



USDA Forest Service

Frequently Asked Questions

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Cave and Abandoned Mine Management for White-Nose Syndrome

What is white-nose syndrome (WNS)

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a bat disease responsible for unprecedented bat mortality in the northeastern United States. Since it was discovered in 2006, millions of bats have died and the fungus that causes the disease, *Geomyces destructans* (Gd), has been detected as far west as Oklahoma. The Northeast Region of the US Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a set of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about WNS, and Bat Conservation International also provides a good [overview of WNS](#).

Has WNS reached the Rocky Mountain Region of the Forest Service?

To date, neither the disease nor the fungus has been confirmed on any of the national forests or grasslands in the Rocky Mountain Region (Wyoming, Colorado, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas). A map tracking the disease's progress is kept up to date as new information becomes available and can be found [here](#).

What is the Forest Service doing to prevent WNS in the Rocky Mountain Region?

In 2010 the Rocky Mountain Regional Office issued a temporary emergency order prohibiting human access to caves and abandoned mine lands (AMLs) on U.S. Forest Service lands in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska. This current order expires July 31, 2013.

During 2012 and 2013, the Forest Service completed an environmental assessment with each Forest Supervisor approving individual decision notices and a finding of no significant impact. The Nebraska National Forest was not included because there are no known caves or mines on the unit.

How does the current adaptive management approach work?

The adaptive approach includes 3 tiers of management based on the status of WNS and Gd:

- Tier 1, *Prior to the arrival of WNS in the Region*: White-nose syndrome is not confirmed within 250 miles of a Forest. Basic management approach: caves are open with targeted closures for caves important to bats.
- Tier 2, *After the arrival of WNS in the Region*: White-nose syndrome confirmed within 250 miles. Basic management approach: all caves closed with targeted openings possible
- Tier 3: WNS is endemic or has minimal on bat populations- revert to Forest Plan direction

Implementing Tier 1 of the adaptive management approach includes the following measures:

- Closure of known cave hibernacula during the winter hibernation season (approximately October 15 – April 15, exact dates to be determined by each national forest).
- Prohibition on the use of gear that has been used in caves or mines in States and Canadian Provinces where white-nose syndrome or Gd has been confirmed.
- Requiring decontamination of gear and clothing for all cave entries except for caves on the San Juan National Forest (which has yet not enacted this optional Tier 1 management action).
- Requiring online registration for cave access to help increase white-nose syndrome awareness, better understand recreational cave-use patterns, and provides cavers the opportunity to file a post-trip report about cave resources and conditions.

Each management tier includes optional management actions that may be implemented based on local conditions (for example, year-round closure of hibernacula; closures at maternity sites).

How does the cave registration system work?

The cave registration system involves submitting basic personal information (name, email address, zip code) and information about the cave trip (date, cave name, national forest, number of participants) online. Once the information is processed, an approved registration form will be provided to the person making the request (the "Trip Leader").

The Trip Leader will be required to print copies of the registration form for each trip participant, and the trip leader and each participant will be required to sign and date the registration form. Each authorized registration form will include an optional post-trip report that the Trip Leader may complete and submit back to the Forest Service. This information will provide valuable data on cave resources and cave use patterns.

The registration system will be designed to prevent authorizing access to caves that are closed based on the WNS EA decisions or other considerations.

When implementation begins on August 1, an interim registration system will be used. This interim system will require processing by Forest Service staff. Authorized registration forms are expected to be processed in 24-48 hours, though longer processing times may be needed depending upon the number of requests. The Rocky Mountain Region will be developing an automated registration system during the next 4-6 weeks that will process registration requests more quickly than the interim system.

What is decontamination and why is it required for WNS management?

Decontamination refers to the process of cleaning clothing and equipment to prevent accidentally moving the fungus that causes WNS from one site to another. By properly decontaminating clothing and equipment, the likelihood of moving the fungus from one site to another is greatly reduced. The Southern Cave Conservancy has summarized the national WNS decontamination protocol. Their summary is available [on their website](#).

How can I learn more about WNS and the measures to prevent its occurrence in the Rocky Mountain Region of the Forest Service?

A Forest Service website provides background on white-nose syndrome and specific measures for cavers. www.fs.usda.gov/r2

Where can I find out more about WNS, cave/mine closures, and bats?

- The **U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service** maintains a comprehensive website with the latest information about WNS: <http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/>
- **Bat Conservation International, Inc.** provides an array of educational information about bats on its website: <http://www.batcon.org/> .
- The **National Wildlife Health Center's** web site offers information related to the fungal pathogen tied to WNS: http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/index.jsp
- **Western Bat Working Group:** <http://www.wbwg.org/conservation/whitenosesyndrome/whitenose.html>
- The **U. S. Geological Survey** has a website that details why WNS is a concern to bat diversity, including endangered bats: <http://www.fort.usgs.gov/WNS/>
- **U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station Research Review:** National Interagency Team Mobilizes to Tackle White-Nose Syndrome of Bats:
<http://www.caves.org/WNS/USFS%20Northern%20Research%20Stations%20review-vol12.pdf>
- **Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service:** <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/>
- **Colorado Parks and Wildlife:** wildlife.state.co.us/Research/WildlifeHealth/WNS/Pages/WNS.aspx
- **Center for Biological Diversity:** www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/bat_crisis_white-nose_syndrome/index.html
- **National Speleological Society:** <http://www.caves.org/>
- **Colorado Cave Survey:** www.coloradocavesurvey.org
- **Cave Research Foundation:** www.cave-research.org