

Lake States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan



For

**Wisconsin County Forest Association
September 29, 2017**

By

**Sarah Herrick
Forestry Liaison
Natural Heritage Conservation Bureau**

- Populations of cave hibernating bats in WI are in precipitous decline due to a fungal disease known as “white-nose syndrome”.
 - 1st discovered in WI in 2014.
 - Declines of 30% to 100% in hibernacula where WNS is present.
- One species, NLEB, has been listed as federally threatened, two other species are being reviewed for listing by FWS.

Why is this a concern for forestry?

- Any take of endangered species is prohibited.
- During the summer these species:
 - Utilize trees as maternity colonies
 - Roost in trees
 - Forage in forested areas
- Take is defined as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect” an endangered species.

- WI, MI, MN are jointly developing the Lake States Forest Management Bat HCP
- Purpose: Obtain a federal ITP under ESA section 10 requesting authorization for the incidental take of bats during forest management activities.

What is in an HCP?

- HCP a required step in obtaining an ITP
- Species, Lands, and Activities covered by an ITP
- Amount of take anticipated and covered by an ITP
- How take would be avoided and minimized
- How unavoidable take would be mitigated
- How landowners would participate
 - The HCP will likely be structured to allow “opt-in” (or not) by individual landowners through a Certificate of Inclusion

How is the HCP being developed?

- Supported by senior leadership in each state (MN, WI, MI)
 - Regional consistency
 - Landscape scale approach
- Grants and Contracts Administered by MI
- Contractor (ICF International) hired to develop HCP
- Steering Committee of representatives from each state DNR:
 - Endangered Species Coordinator
 - Division of Forestry Representative
 - Participation of USFWS and consultant representatives, as needed
- All three DNRs are committed to covering forest management in all non-federal forest lands
 - Voluntary COI process

Covered Species

- Northern Long-eared Bat
 - Federally threatened species
 - 4(d) rule exempts forest management from take prohibition except under certain conditions.
- Little Brown Bat
 - FWS currently reviewing status and will make a listing decision in the “foreseeable future”
- Tri-colored bat (eastern pipistrelle)
 - 2 NGOs have petitioned FWS to consider federal protection.
- Indiana Bat (MI only)
 - Federally endangered species

Covered Activities

- Timber harvest and related forest practices.
- Road and trail construction, maintenance & use.
- Prescribed fire

Why a Habitat Conservation Plan?

- FWS has received multiple Notices of Intent to Sue challenging Threatened designation and 4(d) rule for NLEB.
- If reclassification or lawsuit leads to loss of the 4(d) rule, continued summer forest management will require an Incidental Take Permit (ITP).
- If no ITP is in place when NLEB becomes endangered, it is possible any harvest operations occurring between April and October could require FWS consultation on a project by project basis to avoid illegal take.
- Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is required to apply for an ITP.

Tentative Timeline

- Internal review complete, revision underway:
 - Chapter 1 - Intro
 - Chapter 2 – Covered Activities
 - Chapter 3 – Environmental Baseline
 - Chapter 4 – Take Estimation
- October 2017 – Chapter 5 (Conservation Measures) will be ready for internal review.
- December 2017 – Chapters 6 (Plan Implementation), 7 (Funding), & 8 (Alternatives) are ready for internal review
- Complete Draft of HCP ready sometime in 2018

Opportunities for Participation:

- HCP website for up-to-date information:
<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestPlanning/hcp/bats.html>
 - Watch introductory webinar on website.
 - Live Q & A webinar on October 31st
- Sign up for HCP GovDelivery list
- Comment on draft HCP chapters
- Comment on full draft HCP which will be put out for public comment by FWS sometime in 2018.
- Participate in FWS EIS scoping meetings.

Questions?

Sarah Herrick

sarah.herrick@wisconsin.gov

608-267-7689