

Federal Register Notice of Availability: National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats

Questions and Answers

Question 1: What is the problem that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is addressing with the *Federal Register Notice of Availability: National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats*?

Answer 1: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks public comment on a national management plan for government agencies and tribes to address the threat to hibernating bats posed by white-nose syndrome.

WNS has caused the death of more than 1 million bats in eastern North America since it was first identified in 2007. WNS is confirmed in hibernacula (caves and mines where bats hibernate) or on bats in 12 states and two Canadian provinces, and is expected to continue spreading. The mobility of bats, the rapid spread of WNS, the potential for human-assisted transmission and the severity of the disease's consequences necessitate a swift national effort to avoid irreversible losses to bat populations.

The national plan is necessary to ensure coordination among the large number of agencies, organizations, institutions, and individuals involved in the WNS investigation and response.

Question 2: What is the purpose of the national plan?

Answer 2: As WNS spreads, the challenges facing wildlife managers in understanding threats to bat populations and managing WNS continue to increase. Collaboration among state, federal and tribal wildlife management agencies and NGOs is essential to the effectiveness of the collective response and ultimately to the survival of bat species across North America.

The national plan provides a framework for coordinating and managing the national investigation and response to WNS. The plan outlines the actions necessary for state, federal, and tribal coordination, and provides overall strategy for investigating the cause of WNS and finding ways to manage it.

Question 3: What agencies wrote the national plan?

Answer 3: The Service led a team of federal, state, and tribal agencies in preparing the draft plan, including:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
 - Forest Service
- U.S. Department of Defense
 - Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of the Interior
 - Bureau of Land Management

- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Geological Survey
- National Park Service
- Tribes
 - St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, Environment Division
- States
 - Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
 - Missouri Department of Conservation
 - New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
 - Pennsylvania Game Commission
 - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
 - Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Question 4: What are the critical elements of the WNS investigation and response?

Answer 4: The national plan details the elements critical to investigating and managing WNS. These elements include:

- Communications and Outreach
- Data and Technical Information Management
- Diagnostics
- Disease Management
- Etiology and Epidemiological Research
- Disease Surveillance
- Conservation and Recovery

Question 5: How will the national plan be implemented?

Answer 5: The national plan is intended to provide guidance to agencies as they make decisions related to managing their response to WNS. It will be followed by an adaptive implementation plan that identifies more specific actions, the entities responsible for implementation of each action, and cost estimates. The implementation plan will be a dynamic document that can be quickly modified in response to new information.

Question 6: What is the next step following the publication of the national plan in the *Federal Register*?

Answer 6: The Service has published the *Notice of Availability* in the *Federal Register*. The notice provides 60 days through December 26, 2010 for the public to submit comments for consideration.

Question 7: What information does the Service hope to obtain from the public?

Answer 7: The Service hopes to gather additional scientific and commercial information for consideration before the plan becomes final.

Question 8: How do I comment on the national plan?

Answer 8: The document and additional information about WNS are available online at <http://www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome/>. Comments may be submitted by e-mail to WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov; by mail to WNS National Coordinator, New York Field Office, 3817 Luker Road, Cortland, NY 13045-9348; or by fax to 607-753-9699.

Question 9: When can the Service be expected to finalize the national plan?

Answer 9: Public comments will be accepted on the proposed plan through December 26, 2010, after which the Service will review relevant scientific and commercial information for consideration before the plan becomes final in early 2011.

Question 10: Why is white-nose syndrome a concern to the Service?

Answer 10: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is dedicated to the conservation, protection, and enhancement of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. The Service is responsible for implementing and enforcing some of our nation's most important environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act. Four endangered species and subspecies of hibernating bats in the United States are already affected by or are at risk from WNS, and these bats co-occur with many other bat species in common sites. More than half the bat species living in the United States rely on hibernation for winter survival and are potentially susceptible to WNS.

Question 11: How can I find more information on white-nose syndrome?

Answer 11: Visit the white-nose syndrome website: <http://www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome/>.