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J.V., Bloomington

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Biologists to talk at workshop about bat-tracking software

By Rick Seltzer
331-4243 | rseltzer@heraldt.com

A pair of research biologists from an environmental and statistical consulting firm's Bloomington office are set to sound off on acoustic identification software for bats before a Midwestern regional workshop next month.

Kevin Murray and Jeff Gruver, biologists at Western EcoSystems Technology Inc. in Bloomington, will speak at the Fifth Annual Midwest Bat Working Group meeting taking place at Ball State University in Muncie April 4 and April 5. The software workshop is slated for the day before, April 3.

It will teach bat biologists about standard automated acoustic identification software packages. The packages analyze bat echolocation data from microphones — data on the sounds bats emit to find prey or orient themselves.

"There are several statistical software packages out where you can take raw data, put that into the software packages, and they'll give you a readout saying you've got 10 gray bats," Murray said. "We're trying to teach people how to do that responsibly and what the strengths and weaknesses of that technique are."

The technique can be a fast way to identify bat species, he added.

It can also prevent discrepancies that are sometimes introduced when different experts

interpret data.

"From a scientific perspective, it's quantitative and repeatable," Murray said. "It doesn't have any subjectivity to it."

About the company

Western EcoSystems Technology Inc., or WEST, works on wind energy development and other projects that require baseline wildlife surveys. It often focuses on endangered species such as the gray bat or the Indiana bat.

The company, which is based in Cheyenne, Wyo., records echolocation calls on 40 to 80 projects across the country annually, according to Murray. Those projects have it looking at "hundreds of thousands" of echolocation calls a year, he said.

Its Bloomington office, located at 408 W. Sixth St., runs 10 to 20 projects a year. The office does much of its work in Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, with other projects taking place in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and

Missouri. Plus, the office is entering markets in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Murray has been researching acoustic identification techniques since the late 1990s.

"I have a lot of experience," he said. "Also WEST, we've got a pretty strong statistical quantitative component."

The Midwest Bat Working Group focuses on bat and bat-habitat conservation in the Midwest. Murray expects between 50 and 100 people at its annual meeting. He hopes for 20 to 30 academics and representatives from state and federal agencies at the WEST workshop.

The workshop costs \$50 per person and has a registration deadline of March 21. Contact Murray for more information at kmurray@west-inc.com or 812-340-4318.

HTO Read more about wildlife in Sunday's Outdoors section or at HeraldTimesOnline.com/outdoors.

BROWN COUNTY

School board votes for change over some parents' objections

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

A group of parents have started regarding their concerns about how are being implemented and what communication about the details public. Some of those parents reiterated at Thursday's board meeting.

Many of them said they understood something to fix the deficit. The district to spend more time figuring will be implemented.

"We understand changes need be made," one parent said. "We want that you take more time in making that difficult decision that is going to take us all through a journey that is not just a few months, not just a year but really a lifetime for our community."

According to the board, waiting another year would only make the problem worse.

Prior to making a recommendation, Brown County Schools Superintendent Shaffer said he too has lost sleep over feels the option is the best way to go.

A leadership meeting among administrators held today, he said, and meetings to address five key issues relating to education, preschool, transportation, different buildings and curriculum.

Shaffer said the district has a curriculum issue but admitted that some work.

"Transportation will be the hardest work on the hardest," he said. "But in the public that we will spend the necessary to make it work effectively."

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