

Minutes of the NMFWA Bat Working Group 25 March 2010, Milwaukee, WI

The National Military Fish and Wildlife Association (NMFWA) Bat Working Group (BWG) met from 1530-1700 on 25 March 2010 in the Midwest Airlines Center, Milwaukee, WI. Trish Griffin, White Sands Missile Range, and Eric Britzke, Environmental Laboratory, U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center, presided over the meeting. NMFWA President Chris Eberly presented Certificates of Appreciation to Trish and Eric for serving as co-chairs of the BWG during 2009-10. The session was attended by approximately 30 personnel representing DoD installations and research facilities, U.S. Fish and Wildlife (FWS) offices, and non-government organizations.

The focus of the meeting was on White-nose Syndrome (WNS) and issues relevant to DoD installations. Jeremy Coleman, USFWS National WNS Coordinator, and Eric Britzke fielded questions from the group, summarized below:

Question – Are there differences in susceptibility to WNS among species, especially by big brown bats?

Response – This is being looked at in the lab (treatment options, etc.). There is some thought that big brown bats may not be as susceptible due to the larger size and the fact that they are not as communal as some species. However, Al Hicks, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, reported that more big brown bats were affected this year than he has previously seen.

Question – What is the latest on petitions to list northern long-eared bats and cave closures?

Response – The USFWS is studying the petitions. There is no official deliberation on the cave closure petition.

Question – Is anybody looking at DNA?

Answer – Some genetic work has been initiated. A contract has been let to map the genome of the fungus. Researchers are also bringing in the European fungus to examine divergence.

Question – If our fungus is the same species as the European fungus, why aren't bats being affected in Europe?

Answer – It's not the same scale for European populations. We don't know if bats here are more susceptible or if it's a reflection a greater immunity or smaller population size in European bats. It could also be behavioral and/ or density related.

Question – There were several questions regarding the level of funding available for WNS.

Answer – The FWS did get \$1.9 million in government appropriations to address the problem. However, the FWS cannot lobby for money and is not seeking additional funds at this time. Nina Fascione, Bat Conservation International, stated the FWS needed to

provide an estimate of funds that are needed, and private citizens should contact their Congressional representative in support of WNS funding appropriations. Jeremy replied that the FWS was working on a national plan and that an implementation plan was being prepared that will include budget break-outs. Eric Britzke is leading the effort for national surveillance plans.

Question – Has anyone done a risk assessment to address potential human impacts?

Answer – We suspect bats are the primary vector for movement of the fungus, but there is some concern that humans may also help spread the disease. Breaks in transmission are not well known. Treatment of sites is not likely to happen at this time because natural strains of *Geomyces* fungi are ubiquitous in the environment and non-WNS fungi might be adversely affected by improper treatment. Possible studies to test decontamination treatments were suggested for mines.

Question – Are installations starting to plan for WNS?

Answer – Trish Griffin replied that she submitted a Legacy proposal with Bat Conservation International to do subterranean surveys at military installations throughout New Mexico.

Question – Are there any studies focusing on humidity and any lessons learned from the amphibian fungus.

Answer – Some work is being done on the humidity issue, but recent heat treatments didn't work. Changing air flow in caves was investigated but this is probably not viable. No connection is known with the amphibian fungus.

Question – Is anyone planning to look at parasites (e.g., mites and fleas) that might be involved in infection?

Answer – This was broadly examined early on but not thought to be significant.

Question – Can we go ahead and try something because the findings of experimental studies take so long?

Answer – There are a lot of things we do know and we are already making tests – not just waiting around. Trish stated that active management includes restricting access to caves, and that is something we can do right now.

Question – What so we need to do to spread the word about WNS, and what is the concern with western states?

Answer – The message needs to be passed on to exploration groups and cavers. No caving gear should be transported from the East to the West. We are encouraging state people to pass the word about the need to decontaminate gear and clothing. Much needs to be done to improve communication. A website is being developed and a spreadsheet is being prepared that will outline all research projects. A workshop was held at the Western Bat Working Group meeting in Austin last year, and WNS symposium is scheduled for Pittsburgh in May. Also, BCI has some new decontamination procedures for workshops.

There were also a few questions and comments regarding other bat issues. Several installations are involved in active bat box programs and problems with bat exclusions. A question was asked about the status of acoustic surveys. Eric responded that he would be showing a poster on acoustic methods at the Show-and-Tell and that he was cooperating with the Forest Service on a study to monitor the success of acoustic surveys and develop more extensive call libraries. It was mentioned that the Midwestern Bat Working Group was scheduled to meet on 6-7 May 2010 in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Trish passed around WNS pamphlets created by the Western Bat Working Group, and she announced that the annual meeting of The Wildlife Society in Snowbird, Utah, this year will include a bat symposium or session covering topics such as WNS.

Trish Griffin made a presentation on “Bat Exclusions from Buildings” after the question and answer session. She described considerations for exclusion and appropriate procedures and listed do’s and don’ts that installation personnel must be aware of. She also provided a list of resources for finding information on proper bat exclusion techniques.

Matthew Moran, Elmendorf AFB, was unanimously elected to serve with Eric Britzke as Co-Chair of the Working Group during 2010-11.

The meeting was adjourned at 1700 hr.

Chester O. Martin
Acting Secretary, NMFWA Bat Working Group