

## VOLUME 23, NO. 4 Winter 2005

### Telling the Story of Bats & Mines

Converting abandoned old mines into gated bat sanctuaries is one of Bat Conservation International's most effective initiatives. Throughout North America, millions of bats now find safe refuge in hundreds of underground mines, many of which would otherwise have been sealed to protect curious or unwary humans from injury. Well-designed gates keep people out, while insuring access for bats. Yet few outside the conservation, land-management and mining communities are even aware of this dramatic success.

The story of bats, mines and the gates that help them coexist is being told now through an innovative educational project at one of the earliest commercial copper mines in the Great Lakes region. The Quincy Mine, active from 1846 to 1976, is now a tourist destination. The Quincy Mine National Historic Land-mark District, operated by the nonprofit Quincy Mine Hoist Association, Inc., features underground mine tours and an educational museum complex. It draws up to 40,000 visitors a year.

The mine is also the hibernation home of tens of thousands of little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and other species, all of them protected by a gate that became bat friendly after modifications by BCI, the association and other partners. They also developed the educational exhibit – a strikingly realistic, gated mine entrance that was dedicated in October 2005.

As the exhibit describes, sealing old mines without first evaluating their importance to bats may be one of the single biggest threats to North American bats. More than half the continent's 47 bat species use mines, often as sanctuaries of last resort after losing other habitat. Even to-day, many historic mines are being removed from the landscape every year to ensure human safety and reduce liability.

BCI partnered with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to found the North American Bats and Mines Project in 1993 to protect bats from mine closures and to gate mines with current or potential use by bat colonies. Before this program's launch, large numbers of bats were being inadvertently buried during mine-reclamation activities. Many partners have since joined this important conservation effort, including federal and state agencies, conservation groups, universities and mining companies. Managing old mines for bats increasingly is becoming standard across the continent.

The work at Quincy Mine, which includes the exhibit and a new bat gate at the associated Pewabic Mine, was completed under the Great Lakes Bats and Mines Initiative. Begun in October 1999 within the North American Bats and Mines Project, the Initiative brought together a powerful collection of partners who have protected bats in more than a dozen abandoned mines in the region.

Quincy, as one of the most popular and accessible of the countless old copper mines around the Great Lakes, is an ideal site to educate the public about bats and mines. The mine reaches a maximum depth of 9,260 feet (2,822 meters), although its lower levels have filled with groundwater since the mine shut down. The world's largest steam-powered hoist, installed in 1918 to take men in and ore out of the deepest levels, still fills the hoist house. Visitors take a tram to the mine tour, which covers 2,400 feet (731 meters) of the old mine. And as they move through an interpretive center to reach the tram, they now encounter an artificial mine entrance, complete with a copy of a bat-friendly gate. The exhibit was



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supervised by BCI Programs Co-director Dave Waldien and Ed Yarbrough, manager of the Quincy Mine Hoist Association.

Bats that use mines are shown and their many values are described. The exhibit explains why and how bats use mines and how bat-friendly gates protect people and bats. The unique artificial mine entrance was created by artist David Chapman of San Antonio, Texas. He built a frame of metal tubing, then covered it with foam and fiberglass painted to resemble native stone, then added the gate.

*The Quincy Mine exhibit and the Great Lakes Bats and Mines Initiative that it commemorates were made possible through the support of:*

The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation  
Cleveland Cliffs Mining Company  
The George Gund Foundation  
International Paper/Lake Superior Land Co.  
Dr. Allen Kurta of Eastern Michigan University  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
Quincy Mine Hoist Association  
Verne and Marion Read  
Steve Smith  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
USDA Forest Service  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
USDI National Park Service  
Richard Whiteman of Red Metal Minerals  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

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