PA Game Commission News Release

2001 Elmerton Avenue • Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17110-9797
www.pgc.state.pa.us

For Information Contact:
Jerry Feaser
717-705-6541
PGCNews@state.pa.us

Release #112-10
Oct. 12, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AGENCIES AND PARTNERS INTENSIFY WNS RESEARCH TO SAVE BATS

Bats continue to disappear across Pennsylvania and the Northeast

HARRISBURG – State wildlife agencies in the Northeast, including the Pennsylvania Game Commission, are ratcheting up their response to White Nose Syndrome as they enter their fourth year of researching this disorder in cave bat populations with an aim to better understand, and hopefully slow, its spread to other states.

Working with 10 other wildlife agencies, the Game Commission announced that its interstate response team is broadening the coalition of partners to include researchers at Pennsylvania's Bucknell University, Northern Kentucky University and Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in Massachusetts

In essence, these researchers have been involved in the WNS response for the past few years, particularly Dr. DeeAnn Reeder at Bucknell. All have made significant contributions to the effort to shed light on how WNS affects bats. That involvement made these universities perfect partners in the ongoing interstate probe, which is funded by state wildlife agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Competitive State Wildlife Grants Program.

"The Competitive SWG grant of 2009 included $200,000 for high-priority research," explained Lisa Williams, coordinator for the grant for the Game Commission. "Our partners unanimously identified treatment and control of White Nose Syndrome as their highest priority, but we wanted to wait until the timing was right to use the funding most effectively. At this point, preliminary WNS treatment studies have been completed, and we are at a point where targeted funds should help us move forward in the search for an agent to prevent or control the impacts of WNS."

"White-Nose Syndrome has spread rapidly since first being identified near Albany, New York, in 2007, and the best course of action for Northeast and Mid-Atlantic wildlife managers is to continue combining forces and resources to search for answers to this complex problem," said Carl G. Roe, Game Commission executive director. "Time is of the essence, because mortality has been extensive, bats aren't overly plentiful and their reproductive rates are extremely low – one pup per adult female per year."

A multi-state review team selected the two projects from eight high-quality proposals received in response to a competitive call for projects announced in June. Proposals were reviewed and selected by representatives from the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

The focus of both projects is to further the development of prevention and treatment options for wildlife managers facing White Nose Syndrome. To date, there has been little recourse to combat this disorder in bat hibernacula. Wildlife managers have been eliminating or limiting visits and disturbances to colonies and studying the carcasses of afflicted bats to learn more about this disorder's cataclysmic consequences. Many managers, particularly those on the leading edge of WNS, have wished for a more active way to combat the threat.

"We understand that there is little possibility of treating bats effectively throughout the entire Northeast even if these projects are incredibly successful," noted Cal Butchkoski, the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Diversity Section biologist who was involved in project selection. "But development of a prevention or treatment tactic could be useful in protecting specific high-priority colonies of bats threatened by WNS."

The projects selected by the interstate panel of wildlife managers were:

Terbinafine dosage and safety in WNS infected Myotis lucifugus: Correlation of survival, drug tissue levels, and toxic effects. Alison Robbins. Michael H. Court and Flo Tseng. Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Massachusetts. The purpose of this project is to determine dosages of the antifungal drug terbinafine in WNS-infected little brown bats that increase survival rates during hibernation.

Fighting the good fight against Geomyces destructans: Evaluating non-invasive anti-Gd treatments and testing the ability of WNS-rehabilitated bats to resist Gd infection

during hibernation. DeeAnn Reeder of Bucknell University and Hazel A. Barton of Northern Kentucky University. The purpose of this project is to: 1.) test the efficacy and safety of non-invasive antifungal treatments for two species of bats, and 2.) test whether affected bats that have been successfully rehabilitated have effectively shed the fungus and can hibernate in a clean environment without regrowth of the fungus.

"This heightened multi-state response improves what wildlife agencies already had set into motion in the northeastern United States, but as WNS advances into more states, the potential for harm and the consequences associated with having fewer bats become greater," explained Williams. "If the large bat colonies to the south of us encounter WNS, funding will need to rise dramatically to meet the threat head-on. At stake are our Eastern bats, with several species imperiled. What remains unclear is whether WNS can be stopped and if we have the resources needed to do it."

In Pennsylvania, when it strikes a hibernating population of bats, WNS typically results in greater than 95 percent mortality after just two years of infection. But what has been seemingly unstoppable in bats appears to have no ill-effect on humans, with the exception that folks are finding dead and dying bats around their homes and occasionally afield.

For more information on WNS, Pennsylvania cave bats or to report a sick bat in your area, visit the Game Commission's website (www.pgc.state.pa.us). Hyperlinks to all of these areas can be found either on the website's homepage or in the "Wildlife" section under "Wildlife Diseases."

# # #

Note to Editors: If you would like to receive Game Commission news releases via e-mail, please send a note with your name, address, telephone number and the name of the organization you represent to: PGCNews@state.pa.us