

White-Nose Syndrome

The devastating disease of hibernating bats in North America

July 2019

What is white-nose syndrome?

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a disease affecting hibernating bats. Named for a white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other parts of bats, WNS is associated with extensive mortality of these animals in eastern and mid-western North America. First documented in New York in the winter of 2006-2007, WNS has spread rapidly across the eastern and midwestern United States and eastern Canada, and has been confirmed as far west as the state of Washington.

Bats with WNS act strangely during cold winter months, including flying outside during the day and clustering near the entrances of caves and other hibernation areas. Bats have been found sick and dying in unprecedented numbers in and around caves and mines. WNS is estimated to have killed more than 6 million bats in the

Northeast and Canada. In some sites, 90 to 100 percent of bats have died.

Many non-governmental organizations, universities and state and federal agencies are investigating the cause of the bat deaths. A fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, has been demonstrated to cause WNS. Scientists are investigating the dynamics of fungal infection and transmission and are developing ways to control it.

What bats are being affected?

More than half of the 47 bat species living in the United States hibernate to survive the winter. Twelve cave-hibernating bats, including two endangered and one threatened federally listed species, have been confirmed with WNS. The fungus has been detected on an additional six species, including two endangered subspecies, with no confirmation of disease.

Bat species confirmed with WNS:

- Big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*)
- Cave Myotis (*Myotis velifer*)
- Eastern small-footed bat (*Myotis leibii*)
- Gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) **endangered**
- Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) **endangered**
- Little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*)
- Long-legged bat (*Myotis volans*)
- Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) **threatened**
- Western long-eared myotis (*Myotis evotis*)
- Yuma bat (*Myotis yumanensis*)
- Southeastern bat (*Myotis austroriparius*)
- Tri-colored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*)



Ryan von Linden/NYDEC

Eastern small-footed bat with white fungus on nose, arms and wings

Bat species on which *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* has been detected with no confirmation of disease:

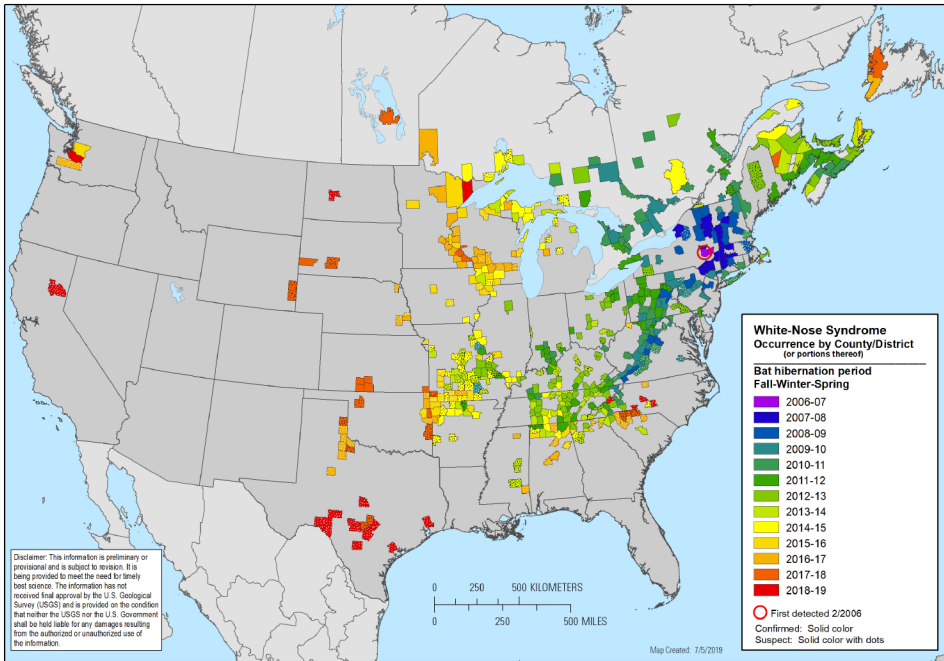
- Western small-footed bat (*Myotis ciliolabrum*)
- Eastern red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*)
- Silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*)
- Rafinesque's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii*)
- Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*)
- Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*) **endangered**
- Ozark big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii ingens*) **endangered**
- Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*)

In Europe, 13 bat species have been confirmed with WNS or the fungus, but there has been no mortality associated with these observations.



Jeremy Coleman/USFWS

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department biologists remove the gate to conduct a winter survey at Plymouth Cave



Citation: White-nose syndrome occurrence map - by year (2019). Data Last Updated: 7/5/2019. Available at: <https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/static-page/wns-spread-map>.

Where is it now?

White-nose syndrome has continued to spread rapidly. As of July 2019, bats with WNS were confirmed in 33 states:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Georgia
- Illinois
- Iowa
- Indiana
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Nebraska
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin

and seven Canadian provinces:

- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Nova Scotia
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island
- Quebec

Evidence of *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* has been detected in five additional states:

- California
- Mississippi
- North Dakota
- Texas
- Wyoming

What is being done?

Partnerships

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leads an extensive network of state and

federal agencies, tribes, organizations, institutions and individuals in working cooperatively to investigate the source, spread and cause of bat deaths associated with WNS and develop management tools and strategies to minimize the impacts of the disease.

WNS National Plan

In 2011, the Service and a team of federal and state agencies and tribes prepared a national white-nose syndrome response plan to address the threat to hibernating bats. The plan is a framework for coordinating and managing the national investigation and response to WNS. The *National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats* outlines actions necessary for state, federal and tribal coordination, and provides an overall strategy for investigating ways to manage WNS and conserve bats.

What have we learned?

- Biologists in New York and Vermont have found up to 50 percent of marked little brown bats at a few test sites surviving from one winter to the next in recent years, giving some hope that this species might one day be able to recover. Little brown bat populations at these sites remain at less than 10 percent of their pre-WNS size, however.
- Scientists have developed new ways to detect *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* on bats and in the environment, including using UV light and molecular analyses.
- Researchers have made significant strides in understanding disease response of hibernating bats

and factors that influence bat vulnerability to WNS.

- Studies of natural bacteria and skin microbioma of bats have led to new lines of research for treatments using biological or biologically derived agents for bats at risk of WNS infection. Some of the potential treatments are moving to limited field testing.
- Other treatments under consideration include altering climate in hibernation areas to slow fungal growth or improve bat survival, using UV light to kill the fungus and vaccines to boost resistance to WNS.
- Researchers are looking into molecular and genetic tools to reduce the ability of *P. destructans* to cause disease.

Research Funding

From 2008 to 2018 the Service allocated more than \$46 million to meet high priority needs for research and field support. This includes nearly \$34 million in grants to other federal agencies, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations and state natural resources agencies.

The Service also leverages federal funds with private investments through the Bats for the Future Fund (www.nfwf.org/bats), which is managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The BFF was established to use research results in designing and carrying out WNS treatments in the field.

For more information on recent research developments see www.WhiteNoseSyndrome.org

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