

White-nose Subcommittee Conference Call
July 8, 2009

Attendants: Pat Ormsbee, Dave Waldien, Greg Faxla, Darek Hall, Diane Probasco, Ellen Rowan, Toni Piaggio, Mike Baker, Katie Miller

Pat: Any additions to the schedule?

Toni: Add discussion on the signs.

Pat: I am attending the WAFWA meeting next week in California. This is a fairly influential group, so we need to get them information and recommendations on WNS. I am giving 2 presentations: wildlife health committee and the T&E committee. We need to give them ½ a dozen items to consider/act upon, in an informal way. And we need to ask them what WBWG can do for them. I think the first item should be 1) It is critical for the West to make an effort to raise awareness and create a sense of urgency on this topic.

Toni: I agree. We are moving forward on the signs, but not moving forward on contact with the states. We need to work at a state level with state vets and agencies.

Derek: Did we want to create a united letter, or speak to individuals within the state?

Greg: WBWG needs to develop a letter, as identified at the meeting.

Pat: I agree. Right now, though, we need to stay focused on message for the WAFWA meeting next week, and then we can follow up on what WBWG will do.

Derek: Good idea. Will you be telling WAFWA about our actions?

Pat: Yes. How effective will we be chasing down health department contacts? Is the state better off doing this, than WBWG?

Katie: I think it's good to initiate contact with our state vets, and it should probably be done at the state level.

Ellen: We work with the state vets and the department of health and it's not an issue to contact and coordinate within groups. We already have this path of communication in place for avian influenza and waterfowl.

Pat: You can ask staff to initiate and/or reaffirm relationships with state health officials and wildlife vets, and discuss a process to submit specimens for testing and what to do if WNS evidence exists.

Dave: They may want help with the decision making process. When there was an awareness campaign back East, the data that was collected was skewed because people increased the number of submitted bats. Do we want all bats to be submitted for testing?

Pat: If there is an increase in dead bats, than that would be the trigger. But for now, we should encourage them to focus on the relationships with state vets and the health department, and leave it at that for now.

Derek: I think that testing, and working with the state vet is a whole different path. All we are looking for is a peak in dead bats right now.

Pat: So for WAFWA, we plant the seed and provide copies of the decontamination protocol.

Greg: A rabies scare about 10 years ago resulted in huge increases in the submittal rate. In WA, bats go to the county health department, then for rabies testing. Maybe that is the step to conduct a wing assessment for WNS. It can be workable in the future.

[Mike Baker joins the call]

Pat: For the presentation, the ideas I have are:

- 1) Plant the seed to coordinate with vets and the health department
- 2) WBWG needs to put together a packet for them to assist in the development of a response protocol-there is a national push for this.

Derek: How serious is the push to do this at a national level?

Pat: I don't know. I think there is a USFWS model that is being used.

Dave: Pat, have you seen the more recent maps?

Pat: I have one from a few months ago.

Dave: We just sent an updated map out.

Pat: We know that WBWG needs to move on this, but I think for now we need to stick to the coordination message. For the next bullet, there is some concern that nothing much will happen unless there is legislation to protect bats as a group, such as the Migratory Bat Treaty Act and the Wildlife Heritage Act. These are federal acts; WHA has been introduced to Congress.

Dave: I think it's good to inform them what's going on.

Pat: What else?

Toni: Is there anything else we can take from Virginia and Wisconsin?

Pat: What about monitoring popular cave and mine sites?

Toni: Privately owned caves?

Dave: Private, show caves, etc – we need to monitor in these areas and this is a truth that rises above that division of public and private ownership. This is a good opportunity for education, outreach, and awareness.

Pat: So, we should recommend that they start discussions now with private show cave owners to start monitoring early?

Toni: This would get those owners and operators involved. The prospect of having to close caves, net bats, etc. – we need to put those extreme ideas out there.

Dave: How are we going to coalesce all this information? Negative/Positive information is equally important. How do we speed it up to a regional/national level?

