

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Grants go to help the struggle against White Nose Syndrome

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Winter is approaching - a season that has become a time of apprehension among wildlife biologists. White nose syndrome, a mysterious affliction responsible for the deaths of more than a million bats, is most lethal during this time, and the collective hibernation of bats means winter presents the greatest opportunity for spreading the malady.

In response to the threat of white nose syndrome, the Fish & Wildlife Service recently announced \$800,000 in grants to fund six research projects that will provide insight into this mysterious, menacing threat, and help ensure the survival of some of our rarest bats.

The Southern Appalachians are home to three species of endangered bats – the Virginia big-eared, gray, and Indiana bat. One of the grants is to the National Zoo to establish a captive population of Virginia big-eared bats at research center in Northern Virginia. The Virginia big-eared bat is one of a handful of subspecies of the Townsend's big-eared bat, and is found only in the Southern Appalachians.

Part of the reason for establishing a captively-held population is to create what biologists call an "ark" population, that is to say, should Virginia big-eared bats disappear from the wild, these bats will be the seed from which the sub-species would be re-established. Virginia big-eared bats have never been reared in captivity before and lessons learned will help if captive propagation needs to be considered for other bat species as well.

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