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News

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White-nose disease confirmed in Pendleton bats

By **Rick Steelhammer**
Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Bats in Pendleton County have white-nose syndrome, a condition associated with the death of more than 100,000 hibernating bats in the Northeast, a laboratory has confirmed.

"We pretty much knew that," state Division of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Craig Stihler said of the syndrome's confirmation in an e-mail message on Monday. "But now the lab confirms it."

Bats with suspected white nose syndrome were collected from two Pendleton County caves in late January and sent to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis., for analysis.

DNR biologists found dead bats and bats showing symptoms of the disease at three Pendleton County caves in late January and early February, and have received a report from cavers of suspected WNS at a fourth Pendleton County cave.

West Virginia caves provide some of the nation's most important hibernation sites for endangered Virginia big-eared bats and Indiana bats, as well as for a variety of more abundant bat species.

A cold-loving fungus not previously scientifically described has been linked to white nose syndrome, which was first observed in bat hibernation sites near Albany, N.Y., in 2006. Since then, the syndrome has spread to caves and abandoned mines in Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and West Virginia, and is suspected to be present in New Hampshire.

The syndrome gets its name from the powdery, white fungus found on the muzzles, ears and wings of afflicted bats.

"Although little is known about this condition, what is known suggests that large numbers of bats in West Virginia are likely to be affected and die within the next couple years," Stihler said earlier this month.

"The void in the night skies created by the absence of thousands of bats could affect all West Virginians, because bats prey on a variety of insect pests."

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