



(l-r) Bat specialists Kevin Murray and Matt Clemat discuss plans at WEST's office with manager Rhett Good and research ecologist Jason Hignite. Photo by Lynae Sowinski

WEST, Inc.

Dynamic Eco-company With New Office in B-town

From the waters of the Arctic to the plains of Kenya to the skies above Indiana's Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane Division (NSWC Crane), the ecologists and statisticians at Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc. (WEST) are providing data that government and industry need in order to make sound environmental decisions.

Rhett Good, a wildlife biologist and manager of WEST's Bloomington office, says the consulting firm "combines field ecology and statistics to help solve natural-resource problems. We pride ourselves on providing objective, replicable data."

WEST has been in Bloomington for the past three years and now has seven employees at its new office in the historic Applegate Building on West 6th Street. It's a good fit, says research ecologist Jason Hignite, because "Bloomington is a town that seems to embrace environmental concerns."

The local office is one of eight the firm has in the United States. Nationally and internationally, WEST staff is studying the ways in which polar bears in the Arctic are adapting to climate change. "A lot of that data was used in listing the polar bear as an endangered species," says Good. Among dozens of other projects, WEST is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to estimate the golden eagle population in the west and studying lions and land use in Africa. The company also has helped with damage assessment following the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska and the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico.

Closer to home, the Bloomington staff has worked on wind-energy projects like Fowler Ridge in Benton County and Meadow Lake in White County, studying the effect of wind turbines on wildlife, especially migratory birds. "We play an important role in the wind industry by providing data they can use," says Good. "They know they need to develop their projects in the right way." Overall, WEST has assessed wildlife use at more than 300 wind-energy facilities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

At NSWC Crane, 25 miles southwest of Bloomington, Good says WEST is "studying which birds were using the facility," a noted warbler habitat. The local staff includes two bat biologists who, Hignite says, "specialize in the study of Indiana bats." Other projects include assessing the effect of airport runway expansion on wetlands, preparing storm-water management plans, and conducting surveys of rare plants and wetlands for development projects. —Janet Mandelstam