

**U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region**

Cave Closure and Restrictions

PROHIBITIONS

Pursuant to 16 U.S.C. § 551 and 36 C.F.R. 261.50(a), the following are prohibited on the National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2), which is described further below and in the attached Exhibit A incorporated into this Order (the “Described Area”):

1. Entering caves in the Described Area identified on Exhibit A during the dates specified on Exhibit A. 36 CFR § 261.53(a) and (d).
2. Entering any cave within the Described Area, not listed on Exhibit A or any cave listed on Exhibit A during any time of year outside of the dates specified on Exhibit A, without:
 - a. Complying with the decontamination guidelines in Exhibit B, attached and incorporated into this Order;
 - b. Ensuring that equipment and clothing used in states and counties where White nose syndrome (WNS) or WNS fungus has been detected (listed at <http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org>) are not used in states or counties where WNS or WNS fungus has not been detected; and
 - c. Possessing a signed and approved Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region Cave Access Registration Form.

EXEMPTIONS

Pursuant to 36 CFR § 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this Order:

1. Any Federal, State or local law enforcement officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty.
2. Members of an Indian Tribe, as defined in 36 CFR § 261.2, who are conducting ceremonies, rituals, or other culturally significant events.
3. Persons with Forest Service Permit No. FS-7700-48 (Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order), specifically exempting them from this Order or a written determination by a Forest Service authorized officer that a permit is not required under 36 C.F.R. § 251.50(e)(1) or (2).

4. Forest Service employees, Forest Service partners or contractors, or state wildlife agency personnel conducting cave resource surveys, bat monitoring, or WNS-related activities who have:
 - a. Complied with the decontamination guidelines in Exhibit B; and
 - b. Ensured that equipment and clothing used in states and counties where WNS or WNS fungus has been detected (listed at <http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org>) are not used in states or counties where WNS or WNS fungus has not been detected.
5. Persons:
 - a. Either: (i) conducting WNS-related research, inventory, or monitoring to understand and manage WNS or contribute to the nomination of cave resources as significant under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. § 4301 – 4309 and 36 C.F.R. § 290); or (ii) possessing current proof of their membership in the National Speleological Society (NSS) or Cave Research Foundation who are conducting activities consistent with the organization's Memorandums of Understanding with the Forest Service (#21-MU-11132428-161 and 21-MU-11132428-101, respectively) or under the Master Project Agreement between the Forest Service and NSS (24-PA-11132426-059); and
 - b. Who:
 - i. Are in possession of a valid, signed registration form obtained through the Rocky Mountain Region's public website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r2/home/?cid=fseprd515209>) or by a written request to the Rocky Mountain Region (USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 1617 Cole Blvd., Bldg. 17, Lakewood, CO 80401: ATTN: cave registration request); and
 - ii. Complied with the decontamination guidelines in Exhibit B; and
 - iii. Ensured that equipment and clothing used in states and counties where WNS or WNS fungus has been detected (listed at <http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org>) are not used in states or counties where WNS or WNS fungus has not been detected; or
 - iv. A written authorization from the Forest Supervisor for those activities in their possession.

DESCRIBED AREA

The Described Area is all NFS lands in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Kansas except that the Described Area does not include the Nebraska National Forest and Grassland, the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, or the Fort Pierre National Grassland in South Dakota.

PURPOSE

The Rocky Mountain Region prepared the Environmental Assessment for Cave and Abandoned Mine Management to implement this Order (2013). The purpose of this Order is to reduce the spread of the fungus that causes WNS and to protect bat species during critical biological periods.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. This Order will be in effect from September 1, 2024 at 12:00am (MT) through August 31, 2027 at 12:00pm (MT), unless rescinded.
2. Exhibits A and B are attached to and made a part of this Order. For a digital version of this Order and Exhibits A and B, go to <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r2/home/?cid=fseprd515209>.
3. Unless otherwise expressly defined in this Order, the terms used in this Order are defined by the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture, 36 C.F.R. Chapter II, Parts 200-299. If there are terms in this Order that are not expressly defined in the Order or 36 C.F.R. Chapter II, Parts 200-299, their meaning shall be determined by their plain language definitions.
4. A violation of these prohibitions is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual and \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than six months, or both. (16 U.S.C. § 551, 18 U.S.C. §§ 3559, 3571, 3581).
5. Contact the Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Lakewood, CO at (303)275-5350, for more information about this Order.

Dated this 1st day of September, 2024, at Lakewood, Colorado.

Troy Heithecker
Regional Forester
Rocky Mountain Region

EXHIBIT A**CLOSED CAVES**

Entry to the following caves is prohibited during the dates specified. Caves lacking numbers are pending further evaluation and nomination as a significant cave under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act.