Pat: The national effort is still a fledgling effort. A lot of information is still getting put together. Who does WAFWA tier to?

[Dave Waldien has to sign off]

Pat: OK, what I've got so far:

- 1) strategize
- 2) legislation
- 3) evaluate for monitoring caves
- 4) decontamination protocols should be part of the state permits
- 5) create a national tie in

Toni: How about coordinating with their state WBWG reps?

Pat. OK, or is this enough?

Toni: I think, for the presentation, this is enough.

Pat: OK, I will go with this list.

Pat: Alright, onto the field protocol agenda item. This is being used at all of our trainings. This is probably more an exercise in easing our conscience than doing 100% for prevention. What we're adding to this, is once a bat hits the net, we spritz it with 90% alcohol solution. Also, we're adding to clean our headlamps. We're not totally convinced that there will be a decontamination protocol that effectively treats 100% of gear. Something that we've done in the field is to assign someone to be in charge of keeping equipment clean. And now, we encourage people to use disposable equipment.

Derek: Do we know anything about what kills WNS?

Pat: No, research is on going. But quaternary sustances and bleach are most effective. The key is that these protocols are a pain, and that people need to get used to them now.

Toni: Yeah, it's not bad practice. The same thing happened in the amphibian world. We need to work through this now.

Pat: Let's move onto our action plan. Greg, have you looked at it?

Greg: Yeah. Looks like some of the items have gotten done. I've been looking mostly at those with pressing due dates: WAFWA presentation, position statement by fall, public education initiative is being developed, funding issues. I haven't done much on it because I'm working a field schedule right now. One of my actions is to ID unusual winter behavior. We know that we have some bats that are active at some times in the winter months and this should not be interpreted as unusual.

Pat: I think we'll find that our bats in the temperate zones will not be as susceptible because they go into torpor less often.

Greg: Same in the Puget Sound.

Derek: Same in southern NV.

Pat: It's important to identify those locations.

Greg: That's what I need to create.

Pat: What do you recommend that the Action Plan needs to get approved by the board?

Greg: It needs to be edited down.

Toni: Maybe form some bullets?

Pat: I think the education section is good to go.

Greg: Yes, I think so, too. It will take some time to get the rest of it in the same format.

Toni: I can take a stab at it. Would that be helpful?

Greg: Action items for each issue have a number of items that can be broken down into more specifics. We need to make individual items out of each of these to be more specific, with items that can be checked off once it's done.

Toni. Send your notes to me.

Pat: If anyone else can help, let Toni know.

Toni: I'll do what I can and then send it to Pat.

P: OK. The signs. Impressions.

Diane: I didn't want to focus on closures, more on advisories.

Pat: To be honest, I didn't care for any of them.

Toni: I didn't like the web links.

Katie: Yeah, kind of weird. Who's going to write down a website, when they're out in the boondocks?

Diane: OK, well I wasn't really sure what we were looking for. I can do more.

Pat: Let's come up with 2 signs: one to provide info on WNS, and one for decontamination. Those are the 2 that we need, but they should be brief. We need to condense the information.

Derek: Are you leaving it up to the land managers to pick, print, and post signs?

Pat: Well, yeah. We want WBWG to make 1000 signs and provide them. Do you have other ideas?

Derek: I just see this as a big project – as big as the water trough efforts. I think putting them up at the abandoned mines is good for the education signs.

Katie: I agree. We don't want to put up decontamination signs at the abandoned mines because then it looks like we condone entering these sites, when we don't.

Greg: In WA, one of the grottos is interested in getting volunteers for signage.

Derek: So we're just going to provide a template.

Pat: If we can get a sign, and encourage land management agencies to run with it, then monitor it. We also need to census the commercial caves and provide them with pamphlets.

Diane: Is the brochure approved by the board?

Pat: Yes.

Diane: I can take the lead on the 2 signs.

Meeting concluded.

Next conference call scheduled for August 8, 2009 at 1pm