

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 5, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are faced with an alarming ecological situation in the Northeast. Over the last two winters over one million hibernating bats have mysteriously died. While scientists have not been able to determine the precise cause of these deaths, with mortality rates in some caves as high as 90 to 100 percent, the bats appear to be infected with a fungus that turns their noses and bodies white. This affliction of unknown origin, dubbed White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), must be stopped. We ask for your full support to respond to this crisis by providing immediate, emergency Fiscal Year 2009 funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey to respond to this crisis.

The first case of WNS was reported in the winter of 2006 in Howes Cave, near Albany, New York. Scientists working for the New York Department of Environmental Conservation observed hibernating bats with a previously unidentified white fungus on their noses and bodies. Since then, confirmed cases of WNS have shown up in nine states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. In addition, there are unconfirmed WNS reports in Rhode Island. Given what we have seen in the past three years, it is highly likely that WNS will spread from the northeast into some of the largest and most diverse bat colonies in the nation, which are located in the southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest. If this happens, we risk the possibility of extinction of several bat species.

This issue has profound public health, environmental, and economic implications. Bats are among the most beneficial animals. We are just beginning to fully appreciate the roles that bats play in North American ecosystems, and it is clear that threats like WNS have the potential to influence ecosystem function in ways that we currently do not understand. They prey almost exclusively on insects such as mosquitoes, which spread disease, and moths and beetles, which damage crops. A single bat can easily eat more than 3,000 insects a night and an entire colony will consume hundreds of millions of these crop-destroying and disease-carrying pests every year. Bats reduce the need for pesticides, which cost farmers billions of dollars every year and are harmful to human health.

States, in partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, have been working diligently to establish a cause for this deadly mystery. With extremely limited resources, scientists have been working to determine a cause and develop solutions to this crisis, while minimizing its impact on populations of hibernating bats in North America. Additional research, work, and proper resources are needed to fully address this crisis.

We respectfully request that the Department of the Interior provide adequate funding to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and other agencies to carry out critical research on and develop a cure for WNS. As the bats emerge from their hibernation caves, it is vital that researchers have the resources in place to conduct tests this summer. We must do everything we can to stop the spread of WNS or it will continue to spread across the country decimating our bat populations. We ask for your help in providing immediate, emergency funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey for research, management, coordination, and outreach in order to provide an appropriate coordinated response to this deadly, newly emergent disease.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Patrick Leahy

Peter Welch

Bob Sanders

Joe Courtney

Robert Byrd

Carol Shea-Porter

Frank R. Lautenberg

John W. Olver

Chuck Schumer

Hyd Dossert

J. F. King

Robert Menendez

Jim Webb

Bob Casey, Jr.

Mark R. Warner

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Michelle Gandy

Peter J. Viscusi

Rick Raab

Robert Work

John M. H. [unclear]

Maureen Diney

Carolyn C. Kipatnick

Jay Byrnes

Joe Vit

Signers:

1. Senator Patrick Leahy
2. Senator Bernard Sanders
3. Senator Robert C. Byrd
4. Senator Charles E. Schumer
5. Senator Frank R. Lautenberg
6. Senator Robert Menendez
7. Senator John F. Kerry
8. Senator Jim Webb
9. Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
10. Senator Mark R. Warner
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22. Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick
23. Representative Robert Wexler
24. Representative Carol Shea-Porter
25. Representative Lloyd Doggett