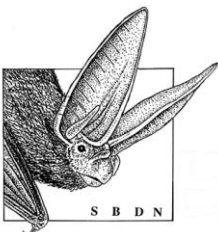
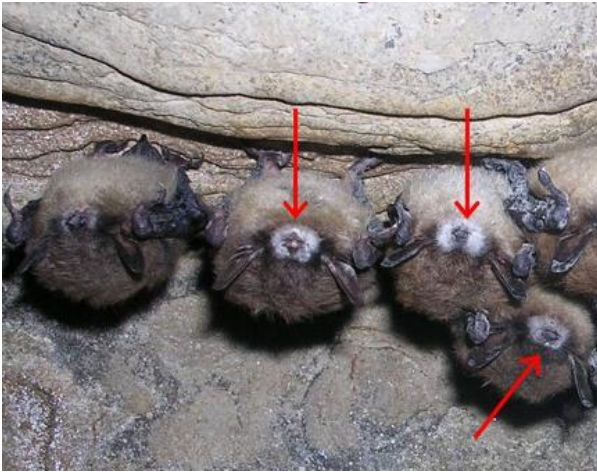




# North American Bat Working Groups Update to Trilateral Committee Meeting 2013



## **XVI Meeting of the Canada/Mexico/U.S. Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management**

**May 13-17, 2013, National Conservation Training Center, West Virginia**

### **Bat Working Groups Report to the Species of Common Conservation Concern**

#### Background

Over 50 percent of North American bat species are in some category of concern and new threats, such as bat fatalities at wind power facilities, unprecedented human activity and growth, climate change, and large-scale bat die-offs (e.g., white nosed syndrome in the Northeast) indicate that North American bats are in need of more attention than ever. In 2007 and 2008, the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management (Trilateral) and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), both supported the concept of a North American conservation effort for bats. Due to the lack of a coordinated effort at the national or international level for bat conservation in North America, a workshop was held in 2008 to establish the groundwork for an organizational framework to spearhead a conservation initiative for bats, North American Bat Conservation Alliance (NABCA).

#### Requested Outcome

The intent of this agenda item is to provide information to the Trilateral Committee on efforts underway by North American bat working groups with the intent to continue to strengthen our communication networks across the three countries to monitor and conserve migratory bat species.

#### **BAT WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

##### North American Bat Conservation Alliance (NABCA)

Although the bat conservation network in North America was one of the first to formalize its relationships, our coordinated efforts as a group have varied in structure and effectiveness over the years. Canada, Mexico and the US all have dedicated biologists and local networks (regions or states) operating effectively to respond to localized priorities. However, the international network between these three countries has been inactive for many years. The early coordinated North American network faltered for a number of reasons, but we are currently launching an effort to revitalize this network and establish clear priorities and goals to address bat conservation challenges that warrant our combined attention. We are working under a new draft charter, developed during a 2008 meeting in Tucson, Arizona, and are taking steps to develop a fully functioning team with working goals and objectives, key deliverables, and a very specific mandate. Independent of an overarching existing network, several important collaborations are moving forward including the development of a North American bat monitoring effort and a multinational response to White-nose Syndrome. While these efforts should and will continue, we believe a coordinated and effective North American Bat Conservation Alliance would add value by enhancing cooperation among existing initiatives, while also considering the full suite of concerns, threats and issues facing bats in North America. The alliance would help to establish continental bat conservation priorities, and encourage efforts to address priorities that are not already being

considered. It could also help to elevate the priority of bat conservation in other existing conservation partnerships between our three countries, and generating support and funding for critical projects.

A symposium, "Building a Global Network for Bat Conservation," will be held during the 2013 International Bat Research Conference/North American Society for Bat Research conference in San Juan, Costa Rica, August 2013. The intent of the symposium is to provide a forum for existing bat networks to share and discuss models for integrating research, education, and conservation to share lessons learned, facilitate communication and make progress toward a global network. Representatives from the following networks and organizations are scheduled: Bat Conservation International, The Latin American Bat Conservation Network (RELCOM), Bat Conservation Africa, Eurobats and BatLife Europe, Southeast Asia Bat Conservation and Research Unit (SEABCRU) Australasian Bat Society, North American Bat Conservation Alliance (NABCA), NatureServe, IUCN Species Survival Commission.

#### The Program for Conservation of Mexican Bats (PCMM)

During the past two years the PCMM has strived to maintain its growth and impact on the conservation status of bats across the country. We continue to expand the network of protected areas in caves and other roosts that are benefiting bats in many ecosystems and states of Mexico. The proposal to delist the lesser long-nosed bat from the Mexican Federal List has advanced to the next stage and we hope to announce the final delisting before the end of the year. We modeled the distribution of the threatened Mexican long-nosed bat and as a result found a couple of previously unknown roosts, one of which might be the second known mating roost for the species. In September we will have the Mexican Workshop to determine the Areas of Importance for Conservation of Bats, with the participation of over 30 bat experts and federal government institutions. The federal government asked the PCMM to be the representative for a country-wide National Program of Biological Monitoring, currently in the planning stages. We have been recognized with the 2012 Pollinator Advocate Award from the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign, and with the 2012 Whitley Gold Award from the hands of Princess Anne of England. The founder was also recognized in 2012 by the corporate Expansion Group as one of the 50 most influential Mexicans, QUIEN50.

#### Western Bat Working Group (WBWG)

For the past two years, the WBWG has been working on a Conservation Assessment for Western Bat Species to provide states, provinces, federal land management agencies, and interested organizations and individuals information on overall status of western bat species. The original Regional Priority Matrix for Western Bat Species was developed at a workshop in Reno, Nevada in 1998. Since that time, emerging threats such as climate change, wind energy, and white-nose syndrome, not evaluated as part of the 1998 assessment, necessitated a reevaluation of the existing matrix. One goal in updating the Conservation Assessment was to develop a framework to support consistent and systematic assessment of bat species vulnerability using a rigorous process and NatureServe's rank calculator to facilitate conservation status determination. We adopted the same threats scoring method developed by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and used by NatureServe. Biologists across the west were asked to contribute information on threat impact, population size and range extent for bat species in their state or area of expertise. State and regional team leads compiled information by region and assimilated into nine Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs, ecologically-based conservation regions). The draft assessment was presented for review and discussion during the 2013 WBWG Biennial Meeting in Santa Fe, New

Mexico. Emphasis was placed on transparency, repeatability, and creating a process that can endure and be duplicated and updated to assess species conservation status into the future. The WBWG sees this as a necessary first step toward prioritizing conservation actions for bats in the West and intends to incorporate Canada and Mexico in future assessments. Numerous partners collaborated on this effort (western state and federal wildlife agencies, including Alaska and British Columbia, Natural Heritage Programs, NatureServe, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, and USGS National Gap Analysis Program).

#### Midwest Bat Working Group (MWBWG)

As the primary predators of night-flying insects, bats are crucial to the ecology, economy, and health of our shared world ecosystem. The Midwest Bat Working Group (MWBWG) provides a structure for coordination, collaboration, and communication among concerned citizens and professional biologists in state, federal, academic, and private organizations. The MWBWG is dedicated to the conservation of bats and their habitats, particularly in the Midwestern United States, and works to address bat-related issues with a regional approach. Although most participants are from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin, membership is open to anyone who seeks to collaborate on research and management of bats or to promote conservation by enhancing public understanding of bats.

- Coordinate people working with bats in the Midwest
- Facilitate communication: Annual meeting; Website ([www.mwbwg.org](http://www.mwbwg.org)); Listserv
- Facilitate collaboration: Regional projects
- Advocate for Regional/National Priorities

#### Southeastern Bat Diversity Network (SBDN)

***SBDN was recognized with a Group Achievement Award from The Wildlife Society in 2012.***

As the oldest regional bat working group, SBDN has served as a model and advisory group to other developing state and regional bat conservation groups. Recent and ongoing services provided include advising the newly formed Midwest Bat Working Group on organizational structure in 2008, providing support for the South Dakota Bat Working Group to achieve nonprofit status, providing banking services for nonprofit groups involved in conservation efforts for bats (e.g., North Carolina Bat Working Group, NASBR annual meeting in 2006), and providing list-serves and website access for posting notices, news and other information on bats, positions available for bat work and study, and conservation efforts in the region.

