

Captive Virginia big-eared bat research project faces challenges

March 12, 2010

In 2009, the Service concluded that Virginia big-eared bats likely faced imminent danger of extinction from white-nose syndrome. The species is especially vulnerable due to its relatively small numbers and limited distribution. This year, half of the entire Virginia big-eared bat species is hibernating in areas now infected with WNS, which causes near certain death in the bats affected so far.

The Service, in consultation with more than 20 individuals from state, federal and non-government organizations, prepared the [Virginia big-eared bat plan for controlled holding, propagation, and reintroduction](#), published in August 2009. Based on the plan, the Service solicited proposals for an experimental research project aimed at learning how to care for and eventually propagate a colony of Virginia big-eared bats. The Service actively sought proposals to attempt establishing such a colony of bats.

Smithsonian's National Zoo was the only institution willing to take on this project. After careful review of their proposal, we announced funding for the project in October 2009. While licensed rehabilitators have successfully maintained individual bats, no one has ever successfully established a colony of Virginia big-eared bats. The Service knew establishing a colony of this bat species would be challenging. Despite the challenges, we moved forward with the captive research project because of a general sense of urgency as these endangered bat hibernacula were within striking distance of WNS.

Unfortunately, of the 40 bats captured and held at the Zoo's facility in Virginia, only 11 survived to March 5.

[Smithsonian news release](#).

The information the Smithsonian has provided leads us to believe they are doing everything they can to care for the remaining bats. In the face of the regrettable loss of these bats, we plan to work with independent experts to evaluate and learn from the project.

The Service is working to address WNS on multiple fronts, e.g., through funding research, through assisting states to prepare management plans and through development of a national plan. We are working vigorously with dozens of state, federal and non-government partners to do what is possible to understand and confront the WNS crisis.

[Memorandum of Understanding among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources' Section and the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park](#) (Nov. 3, 2009)

[Permit to collect and hold Virginia big-eared bats](#) (Sept. 28, 2009)