



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Wildlife Diversity and Conservation Funding Committee Bat Working Group Report: September 11, 2023

Working Group Members

State/Provincial Agency:

Brett Andersen, *Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*
Owen Boyle, *Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources*
Jenny Dickson, *Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division*
Carolyn Eckrich, *Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife*
Nathan Fuller, *Texas Parks and Wildlife*
Joe Kath, *Illinois Department of Natural Resources*
Trina Morris, Chair, *Georgia Department of Natural Resources*
Erin Swerdferger, *Government of Saskatchewan*

Federal Agency:

Jeremy Coleman, *US Fish and Wildlife Service*
Theresa Davidson, *US Department of Agriculture Forest Service - Eastern Region*
Brad Jost, *Bureau of Land Management - Headquarters*
Marikay Ramsey, *Bureau of Land Management - New Mexico*
Brian Reichert, *US Geological Survey - Fort Collins Science Center*

Non-governmental Organization:

Mylea Bayless, *Bat Conservation International*

AFWA Staff Support:

Leanne Burns

Activities

The AFWA Bat Working Group (BWG) held a forum at the March 2023 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference annual conference in St. Louis. The forum included presentations on topics including state agency needs, department of transportation partnerships, bat status & threats, white-nose syndrome, wild energy impacts to bats, NA Bat and the 2023 State of the Bats Report. The topics initiated good discussions among participants and comments after the forum were very positive. Participants expressed their support for the BWG and our planned ongoing and future efforts.

Work Group Charge

The Bat Working Group will help identify barriers to bat conservation and work with other AFWA committees to provide guidance or assistance on cross-cutting issues. The working group creates a forum for coordination and information sharing regarding broad collaborations (e.g. NA Bat monitoring and WNS response) and develops new conservation tools and solutions.

Questions/Suggestions from 2023 BWG Forum:

- Collect current wind energy standards for siting/reviewing/monitoring & compile into recommendations for states
- Pursue “bat friendly” certification for wind energy companies that use best practices?
- DOD & BLM funding opportunities upcoming for bats – BWG to distribute
- Suggestions/Comments for NA Bat
 - Streamline federal bat capture data entry process
 - USFS E Region used NA Bat in development of bat conservation strategy and considered it a great example of a success story
 - BLM in the west also considers it a very valuable partnership considering limited capacity over a very large landscape
 - Some states struggle to have capacity to verify acoustic records – NA Bat staff suggested increased partnerships with hubs to assist
 - Other states expressed difficulties incorporating large, legacy datasets into NA Bat. Staff suggested they attend upcoming training to deal with data backlogs
- Upcoming federal listing decisions – participants expressed interest in increased assistance dealing with newly listed bat species
- Requested flexibility from USFWS with state forest management considering the absence of some species on the landscape after WNS
- BWG will continue to work on FAQs for bat listings to assist with questions from state agencies. USFWS will work to address questions.
- USFWS urges states to work closely with USFWS ecological services offices
- Participants requested additional guidance on the 7A1/7A2 process from USFWS
- Some discussion for USFWS to consider funding more research with mitigation dollars

The BWG continue to collect requests questions from state agency representatives related to the recent and upcoming bat listings. BWG members will assist USFWS with disseminating any new documents related to bat listings as they are available. BWG member Brian Reichert is our NA Bat representative and will be using the comments and suggestions from the forum to develop topics for upcoming NA Bat learning sessions. BWG members will also continue to work with the AFWA Energy and Wildlife Committee on developing some standard guidance for wind energy siting/review/monitoring for state agencies.

Recently, the majority of the efforts of the BWG have been focused on development of the Bats and Transportations Structures (B.A.T.S.) resolution. This resolution has been reviewed by the resolution committee and is being presented for adoption at the upcoming annual AFWA meeting in Calgary. The resolution encourages state resource agencies to work with state Departments of Transportation (DOT) to adopt the national *Bats and Transportation Structures* (BATS) training and survey guidance recommendations. The resolution outlines the importance of bats to our environments and the long list of current threats to bats in North America. The resolution encourages utilizing existing training materials to prepare staff and contractors for bat surveys on transportation structures to increase survey effectiveness. The resolution also encourages survey data be entered into the NA Bat database. This resolution, once adopted,

should help state resources agencies to effectively manage and conserve bat populations while continuing to address transportation infrastructure improvement needs.

In addition to these activities, the BWG is continuing to assemble information to aid states currently revising their State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). BWG members are collecting current recommendations and conservation actions related to bat conservation. This effort is consistent with the goal of standardizing conservation priorities and actions across regions. In order to help facilitate this effort, the BWG is preparing an AFWA SWAP learning session for bats. The session is scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 18th from 2-3:30 (eastern time). The session is intended to provide some examples from states that have incorporated conservation actions for bats into their SWAP revision. The session will also provide information about how states can use NA Bat to inform their SWAP revision. Breakout sessions will allow for discussions around additional questions/needs from state SWAP coordinators as well as a forum for sharing successes and challenges.

The working group will continue to provide technical assistance related to bat health from a One Health approach as needed, and will continue to promote NABat expansion to facilitate coordination, share information, and develop new conservation tools and solutions. The AFWA Bat Conservation E-Newsletter, which reaches over 300 subscribers with over a 50% open rate, will continue to be sent out monthly to inform a network of bat professionals and interested AFWA associates across North America.

The BWG continues to grow membership representation, adding and replacing several members since the NA Meeting in March. We have had two retirements and will have a third by the end of 2023. We brought on new members to overlap with retiring members to allow for a better transition. We recently added our first Canadian provincial member and she is working on developing a contact list for bat leads in all Canadian provinces as well as working to recruit additional members from Canada. Group members are still working to identify potential candidates for Tribal representation and we will continue to work to add/replace members when needed. This broad representation should assist the working group to identify additional regional bat conservation and research priorities in support of its AFWA members.