



RESOLUTION 2023-05-07

IN SUPPORT OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION TO CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF TRANSPORTATION STRUCTURES ON BATS

WHEREAS, healthy bats and their habitats provide essential pest control, nutrient and seed dispersal, pollination, technological inspiration, and medical innovation; and

WHEREAS, many North American bat populations are increasingly vulnerable to threats that include the effects of climate change, habitat loss or disturbance, wind energy development, and the disease, white-nose syndrome, with 43 species/subspecies designated as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) nationally as of 2015; and

WHEREAS, life history traits such as delayed maturation, low reproductive rates, extensive maternal care of young, and long lifespans predispose bat populations to significant declines following loss of adults; and

WHEREAS, bats use a variety of habitat types for roosting, foraging, hibernating, and rearing young such as caves and trees, increasingly, they also use man-made structures such as mines, tunnels, bridges, culverts, barns, and attics, which therefore are also considered important habitat resources especially because loss of natural habitats make bats increasingly reliant on them; and

WHEREAS, many North American bat species depend on ecological systems that cross geopolitical boundaries, and thereby require landscape scale collaboration among both public and private land managers for cross-boundary conservation; and

WHEREAS, there is value in standardizing data collection and management protocols for effective and efficient cross-boundary conservation, and the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat) provides a shared repository and resource for federal, state, provincial, tribal, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies; and

WHEREAS, several bat species that use transportation structures, including tricolored and little brown bats, are currently being considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listing as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, which would necessitate transportation structure survey requirements before commencing relevant work; and

WHEREAS, transportation infrastructure in North America is generally aging and in disrepair, with increasing need for expansion and maintenance; and

WHEREAS, the primary authority and capacity to protect and manage non-federally listed bat species resides in the states, provinces, tribes, and territories, which have a significant interest in protecting their native wildlife resources, while allowing infrastructure projects to proceed without significant delays or increased project costs; and

WHEREAS, the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act has made \$110 billion available for development, maintenance, and improvements to infrastructure, creating an opportunity for greater collaboration between wildlife agencies and state and federal departments of transportation to address wildlife and habitat in roadway rights-of-way; and

WHEREAS, because many states, provinces, tribes, and territories are already required to conduct migratory bird surveys before most maintenance or demolition projects under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), the opportunity exists for simultaneously surveying for the presence of bats at bridge and culvert projects; and

WHEREAS, the national Bats and Transportation Structures (BATS) survey training materials developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and the standardized data protocols for collection and submission of recorded data to NABat, are available free of charge to federal, state, provincial, tribal, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies; and

WHEREAS, the BATS survey training and standardized data protocols for collection and submission of data to NABat are scientific guidance that are not meant to be prescriptive at the local, state, federal, tribal, or territorial levels, and should thereby be regarded as a set of recommendations for agencies;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies acknowledges the importance of state, provincial, tribal, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies collaborating with their respective departments of transportation to determine the presence of bats at all bridge and culvert projects before any structural maintenance or demolition projects begin to help meet statutory and regulatory responsibilities to conserve bats and their habitats, while limiting delays and costs to infrastructure projects; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Association recognizes the value of standardizing surveillance practices for landscape conservation, and therefore encourages use of national Bats and Transportation Structures (BATS) survey protocols by trained individuals, and submission of recorded data, when feasible, to the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat), which serves as a shared data repository for fish and wildlife agencies, to effectively manage and conserve bat populations while continuing to address transportation infrastructure improvement needs.

Resolution submitted by the Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee.

Adopted by the Association on September 27, 2023 in Calgary, Alberta.