

Intermountain Region White-Nose Syndrome Detection and Response Guidance

March 2024

Background

White-nose Syndrome (WNS) and the *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (*Pd*) pathogen are an ongoing concern and threat to bat species. State wildlife agencies within the region continue to monitor bat populations and sample for WNS/*Pd* yearly. The *Pd* pathogen was detected in Minnetonka Cave (Caribou-Targhee NF) in 2021, but has not been detected since, and WNS has not been confirmed. Monitoring efforts are ongoing, as are efforts among biologists and speleological societies to minimize the risk of human-assisted transmission of the pathogen between underground sites.

Observations

- Evidence suggests that most WNS-susceptible bat species in the region hibernate in sites other than mines and caves, but underground sites are important bat habitats.
- WNS has not been as devastating in the intermountain region as it has been in the eastern states, but the threat of its continued spread is an ongoing concern.
- After initial detection of *Pd* in a cave, additional detections and establishment may not occur in subsequent years; WNS generally isn't confirmed until three years later.
- Given *Pd* presence, the conditions that result in a destructive outbreak of WNS are unknown.
- Decontamination protocols for human clothing and gear have been developed and their use is encouraged for anyone contacting bats or their environments.
- The pathogen is primarily spread bat to bat, so prohibiting human access will not prevent site to site contamination. Access management and decontamination should be emphasized.
- Immunological and roost-decontamination treatments will continue to be developed, but broad scale pathogen extermination is not currently available.
- State plans already incorporate available tactics for limiting the spread of *Pd*. They emphasize:
 - Communication
 - Bat Population Monitoring
 - Disease Surveillance
 - Disease Control
 - Public Education
- Regional USFS staff coordinate with state agencies and are informed of monitoring and testing results.
- If a particular cave is identified as having unique and important conservation importance, it can be protected as a Significant Cave under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988.

Guidance if *Pd* or WNS is detected on USFS Intermountain Region Lands

- Coordinate and align messaging with state wildlife agencies to announce detections in press releases and further public education about WNS and efforts to minimize its spread.
- Continue coordination with the state wildlife agencies, incorporating practicable elements of state bat and WNS plans.
- Automatic closure of an area or gating a *Pd*- or WNS-positive cave is not recommended; unique or important bat colonies should be protected proactively, and not necessarily for the containment of or protection from *Pd* or WNS.