

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release December 2, 1977

Levitt 202/343-5634

TWO BAT SPECIES PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED LIST

Two species of bats, whose existence depends upon fragile cave habitats, have been proposed for the endangered list, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposal, published in the December 2 Federal Register would give endangered status to the Virginia and Ozark big eared bats and determine critical habitat for the two species. Interested persons have until January 31, 1978, to comment on the proposed rulemaking.

Both of these species have been restricted to relatively small mountainous and upland areas and are dependent on a few specific kinds of caves for hibernation and reproductive activity. Both are highly intolerant of human presence and will readily abandon their roosts when disturbed.

The Virginia big eared bat population is estimated to number less than 4,000 animals centered in three separate areas in the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and eastern West Virginia, but many caves within this region have been abandoned by the bats. In the last 15 years at least five wintering colonies have disappeared in West Virginia, and only three nursery colony caves are known to remain. Numbers in those caves have also declined considerably because of repeated disturbance by people.

Monongahela National Forest personnel have placed gates on the entrances to one cave used by the Virginia big eared bat, and the National Speleological Society has passed a moratorium on entry to it. But the cave has been broken into several times, and bats later have been found dead.

The Ozark big eared bat is in even worse condition with total numbers estimated to be less than 200 individuals. It is now found in only a few caves in northwestern Arkansas, southwestern Missouri, and eastern Oklahoma.

Interested persons wishing to comment on this proposal should write to the Director (FWS/OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.