

# BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### WNS Fungus Hits Endangered Gray Bats

A fungus tied to White-nose Syndrome (WNS), the most devastating disease ever faced by North American bats, is now confirmed in endangered gray bats in Missouri. Recovery efforts, especially protecting critical caves used by these bats, have been so successful that the gray bat was being considered for graduation off the list of endangered species. WNS threatens to reverse that success.

WNS has swept across the eastern United States, killing more than a million hibernating bats of seven species since it was discovered in a New York cave in February 2006. Mortality rates approaching 100 percent are reported at some sites, and the disease still defies desperate research efforts to find a cure or at least a way to slow the spread.

Endangered Indiana bats already are being battered by WNS. So far this year, the disease or the associated fungus have expanded into Tennessee, Maryland and Missouri, and northward into Ontario and Quebec in Canada. Bats across the continent are at imminent risk.

Roughly 95 percent of all gray bats hibernate in a handful of caves in Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Alabama. If WNS decimates these few, major colonies, the species would clearly be in peril.

“This news that gray bats are now infected with the White-nose Syndrome fungus is especially tragic for BCI,” said Nina Fascione, Executive Director of Bat Conservation International, “because our organization has worked so hard over so many years for the recovery of this important species. We must find a way to stop this disease before extinctions become inevitable.”

Fascione submitted written testimony to the Senate Interior Appropriations subcommittee last week urging the federal government to commit an additional \$5 million for research and management of WNS in 2011. The request was endorsed by nearly 60 other organizations, including the Center for Biological Diversity, Natural Resources Defense Council, Defenders of Wildlife and the National Speleological Society.

Bat Conservation International has been a key player in the gray bat’s recovery since the organization’s founding in 1982. The species, its population collapsing, was listed as endangered in 1976. BCI documented the critical threats were disturbances and loss of caves that met gray bats needs for hibernating in winter and giving birth and raising young in summer.

BCI worked with partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy and the American Cave Conservation Association, to protect critical caves, as by installing bat-friendly gates that keep people out. Gray bat colonies at caves often doubled or tripled in size after gating, and total population grew some 40 percent from 1982, reaching an estimated 2.5 million in 2005.

***Bat Conservation International (BCI)*** is devoted to conserving the world's bats and their ecosystems in order to ensure a healthy planet. Founded in 1982, the organization has achieved unprecedented progress by emphasizing sustainable uses of natural resources that benefit both bats and people.