed cave logs.
- Work with your federal, state, and provincial wildlife agency personnel to establish a centralized baseline for roost-site location information Inclusion of sites that are most likely to be entered by people who also have been exposed to eastern roost sites is especially important so that they can be monitored.
- Engage your federal, state, and provincial wildlife agency personnel to establish a legitimate and credible monitoring strategy for roost sites, especially those sites with the highest risk of potential contamination such as popular caving sites that serve as hibernacula. It is important that any monitoring effort is conducted by qualified, trained personnel to avoid inappropriate intrusions on bats that also can cause bat fatalities.

For specific information and current status of WNS, please see the following links:

Western Bat Working Group www.wbwg.org
National Speleological Society
http://www.caves.org/committee/conservation/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm
US Fish and Wildlife Service WNS http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html
Bat Conservation and Management http://www.batmanagement.com/cgi-bin/yabb2/YaBB.pl?num=1199773599/0