

## WHITE NOSE SYNDROME IN BATS

### The Situation:

A relatively new disease, known as White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), is causing massive mortality among hibernating bats in caves and mines in a number of northeastern states in the United States. The disease was first discovered in a cave in New York State in winter 2006, and appears to be spreading rapidly.

Currently, there are no known cases of WNS in Canada; however, it has been detected in sites close to the Canadian border, just south of Ontario and Quebec. All populations of cave-roosting bats across North America may be at risk.

US Fish & Wildlife Service website – [www.fws.gov/northeast/white\\_nose.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html)

### The Cause:

White-nose Syndrome appears to be associated with a newly-discovered fungal species – *Geomyces destructans* – a fungus which grows well in locations where bats hibernate. Bats with WNS have the white, powdery fungus growing on their muzzle, ears and legs. It often occurs as a white ring around the nose, hence the name White-nose Syndrome. Affected bats often awaken from hibernation to groom themselves in an attempt to remove the fungus. They use up valuable energy reserves in the process, and they often die of starvation.

[Fish & Wildlife's fact sheet on WNS](#)

### Spreading the Fungus:

Although there is much to learn about how the fungus is transported from cave to cave, there is evidence that people may play a role in transferring the fungus to new locations (e.g., inadvertently spreading the fungal spores on muddy boots or on clothing and equipment). It is important, therefore, that appropriate precautions be taken by anyone who visits caves.

[Interim Recommended Field Procedures](#) – 15 June 2009, Western Bat Working Group

[Alberta Bat Handling Protocol](#)

### Bat Hibernacula in Alberta:

In Alberta, there are two primary bat hibernacula known on provincial lands – Cadomin Cave near Hinton, and Wapiabi Cave near Nordegg. Cadomin Cave receives many visitors during the summer season; Wapiabi Cave is more difficult to access and receives fewer visitors. Under authority of Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, bat hibernacula are closed from September 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>, to protect over-wintering bats.

### Prevention/Control:

If the WNS risk to Alberta's bats increases, it will be necessary to restrict public access to caves that are used by bats. Restrictions could take the form of:

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) Guided access only    | (3) Research access only |
| (2) Permitted access only | (4) Total cave closure.  |

[Fish & Wildlife's "Death in the Caves" posters](#) (coming soon)