

News Release



Office of Public Affairs
4401 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203
Phone 703/358 2220 Fax: 703/358 1930

September 16, 2010

Contact: Jeremy Coleman 607-753-9334
Donita Cotter 703-358-2383
Ann Froschauer 413-253-8356
Tom Buckley 505-248-6455

National Wildlife Refuge System Closes Caves to Slow Spread of White-Nose Syndrome

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) National Wildlife Refuge System (NWR) has decided to close caves and mines and implement research and monitoring protocols in a nationwide effort to slow the spread of white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats. Acting Service Director Greg Siekaniec issued the guidance in a memo dated Sept. 2, 2010.

The Service's Southwest Region, which includes Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma, has 43 refuges, of which 8 are known to have caves. These are Ozark Plateau NWR, Sequoyah NWR, Trinity River NWR, Deep Fork NWR, Kofa NWR, San Andres NWR, Cabeza Prieta NWR, and Wichita Mountains NWR. This closure order does not place an additional restriction on these refuges since the caves were already closed to access.

First documented in New York in 2006, WNS has spread rapidly across the eastern United States, killing more than 1 million bats. Named for the white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other body parts of hibernating bats, WNS is associated with extensive mortality of bats in the Northeast.

Bats with WNS are found to exhibit uncharacteristic behavior during cold winter months including flying outside in the day and clustering near the entrance of hibernacula.

More than half of the 45 bat species living in the United States rely on hibernation for winter survival. Four endangered species and subspecies of hibernating bats in the U.S. are already affected by or are at risk from WNS.

The fungus associated with WNS, *Geomyces destructans*, has been detected as far west as Oklahoma, and is expected to continue spreading. While the fungus is transmitted primarily by bat to bat contact, biologists suspect it could be transmitted inadvertently by humans. Fungal spores can be transferred from cave sediment to clothing and instruments, and transported to unaffected sites.

White-nose syndrome has not yet been detected in the Southwest Region, however, the virus associated with WNS was found in a bat in northwestern Oklahoma this past spring.

The Service is leading a cooperative effort with federal and state agencies, researchers, universities and other non-government organizations to research and manage the spread of WNS.

To view the memo and information about WNS visit <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/>