



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mark Twain National Forest

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Route To:

Subject: Review of New Information Determination of Significance for Knife Cave Indiana bat Hibernaculum

To: Regional Forester, R9

The Council of Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1502.9(c)(1) requires the agency to prepare a supplement to either a draft or final EIS if:

- (I) The agency makes substantial changes in the proposed action that are relevant to the environmental concerns; or
- (II) There are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

In addition, Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Section 18.1 further defines the procedures for complying with 40 CFR 1502.9.

In accordance with FSH 1909.15(18.1), an interdisciplinary team was formed to consider and document their analysis of recent "new information" on the discovery of an Indiana bat hibernacula in Knife Cave on the Houston/Rolla Ranger District. This letter will also document my determination whether a correction, supplement, or revision, to the EIS for the Forest Plan development is required.

Background

The Cave Research Foundation, working under a challenge cost share agreement with the Forest Service to inventory and map caves on the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF), contacted us on January 17, 2005 about the discovery of bats hibernating in Knife Cave on the Houston/Rolla Ranger District that could be federally listed Endangered Indiana bats. Jody Eberly, Forest Wildlife Biologist, contacted Theresa Davidson with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with this information. Jody also contacted Rick Clawson, Missouri Department of Conservation Resource Scientist and lead for the Indiana Bat Recovery Team.

On Thursday, February 10, 2005, MTNF employees accompanied Rick Clawson to the cave, where he identified 67 Indiana bats, along with a number of other bat species. This discovery is the first new Indiana bat hibernacula found on the Forest in recent memory and represents the 2nd largest Indiana bat hibernacula on the Mark Twain. However, in terms of comparative size, it is still considered a small hibernacula and would only classify as a Priority 3 hibernacula (<500 bats) as defined by the Indiana bat Recovery Plan.



Analysis

The Mark Twain Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides direction for maintaining occupied Indiana bat hibernacula by establishing an “area of influence” (AOI) not to exceed a 5-mile radius around the cave (Forest Plan, page IV-50). The Forest Plan direction was a direct result of formal consultation with the USFWS, which resulted in a June 23, 1999, *Biological Opinion on the Impacts of Forest management And Other Activities to the Gray Bat, Bald Eagle, Indiana Bat, and Mead’s Milkweed on the Mark Twain National Forest* (Programmatic BO). In March 2000, we amended the Forest Plan to incorporate the Programmatic BO. In November 2001, Forest Supervisor Randy Moore signed a Forest Plan amendment Decision Notice to establish AOIs and Management Strategies for Indiana bat hibernacula. The AOI amendment created the 3.5 Management Prescription and designated 3.5 Management Area boundaries (Forest Plan, pages IV-124-1 & 2). The 3.5 prescription is designed to help reduce the decline of Indiana bat populations range-wide and contribute to the eventual recovery of the species. One purpose of 3.5 Management Areas is to protect Indiana bat hibernacula (Forest Plan, p IV-124-1).

A potential Area of Influence for the Knife Cave Indiana bat hibernaculum would include all the compartments that fall totally within a 5-mile circle around the cave. The attached maps show the 5-mile circle and indicate that only two compartments (268 and 272) fall outside an existing Area of Influence for Great Spirit Cave. The rest of the compartments are already being managed under the 3.5 Management Prescription. Compartments 268 and 272 are designated as Management Prescription 6.2, which emphasizes motorized, semi-primitive dispersed recreation.

The Forest Plan is currently being revised. The Revised Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement is available for public review and comment until early May 2005. The Final EIS, Record of Decision, and Revised Plan are scheduled for completion in August 2005. There are no current activities planned in compartments 268 or 272.

The Houston/Rolla Ranger District is currently in the NEPA planning phase for the Northwest Project in the 3.5 Management Area, which includes most of the compartments within 5 miles of Knife Cave. The purpose of the Northwest Project is to enhance Indiana bat habitat (Northwest Project Scoping Packet, page 4) in compliance with the Programmatic BO and Forest Plan.

Conclusion

I have determined that a Forest Plan amendment to create an AOI around Knife Cave is not necessary at this time for the following reasons:

- a. The compartments within 5 miles of Knife Cave are already designated as an AOI and are being managed under the 3.5 Management Area, with the exception of compartments 268 and 272.
- b. There are no activities planned in compartments 268 or 272.
- c. The Forest Plan will be revised within the next 6 months.

- d. Theresa Davidson, USFWS, agreed that creating an AOI is not warranted at this time.

Careful examination of the current information referenced and the background information shows the Mark Twain National Forest considered impacts to Indiana bat hibernacula in preparing the Environmental Analysis for Establishing Areas of Influence and Strategies for Indiana bat Hibernacula in August 2001. It is my determination that there is no “new information” in regard to Indiana bats that would have any bearing on the proposed action or its impact not already considered. The new hibernaculum lies almost totally within an area that was already considered and analyzed for an AOI. Impacts to Indiana bats would be the same as previously analyzed. A correction, supplement, or revision to the environmental documentation on the Forest Plan is not necessary at this time.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Jody Eberly at (573) 364-4621, ext. 499, or Richard R Hall at ext. 404.

/s/ Ronnie Raun
RONNIE RAUM
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure