

Virginia Cave Board Recommendations Regarding Caving and White-Nose Syndrome

April 30, 2013

As of March 1, 2013, white-nose syndrome (WNS) has been observed affecting bats in every county in Virginia that has limestone caves. At this point, state wildlife agencies consider the disease to be pervasive within susceptible bat populations in Virginia. In addition, the disease spread rapidly throughout the state from its initial appearance in 2009, despite a combination of cave closures, decontamination of caving equipment, and isolation of caving gear. While bat-to-bat transmission of the spores of the fungus (*Geomyces destructans*) that causes WNS may not be the only mechanism by which WNS spreads, the evidence suggests that this is by far the most significant. Transport of spores on equipment and clothing that has been exposed to a WNS-positive environment is certainly possible, but does not appear to have played a significant role in the spread of WNS within Virginia from 2009 to 2013.

For these reasons, the Virginia Cave Board recommends the following regarding caving activity within Virginia.

1. Do not under any circumstances take any equipment or clothing used in caves or mines in Virginia or other WNS-positive regions into geographic areas where WNS is not present. An updated map showing the current distribution of WNS is maintained at:

<http://whitenosesyndrome.org/resources/map>

2. Cavers are encouraged to thoroughly wash their gear when moving between cave systems within the WNS range to decrease the number of *Geomyces* spores and other pathogens, contaminants, and organisms transported between caves. Decontamination protocols are available at <http://whitenosesyndrome.org/topics/decontamination> for those cavers continuing to implement full decontamination procedures.
3. Private landowners and managers of public lands may still choose to keep their caves closed. Before visiting a cave, get permission and comply with any conditions the owner or manager may have.
4. Despite vast population reductions for several cave bat species, seasonal hibernacula closures remain in effect and may be updated. Continued protection of hibernacula is considered critical for potential recovery of WNS-affected species. Please consult the closed cave list as maintained by the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society at:
<http://var.caves.org/index.php/conservation/closed-caves/var-limited-access-caves>
5. Report observations of bats to Wil.Orndorff@dcr.virginia.gov. Photographs are appreciated.