Forest	District	State	Cave Name	Cave Number	Closure Dates (inclusive)
Bighorn National Forest	Tongue	WY	Big Piney	020206-004	October 15 - April 15
	Tongue	WY	Cliff Dweller's	020206-002	April 15 - August 31
	Tongue	WY	Eaton's	020206-003	October 15 - April 15
	Tongue	WY	Tongue River	020206-001	April 15 - August 31
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Church Cave	020203-038	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Doglick Ice Cave	020203-028	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Fern Cave	020203-036	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Rimsky's Cave	020203-057	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	South Fork Ice Cave	020203-037	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Spanish Point Cave	020203-077	October 15 - April 15
	Medicine Wheel	WY	Sud's Ice Box Cave	020203-029	October 15 - April 15
Black Hills National Forest	Bearlodge	WY	Crook's	020301-001	August 15 - May 31
	Bearlodge	WY	Grand Canyon	020301-002	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Bad Luck	020303-002	Year Round
	Hell Canyon	SD	Bat Cave (South)		August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Cave 41	020303-004	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Endtimes		August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Grizzly Rock Shelter		August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Jasper	020303-001	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	King Tut	020303-008	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	North Cave	020302-011	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Porcupine	020303-003	Year Round
	Hell Canyon	SD	Rainbow	020303-010	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	S&G	020303-005	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Section 9		August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Stenders	020303-007	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Two-Name	020303-006	August 15 - May 31
	Hell Canyon	SD	Onyx	020303-009	August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Aspen Sink	020306-002	Year Round	
Mystic	SD	Bear Trap	020306-003	Year Round	

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Mystic	SD	Bed Spring		August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Blackhawk/Woodland Hill		August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Goosechase		August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Ice (Icebox)	020306-004	August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Ice West/Kenzie		August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Igloo	020306-001	Year Round
Mystic	SD	Reynolds	020306-005	August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Schad	020306-007	August 15 - May 31
Mystic	SD	Sourdough (Elephant Trunk)	020306-006	August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Almostnota		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Austin's Pit		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Badger		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Bear Butte Creek		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Big Little		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Blue Crystal Ice	020308-005	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Borris B		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	BTF		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Crook Cave Ravine		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Crook's Sink #2		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Crook's Sink #3		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Davenport	020308-004	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Deadman		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Deadman 8-03		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	End of Road		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Erskine	020308-003	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Ever So Short		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Freeland's Fissure		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Gordon's	020308-007	August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Hell's Half Acre		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Hokey Smokes		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Ice/Horsethief	020308-006	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Josh's		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Knife-Blade	020308-001	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Park Creek		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Runkle	020308-002	Year Round
Northern Hills	SD	Scholt's Slot		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Sidestag		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Sun		August 15 - May 31
Northern Hills	SD	Timon		August 15 - May 31

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	Northern Hills	SD	White Gate		August 15 - May 31
Shoshone National Forest	Washakie	WY	Gaylord (Sawmill) Cave	021403-001	October 15 - April 15
	Wind River	WY	Spooky Cave	021405-003	October 15 - April 15
White River National Forest	Blanco	CO	Fulton	021502-001	October 15 - April 15
	Blanco	CO	Spring	021502-002	August 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Bair	021504-001	October 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Buffalo	021504-003	August 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Devil's Den	021504-011	October 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Fixin-to-die	021504-004	August 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Fulford	021504-010	October 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Groaning	021504-005	August 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Premonition	021504-007	Year Round
	Eagle	CO	Thursday Morning	021504-008	August 15 - April 15
	Eagle	CO	Wednesday Afternoon	021504-009	October 15 - April 15
	Rifle	CO	Charlotte's	021508-001	August 15 - April 15
	Sopris/Eagle	CO	Hubbard	021503-003	Year Round
	Sopris	CO	Ice Cave	021503-012	October 15 - April 15
	Sopris	CO	Lime Creek	021503-004	October 15 - April 15
Sopris	CO	Powerline	021503-002	August 15 - April 15	

EXHIBIT B

Decontamination Procedures to Help Prevent the Spread of White-Nose Syndrome (WNS) Associated with Cave (and Abandoned Mine) Entry

USDA Forest Service ALL NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS

All approved cave entries in the Described Area must adhere to the latest National White-Nose Syndrome Decontamination Protocol. As of this order the current protocol is Version March 2024. The protocol is periodically updated. All persons entering caves on NFS lands are responsible for ensuring they are following the latest version available at www.whitenosesyndrome.org.

Additionally, the Rocky Mountain Region provides the following addenda that clarifies or expands on the National Protocol relative to decontamination procedures for National Forest System lands in the Region.

USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region Addenda to the National Protocol

Decontamination on National Forest System lands in the Rocky Mountain Region

White-nose syndrome (WNS) decontamination will occur using the national decontamination protocol in relation to sanctioned cave entry. A cave is defined under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act as “any naturally occurring void, cavity, recess, or system interconnected passages beneath the surface of the earth or within a cliff or ledge that is large enough for a person to enter, whether the entrance is excavated or naturally formed.” Caves used by bats and of concern in this document include all caves and fissures whether they are accessible by humans or are known to be used by bats or not.

While the national decontamination protocol properly emphasizes that “the label is the law” when using the products identified in the protocol appropriate for decontamination, many of these are household products for which the labels may not be fully instructive about their use in the situations and environments associated with White-nose syndrome-related decontamination. Consequently, added precaution may be needed in use and proper disposal of decontamination products and materials. Consistent with the national protocol, we also emphasize again bagging exposed gear and clothing and carrying it off-site (off of National Forest System lands) in order to complete the decontamination, following the initial removal of sediment and other debris immediately after emerging from the cave.

USFS employees are responsible at all times to meet any other existing agency or Region 2 requirements for cave entry and/or use of pesticides in addition to any requirements in this Exhibit.

Disinfectants/Applications

While the national protocol provides several product and procedural options for decontamination, the preferred option for decontamination for cave and mine entries in the Rocky Mountain Region is to **submerge gear in hot water at sustained temperatures $\geq 55^{\circ}\text{C}$ (131°F) for at least 20 minutes** whenever possible without harming the treated gear or equipment. (Water at the required temperature should be very hot, but not boiling, in most cases. Temperature at boiling is altitude-dependent). Thermometers must be used to ensure proper temperatures over the duration of the decontamination. All appropriate regulations regarding use of stoves or fire, as well as appropriate safety precautions to prevent burns or risk of wildfire must be followed.

Application of quaternary ammonium if used is limited to hard non-porous surfaces. Other decontaminated surfaces or materials need to be treated with a 131°F water bath for **at least 20 minutes** or 10% bleach solution within the limits specified by the label and Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).

Disinfectants known to be effective on *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (*Pd*), the fungus that causes WNS, contain chemicals registered with the EPA. It is a violation of federal law to use, store, or dispose of a regulated product in any manner not prescribed on the approved product label and associated MSDS. Users must obtain product labels and MSDSs, read them carefully, and use products only as instructed on the label. Final determination of suitability for any decontaminant is the sole responsibility of the user. Treatments which include the use of the products listed below need to be applied carefully, especially in confined spaces, due to risk of inhalation or contact with the product. All users should be aware of these risks prior to implementing the protocol and understand that products and corresponding procedures may cause irreversible harm. Always use personal protective equipment to reduce contact with these products, particularly when recommended by the manufacturer.

Safe Use of Decontaminants

Because each state can have different regulations concerning the disposal of decontamination solutions and rinse water, always dispose of these where they will be processed in a municipal water treatment facility. **Never dispose of solutions or rinse water on the ground, in ground water, in outhouses, or down simple wastewater systems such as at campgrounds or rural RV dumps.** Disposal on National Forest System lands is prohibited.

Biosecurity/Decontamination Procedures

Caves

Clothing (including outer clothing), boots, socks, harness/ropes, helmet, hardhat, hippack/daypack, headlamp, flashlight, camera, and other gear should not be used in multiple entries in the same day unless the cleaning and decontamination recommended below can be performed between each entry. Exceptions include:

- Where caves are known to be interconnected and have multiple entrances, decontamination is not required between entries at the various entrances within the same day.

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- Forests may identify logical decontamination zones that allow decontamination between cave clusters when use or disposal of decontamination chemicals between individual caves, present a human or environmental risk. Decontamination zones should also encompass areas that are likely to be used by the same group of bats and at the smallest possible geographic unit to minimize risk of contamination between zones. These geographic units could be hydrologic unit code boundaries (HUCs) or bat habitat use areas.
- Movement between the sites will occur by foot. If any vehicle will be used to travel between sites, gear will be decontaminated or securely stored in a container before entering/mounting the vehicle (including automobile, ATV, mountain bike, horse, etc.).
- Any item that comes in contact with contaminated gear (anything that has entered a site) will need decontamination. For example, if a backpack is put on while still wearing the coveralls/tyvex suit worn in the site, the backpack will need to be decontaminated.
- Any item that will not be securely stored in a container should be decontaminated before placed in a vehicle. This includes outer clothing that has entered a site (i.e. do not get in or on a vehicle in clothing that has entered a site unless it is decontaminated). Vehicle interiors are impractical to decontaminate so should be kept clean.
- If a site being entered is outside the designated decontamination zone/HIC, that gear/clothing should be decontaminated or changed for clean gear/clothing. Decontamination must occur no less frequently than at the end of each day.
- Gear that is designated to a site or decontamination zone should be decontaminated or replaced annually.