
White-Nose Syndrome in Bats: Current Status of Knowledge and Management of a Novel Wildlife Disease



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Ann Froschauer

National White-Nose Syndrome Communications Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

White-nose syndrome (WNS) has caused unprecedented mortality in hibernating bats in eastern North America. This previously unknown disease has spread rapidly since its discovery in New York in 2007, and poses a threat to hibernating bats throughout the continent. In 2010, DNA indicative of the fungus *Geomyces destructans*, the pathogen demonstrated to cause WNS, was detected on bats as far west as Missouri and Oklahoma. The disease, WNS, and/or the fungus, *G. destructans*, has now been detected on bats at over 200 hibernacula in 19 states and 4 Canadian provinces. An assessment of wintering populations at 42 hibernacula across 5 northeastern states revealed a total loss of 88% of all bats in sites that have been affected for more than 2 years, with colony losses at some sites exceeding 99%. While our understanding of this disease has improved considerably, there are many questions that remain to be answered. The nature of remnant bat populations in the affected area has not yet been determined, and the potential for resistance within affected species has not been demonstrated. We also do not know the actual distribution of *G. destructans* on the landscape and lack the tools to manage the fungus once it becomes established. A coordinated effort is required to manage WNS and conserve North American bats, and there are over 100 state and federal agencies, tribes, universities, institutions, organizations, and private entities involved with the organized response. The *National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats*, finalized in May 2011, provides the framework for a coordinated national response.

Ann Froschauer holds two degrees from the School of Environment and Natural Resources (formerly the School of Natural Resources) at The Ohio State University. Since graduation, Ann has worked as a communications specialist for federal agencies (including the National Park Service and USFWS) and environmental NGOs. Ann is currently located at the USFWS Northeast Regional Office in Hadley, MA.