



The U.S. Congress has approved \$1.9 million in federal funding for research to identify the cause and seek solutions to White-nose Syndrome – the disease that is devastating bat populations throughout the northeastern United States and threatening bat species across North America.

The funds, included in the final version of the 2010 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, mark a dramatic increase from the initial allocation of just \$500,000 for monitoring affected bat populations. The WNS-research support was added by a joint committee that resolved differences between House and Senate versions of the bill. Both houses of Congress approved it on Thursday (October 29).

The bill now goes to President Obama, who is expected to sign it into law.

WNS, with mortality rates exceeding 90 percent at some sites, has spread rapidly into nine states since it was first reported at a New York cave in February 2006. WNS expanded beyond the Northeast and into Virginia and West Virginia last winter. Entire species of bats are at extreme risk unless solutions are found soon.

“It hasn’t been hard to convince people that this is catastrophic,” Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt) told the *Burlington Free Press* in Vermont in explaining his efforts to increase the funding. “It’s going to be a national problem. We’ve all got a stake in this thing.”

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) was instrumental in the effort. “Bats play a vital role in our ecosystem by preying on insects that destroy crops and carry disease,” he said in a news release. “This funding is a smart investment in critical research and an encouraging commitment from Congress in our fight against WNS.”

Lautenberg aides said an outpouring of public support for the WNS measure contributed greatly to its success. Bat Conservation International and other organizations devoted to bats and caves urged their members to contact their congressional representatives, especially conference committee members. “Everyone who wrote and called helped pave the way for this important victory,” Lautenberg’s office told BCI.

Lautenberg notes that he highlighted the WNS threat at a subcommittee hearing in July on imminent threats to wildlife.

“Bats are an incredibly important component of our nation’s ecosystem, and the loss of even one species could be disastrous for wildlife, agriculture and people,” Jane Lyder, Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, told the *Free Press*.

This congressional action is promising step toward protecting bats from the catastrophe of White-nose Syndrome, but much more will be needed.

For more news about White-nose Syndrome and efforts to solve this crisis, go to Bat Conservation International’s website: [www.batcon.org/wns](http://www.batcon.org/wns).

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