



ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS & INNOVATIONS, INC.

781 Neeb Road
Cincinnati, OH 45233
Phone: (513) 451-1777; Fax: (513) 451-3321

23 January 2008

To everyone interested in bat conservation:

The White Nose Syndrome (WNS; aka White Death) scares the hell out of us. It has the potential to be the single most devastating impact on bats in North America that we have seen in recorded history, with the possible exception of the settling of this land by Europeans and subsequent habitat destruction. It is possible that this could be to bats what the chestnut blight and Dutch elm disease were to – well chestnut trees and elm trees. Perhaps less than coincidentally, fungal diseases were responsible for the devastation of these species, although we are not sure that the fungus associated with the WNS is the cause or a symptom.

To date, the WNS has been found only in hibernacula of New York and Vermont, affecting hibernating bats (Indiana, little brown, and northern long-eared bats), but we do not know whether it may affect other cavern-dwelling bats at other times of year. Potentially it could affect species like gray, Virginia big-eared (and other subspecies), Brazilian free-tailed, southeaster, and cave bats.

Recently, the death of a “few” bats by vandalism in a single hibernaculum (the same habitat affected by WNS) garnered high visibility and substantial financial support from both public and private entities - for a past event. The action of WNS is on-going, already more deadly than the aforementioned vandalism, and in the future could be devastating, but has elicited little response or support. While we laud the effort to bring the vandals who killed bats to justice, we feel strongly that the current situation more merits funding and action.

Similarly, we laud the work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under auspices of the ESA, to avoid and minimize a take of endangered bats associated with individual developments, but the WNS seems far more likely to cause harm to listed species and unlisted species alike. Thus, we urge the USFWS, the premier organization for wildlife and endangered species in the United States, to allocate funding and resources to address this issue.

To begin to address this issue, we propose the following starting points.

1. **Hibernacula Closure:** until this fungus is understood, caves and mines containing large populations of hibernating bats of any species, including but

not necessarily limited to the Indiana, gray, Virginian big-eared, and little brown bats, should be closed to human traffic to help prevent the spread of WNS. Al Hicks (<http://forums.caves.org/viewtopic.php?f=31&t=6083>) has proposed measures to help prevent the spread of WNS among caves by individuals entering caves, but additional thoughts on the topic should be of value.

2. **Education:**

- Cavers need to understand why their rights to access caves have been restricted
- Federal and state agencies need to understand why they should close the caves and why it is so important they fund research in a timely manner to address this issue
- The public needs to understand how important this is to a healthy ecosystem

3. **Funding:**

- The USFWS is the primary agency responsible for endangered species, such as the Indiana bat, and it seems logical that an initial response to this situation should indeed be lead by them, including costs to initiate research and develop a concerted, comprehensive response strategy
- States should play a similar and supportive role to that of the USFWS
- Private entities, including individuals, conservation organizations, and companies who may contribute to conservation of caves, hibernacula, and endangered bats should add collectively to our understanding and resolution of the problem

To this end, Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc. is willing to contribute matching funds of up to \$10,000 for donations by non-public entities to directly research and understand the cause, effect, and resolution of the WNS. The collection and administration of such funds must be determined, but logically should be through an entity such the Indiana State University, Center for North American Bat Research and Conservation. It is our hope and intent that the funds available for this effort far exceed the \$20,000 potential, and that private and public funds are combined to do the most good.

Finally, on a personal note, we hope that our concern is overblown and that in a short time people are laughing at us for saying “The sky is falling, the sky is falling.” But until that proves to be the case, this, as we said, scares the hell out of us.

Virgil Brack, Jr.,
Taina M. Pankiewicz
Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc.