

VOLUME 12, NO. 3 Fall 1994

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The North American Bats and Mines Project Begins Work

OF AMERICA's 43 species of bats, more than half now roost in abandoned mines. These include all six of our North American endangered bats and several more that are candidates. Although mine reclamation measures have been carried out for a long time, it has been only in the past few years that efforts have accelerated at both state and federal levels.

Tens of thousands of old mines are being closed for safety reasons, or are slated for closure, threatening some of America's largest remaining bat populations with inadvertent, but immediate, eradication. The result has been one of the most serious conservation crises ever for America's bats [*BATS*, Summer 1993].

Examples like the Hibernia Mine abound. After frequently assisting on a case-by-case, mine-by-mine basis, BCI recognized the urgent need for a much more coordinated and concerted effort. Earlier this year we established the North American Bats and Mines Project in partnership with the BLM, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management [*BATS*, Spring 1994]. The BLM administers some 270 million acres of public land in the Western States. By some estimates, there may be over 100,000 abandoned mines on these lands alone.

The project was created to provide national coordination among federal, state, and private agencies and the mining industry to resolve the current crisis. Dan Taylor, a former U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist, was named Project Director this spring. He has already met with key congressional aides in Washington, DC, to discuss the issues and to ensure that bat conservation guidelines are incorporated into federal mine-closure programs.

Lack of awareness of the problem has been a major impediment to resolution. One of the project's prime objectives, therefore, is to create awareness among natural resource managers and the public about the urgency of considering the needs of bats before mines are closed. Another objective is to ensure that bat conservation is incorporated into state and federal mine-closure legislation and policy.

The issue is complicated by the fact that abandoned mines occur on private, state, and federal lands, with jurisdiction spread among many agencies with differing objectives and policies. Fostering cooperation and communication among these agencies, as well as involving the mining industry itself, will be critical. The BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and Soil Conservation Service have already signed cooperative agreements with BCI. In addition, the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are collaborating on key facets of the project, and major mining companies are beginning to offer their assistance as well.

Developing educational materials to facilitate awareness of the problem, and to introduce solutions, has been one of the project's first priorities. This fall, BCI and the USFWS will publish and distribute *Bats and Mines*, an in-depth technical bulletin for natural resource managers. The publication summarizes current knowledge on mine-assessment techniques for bats, bat and mine habitat relationships, and "bat friendly" mine-closure methods. A slide program and interpretive booth will further carry the message to important agency and

industry conventions and meetings. BCI and other agency partners will collaborate to produce and distribute a brochure designed to alert the public about the relevance of mine closures to bat conservation.

Training is also an integral part of the project. A video covering techniques to assess mines for bats, and closure methods that protect both bats and people, will be developed with the BLM for distribution to federal land managers. The first training workshops for BLM wildlife managers were held last fall. BCI and the BLM will also be conducting a series of three-day workshops open to all federal land managers throughout the western states. BCI will conduct similar workshops to bring together federal, state, and private organizations and agencies in other key regions. A special two-day version of this workshop is scheduled this fall in Michigan's Upper Peninsula to respond to their regional crisis where millions of hibernating bats are at immediate risk.

This project is a massive undertaking, but its success will ensure that many of our most important bat populations will not be lost.

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