



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

SEP 07 2010

N16 (2300)

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors

From: Deputy Director, Operations

Subject: Revised Guidance on White-nose Syndrome in Bats and Impacts on Cave Use

This memo provides updated information and guidance to help prevent or limit the human-assisted spread of White-nose Syndrome (WNS), an emerging disease that is causing unprecedented mortality in several species of hibernating bats. Since the April 17, 2009, Acting Deputy Director's memo (Interim Guidance on White-nose Syndrome in Bats), WNS has continued to spread, and has now been confirmed in 14 states and the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, Canada. Despite the proximity of a large number of national parks to WNS-positive sites, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Ozark Scenic Riverways are the only national parks with bats that have tested positive for *Geomyces destructans*, the fungus that causes WNS. However, the potential for this apparently exotic disease to continue spreading and impact additional parks and resources is considered very high.

In response to the threat of WNS and our responsibility to limit the human-assisted spread of the disease, I am requesting that each park with cave resources update their cave management plan to include actions to minimize the risk of WNS spreading via anthropogenic means *into uninfected* National Park Service sites and to minimize the risk of anthropogenic spread *from infected* NPS sites. These actions may likely include restricting access to caves and mines to individuals who hold appropriate permits and who have been appropriately screened by NPS personnel.

Updates to the cave management plans to address WNS should be completed by the end of this calendar year. If a park has not completed its cave management plan, the superintendent should issue interim guidance specific to WNS and ensure that this guidance is incorporated into the cave management plan as it is developed. Under NPS Management Policies 2006, and in compliance with the Federal Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988, access to NPS caves in the continental U.S. is restricted to individuals who are either part of an official tour or who hold appropriate permits. In both cases, the individuals should be appropriately screened by NPS personnel. If screening is not feasible, I recommend cave closure. In addition, we are required to regulate or restrict cave use if it is necessary to protect and preserve cave resources.

To assist parks, the NPS Wildlife Health Program has developed several guidance documents including a template for surveillance and management of WNS prior to and after its arrival at a park; protocols for determining whether and which caves should be open or closed (including tour caves); procedures for screening all recreational and tour cave visitors, researchers, employees, and others requesting cave or mine entry; templates for cave closure signs and visitor information; and submission guidelines and safe work practices for handling bat carcasses. All of this information is available on the NPS Wildlife Health Program website (http://www1.nrintra.nps.gov/BRMD/Wildlife_Health_Management/Wildlife_Health/White_Nose_Syndrome.cfm). I also encourage you to include disinfection and screening protocols into your Abandoned Mineral Lands contracts and to evaluate existing and proposed scientific investigations that involve entry into NPS caves or mines, or that involve capture and handling of bats outside caves or mines, for their potential to disturb bats and/or spread WNS. The Wildlife Health Program can assist you with this evaluation.

If a park or parks in your region make a decision to open or close caves, please inform me before making this information publicly available. Because WNS management actions taken by NPS, FWS, BLM, and FS may differ, the bureaus have agreed to share information related to cave openings and closings before it is released to the public. If you have technical questions or would like additional information, please contact Dr. Kevin Castle, Wildlife Veterinarian, Wildlife Health Program, at (970)219-0104.

Attachment