#### *Bat Blitzes*

Probably the most notable contribution of SBDN is the annual "Bat Blitz." Bat Blitzes are intensive, volunteer-based surveys that sample the bat community in an extensive area over a 3 day period. The SBDN is the key partner in all Blitzes with a Blitz Committee providing oversight and guidance to host organizations for all aspects of planning and completing a Blitz. This annual event now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year (2002 – 2013), which garnered a prestigious, international award from the U.S. Forest Service (Wings Across America Award for Bats, 2010), is a model effort in conservation via volunteerism.

#### *White Nose Syndrome Efforts*

In 2008, when the disease began to receive significant attention by biologists in the northeastern U.S., SBDN, in conjunction with a joint meeting with the Northeast Bat Working Group, hosted a symposium on recent developments and knowledge regarding the disease. Subsequently, SBDN

formed a WNS Committee, created a webpage devoted to WNS acted quickly to educate state biologists and legislators about the significance of the disease. SBDN has sent multiple letters to nongame biologists in 16 southeastern states with up-to-date information on WNS and to senators for 16 southeastern states asking for support of initiatives that would fund WNS research efforts, including increased funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program and continued funding for the Teaming with Wildlife Act and State Wildlife Action Plan implementation. In collaboration with Bat Conservation International, this committee presented a poster with a compilation of data on the status of southeastern bat populations affected by WNS at the 2012 meeting of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

#### *Rafinesque Big-eared Bat Working Group*

The Rafinesque Big-eared Bat Working Group originated in 2007 with the goal of aiding in the conservation of this species that is closely tied to mature bottomland hardwood forests. This group hosted its annual meeting on 114 February 2013 at Fall Creek Falls State Park. Over 80 biologists attended this meeting. This group was instrumental in hosting a symposium on big-eared bats in 2010, which provided a venue for delivering unpublished information about the species. Subsequently, in 2011, members of this group produced a publication entitled Conservation and Management of Eastern Big-eared Bats. The group has a webpage: [www.rafbat.org](http://www.rafbat.org), which includes updated distribution maps for Rafinesque's big-eared bats and also southeastern myotis, which is another bottomland hardwood specialist in the southeastern U.S.

#### *Eastern Small-footed Bat Working Group*

The Eastern Small-footed Bat Working Group had its first ever meeting at Fall Creek Falls State Park, Tennessee on 14 February 2013, the day before the annual SBDN meeting. Eight-nine biologists from around the southeast were in attendance. Several folks gave presentations on the life history, capture methods, population ecology, and status for *Myotis leibii*; after this, the audience identified critical information gaps that need to be filled. The group has a webpage: <https://sites.google.com/site/mylebats/home> and an email list. Eastern small-footed bats are being considered for federal listing due to WNS impacts on the species; the decision is expected in Oct 2013.

### **OTHER SIGNIFICANT EFFORTS**

#### North American Bat Monitoring Program

The North American Bat Monitoring Program is being developed by the Conservation and Recovery Working Group of the White-Nose Syndrome National Response Plan (*A National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats*, released May 2011). Although this effort is an outgrowth of the White-nose Syndrome national planning efforts, the program will address monitoring needs for all bat species that are shared among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Cooperators in the effort include biologists and statisticians from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Canadian Wildlife Service, state agencies, Bat Conservation International, and faculty from universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. We are currently developing a sampling framework and analytical tools that will provide robust trend estimates for bat population abundances and distributions from the local to regional scale. Ultimately, our goal is to establish an interagency center for bat population monitoring with a coordinator and staff who will provide guidance to, and coordinate efforts among, biologists in state and federal agencies, tribes, NGO's, and academia. Data from these efforts will be managed by the Bat Population Data (BPD) Project at the USGS Fort Collins Science Center. The BPD is a web-based

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application that will store spatially explicit data from colony counts, acoustic data, and captures. Periodic reports will be produced which will provide managers and policy makers with data on species population trends at regional and rangewide scales. This effort is supported by the cooperating agencies, organizations, and institutions, and by grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (NIMBioS).

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