

**Western Bat Working Group Rationale for Recommendations For
Addressing WNS In Western N.A.
5/5/2008**

The following are the rationale for the recommendations to prevent potential spread of WNS from eastern to western North America that were developed and adopted by the WBWG. In a situation like WNS, where there is a relatively sudden onset of lethal outcomes and there are more unknowns than knowns, approaches and recommendations are likely to evolve and vary in conservatism. There simply are no clear answers. The WBWG recommendations are different than those of NE FWS in 2 areas: 1) We ask that our recommendations be applied to all types of roost structures, not just caves (for which the FWS definition extends to mines and other rock features), including bridges, buildings and other structures where bats congregate and that are accessible by humans; 2) we recommend enlisting the decontamination protocol provided by the FWS for people who have had contact with bats and bat roosts east of the Mississippi before traveling west of the Mississippi to work with bats or at their roost. FWS currently focuses their decontamination recommendations to individuals moving out of the area that encompasses Vermont, NY, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The rationale for “1” above is that in western N.A., we find bats roosting in a variety of structures, other than caves, mines, and rock features during hibernation. There is no indication from what we currently understand about WNS that it would necessarily be limited to bat colonies in caves so that the expansion to all roost structures is logical.

Also, if this is a syndrome limited to hibernacula, we know very little about where our bats hibernate in comparison to the east, so we’re at a disadvantage for even recognizing if WNS was present in the West. Additionally, typical hibernacula we know of include tens to several hundred bats and are scattered across the west so that monitoring may be problematic.

The rationale for “2” above includes the following primary elements:

- The hibernacula where WNS has been documented are populated by bats that disperse in spring to unknown areas and unknown distances. During warm weather seasons, these bats also may integrate with bats from other regions.
- If WNS is a contagion, there is at least some possibility that it could be transmitted between bats during seasons other than winter. Additionally, if it is a contagion, there is always a chance that there is a delay in symptoms or there are individuals that are asymptomatic vectors.
- Under any of the above possible scenarios, infected bats could infect sites outside of the NE, in turn, humans visiting those roosts could innocently become vectors of a contagion, before it is formally recognized or symptoms are apparent.
- Cavers, bridge engineers, mining engineers, and facilities personnel may move all over N.A. on a regular basis and we feel it is easier for them to keep in mind the

Mississippi R. than to check back with the FWS website for a current list of states of which to be aware.

The WBWG supports the NE FWS in their management and guidelines for WNS. We adopted our recommendations to complement, not contradict their guidance. The NE FWS's is focused on doing everything they can to prevent the potential spread of WNS by humans out of the NE, should it prove to be a contagion. To this end they have focused on defining an effective boundary around the NE and are applying appropriate recommendations for preventing potential human transmission. The WBWG, on the other hand, is focused on preventing human transfer of a potential contagion to western N.A. The larger scale upon which our recommendations are made, allow us to consider the possibility that a potential contagion may have already been spread beyond the NE and has gone undetected at this point in time. We consider our more conservative recommendations as complementary and as a second line of defense to the FWS recommendations. WNS is frightening mystery to anyone who works with bats and the WBWG is committed to working in concert with the FWS as well as other partners to understand and prevent the potential spread of WNS.

<http://www.wbwg.org>