

NEWS RELEASE

US Forest Service -- Northern Region



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News Contact: Rose Davis, Regional Media Liaison, (406) 329-3472

Regional Biologists and Partners Honored for Batty Work

Missoula, March 24, 2009. Eleven biologists and bat specialists from the Forest Service and partner organizations were honored March 19 at the 74th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference with a *Wings Across the Americas* award. The Forest Service 'Wings' program works for bird, bat and butterfly conservation.

Bats fulfill significant ecological roles as pollinators, tree seed dispersers and insect predators. Most North American bats consume large numbers of crop pests, contributing significantly to maintaining the health of forests and agricultural crops. Conservation efforts are increasingly important as bat populations decline globally, mostly due to habitat destruction.

The multi-year project began in 1987 in the northern region. In coordination with Idaho State University, the Forest Service began conducting bat surveys at abandoned mines on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest in northern Idaho. In 2005 the program spread across the region into Montana and North Dakota and South Dakota.

Over the years, the team surveyed bats using mistnets at 778 sites in the northern region including over 150 abandoned mines. A mistnet is a extremely fine-meshed net that flying bats get tangled in and caught for study. They captured and released a total of 2,545 bats of fifteen species. Some species identified had never been documented in the northern Rockies and fifty-nine bats were in the sensitive species category. Tissue biopsies were gathered from 891 bats across the region for genetic analysis and species identification. These samples will serve future bat genetics research.

With Bat Conservation International, the Forest Service also protected 'batitat' by installing bat gates on more than 100 caves and shafts in Idaho and Montana. The gates' design bars people from entering the dangerous mines but allow the bats to come and go.

The Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota Heritage programs and the Idaho Conservation Data Center received and organized the extensive information gathered. This data is now accessible for further conservation efforts through understanding the distribution and specific habitat needs of bat species across the northern Rockies.

Forest Service employees honored were:

- Jenny Taylor on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, Idaho Panhandle National Forest;
- Jenny Holifield on the Libby Ranger District, Kootenai National Forest, Montana;
- Amie Shovlain on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in Montana;
- **Joanne Bonn on the Salmon River Ranger District, Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho;**
- Sarah Kaufman, seasonal employee for two seasons out of Couer d'Alene, Idaho;
- Pat Ormbsee from the Willamette National Forest who designed the survey grid approach and expertise in bat survey activities.