

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Southern National Forests Cave Closure

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

As the fatal bat disease white nose syndrome continues to spread, leaving millions of dead bats in its wake, land managers continue working to check its spread. In an effort to prevent the human spread of the disease by clothes or equipment, most federal and state caves have been closed to the public, and the Regional Forester for the Southern Region of the U.S. Forest Service recently announced an extension of the closure order for all caves and mines on southeastern National Forest system lands until 2019 to help prevent the spread of white-nose syndrome.

The closure period should allow scientists to flesh out findings, allow for laboratory testing of potential solutions, and allow field trials of white-nose fighting organisms. The closure will minimize spread of the disease due to humans transporting spores of the fungus to caves that presently have no white-nose spores in them.

The fungus has killed nearly seven million bats in the New England and Mid-Atlantic States and continues to spread unchecked. Finding a cure for the fungus is important to the nation's agricultural system because bats play such a key role in keeping insects, including agricultural pests, mosquitoes, and forest pests under control.

Violation of the cave closure order could result in fines up to \$5,000 for an individual and \$10,000 for an organization or imprisonment for up to six months, or both.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.