

Protecting Bats

From National Wildlife Refuge System

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that it will close immediately all caves and mines within the National Wildlife Refuge System and implement research and monitoring protocols in a nationwide effort to slow the spread of white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Alabama and Logan Cave National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas are already involved in the coordinated response by state, federal and tribal wildlife and land management agencies, as are Pilot Knob and Ozark Cavefish National Wildlife Refuges, both in Missouri, Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, Indiana, and Ozark Plateau National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. The Refuge System has about 96 caves-like structures on its lands and about 240 abandoned mine sites.



Photo: USFWS

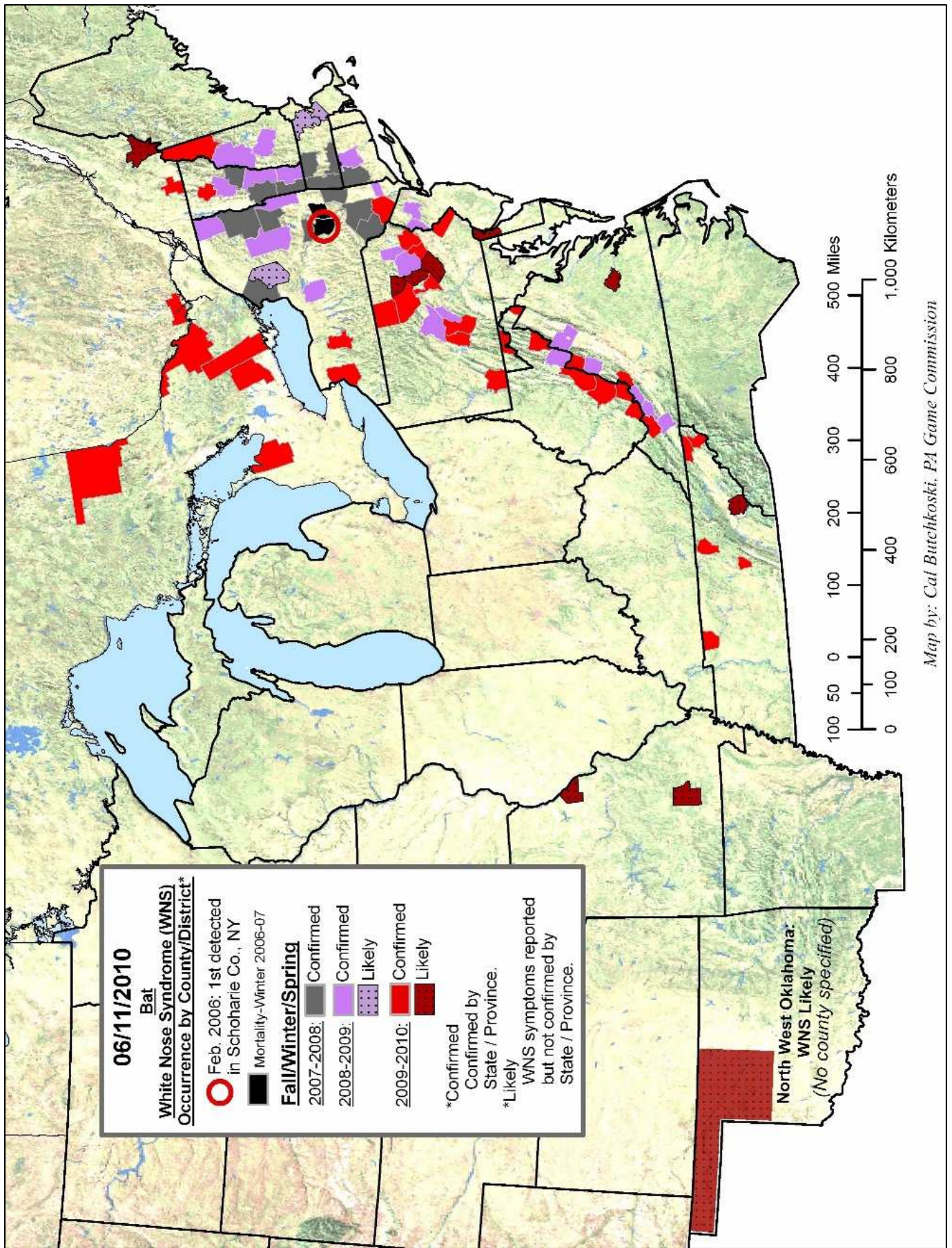
First documented in New York in 2006, WNS has spread rapidly across the eastern United States, killing more than 1 million bats. Named for the white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other body parts of hibernating bats, WNS is associated with extensive mortality of bats in the Northeast.

Bats with WNS are found to exhibit uncharacteristic behavior during cold weather months, including flying outside in the daylight and clustering near the entrance of hibernacula.

More than half of the 45 bat species living in the United States rely on hibernation for winter survival. Four endangered species and subspecies of hibernating bats in the U.S. are already affected by or are at risk from WNS.

The fungus associated with WNS, *Geomyces destructans*, has been detected as far west as Oklahoma, and is expected to continue spreading. While the fungus is transmitted primarily by bat-to-bat contact, biologists suspect it could be transmitted inadvertently by humans. Fungal spores can be transferred from cave sediment to clothing and instruments, and transported to unaffected sites.

For more information about WNS, go to <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/>.



Credit: Cal Butchkoski, Pennsylvania Game Commission via National Wildlife Refuge System