

News Release
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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Extends Comment Period on Proposal to List the Northern Long-eared Bat as Endangered

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is extending the deadline for public comment on the proposal to list the northern long-eared bat as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The extension notice is expected to publish in the federal register early next week and will extend the public comment period to January 2, 2014.

The northern long-eared bat is found across much of the eastern and north central United States, and all Canadian provinces from the Atlantic Ocean west to the southern Yukon Territory and eastern British Columbia.

The Service's proposal to list the northern long-eared bat as endangered appeared in the October 2, 2013, *Federal Register*. The proposal opened a 60-day public comment period that would have ended on December 2, 2013. The Service will be extending the time for public comment an additional 30 days, with the comment period ending January 2, 2014.

The primary threat to the northern long-eared bat is a disease, white-nose syndrome, which has killed an estimated 5.5 million cave-hibernating bats in the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest and Canada. Populations of the northern long-eared bat in the Northeast have declined by 99 percent since symptoms of white-nose syndrome were first observed in 2006.

White-nose syndrome is a fungal disease known to cause high mortality in bats that hibernate in caves. The fungus causing the disease thrives in low temperatures and high humidity – conditions commonly found in caves and mines where northern long-eared bats hibernate.

White-nose syndrome has spread rapidly throughout the East and is currently establishing a foothold in the Midwest. Although there is debate as to how fast white-nose syndrome may spread throughout the species' range, current model predictions suggest it will likely spread throughout the United States.

Under the Endangered Species Act, an endangered plant or animal is one that is in danger of becoming extinct. If a final decision is made to list the northern long-eared bat, the species will be protected from take – harming, harassing, killing – and federal agencies will work to conserve the bat and its habitat as they fund, authorize or carry out activities. In addition, a recovery plan will be developed for the species.

Before the emergence of white-nose syndrome, the northern long-eared bat was found in 39 states, including the District of Columbia, with higher abundance in the East and becoming increasingly rare moving west. Other threats to the species include wind energy development, habitat destruction or disturbance to hibernating and summer habitat, climate change, and contaminants. The Service is working with the wind energy industry to address impacts to imperiled bats.

The Service is looking for comments on the proposal to list the northern long-eared bat.

You may submit comments by one of the following methods; comments must be received by January 2, 2014.

(1) Electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov> .

In the Search box, enter Docket No. FWS–R5–ES–2011–0024, which is the docket number for the rulemaking. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Send a Comment or Submission.” If your comments will fit in the provided comment box, please use this feature of <http://www.regulations.gov>, as it is most compatible with our comment review procedures. If you attach your comments as a separate document, our preferred file format is Microsoft Word. If you attach multiple comments (such as form letters), our preferred format is a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel; or

(2) By hard copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to:

Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R5–ES–2011–0024
Division of Policy and Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM
Arlington, VA 22203

The Service requests that you send comments only by the methods described above. The Service will post all information received on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that the Service will post any personal information you provide. Comments submitted

electronically using the Federal eRulemaking Portal must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on January 2, 2014.

For more information on the proposal to list the northern long-eared bat and other endangered species information, go to

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/nlba/index.html>

For more information about white-nose syndrome visit www.whitenosesyndrome.org

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

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