



Fact sheet and park policies regarding

White-Nose Syndrome in Bats

People come to Carlsbad Caverns National Park to see famous caves and the bats that live in them. To protect hibernating bats from a deadly fungal disease, cave recreation is changing.

What is white-nose syndrome?

First noted in 2006, White-nose Syndrome (WNS) is a disease that has killed over one million hibernating bats in caves and mines throughout eastern and mid-western United States and eastern Canada. It is named for the white, powdery fungus (*Geomyces destructans*) often found on an infected bat's muzzle. The disease and fungus do not appear to harm people or pets.

WNS is caused by a fungus that is spread from bat to bat. Humans may inadvertently spread the disease too because fungal spores can be carried on shoes, clothing, packs or purses, cameras, and caving gear of people who have entered caves or mines where WNS is found. If these items are not properly cleaned or decontaminated and they are brought into another cave or mine, the spores could potentially infect any bats residing there. Fortunately, neither the fungus, nor WNS, has been found in Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

How is cave recreation changing?

In an effort to slow the spread of WNS, visitors to both privately and publicly owned caves will encounter new policies and procedures. Prior to entering park caves, visitors are asked a series of questions to determine if they have visited caves or mines which could potentially have exposed them to WNS.

Clothing, cameras, flashlights and other items that have been in an affected area will not be permitted unless they are properly laundered or cleaned. If alternative footwear is not available, shoes or boots will



NPS photo by Dr. Nick Hristov

be decontaminated on site. Visitors unwilling or unable to comply with decontamination standards will not be permitted to enter park caves.

For visitors on adventures tours into **Lower Cave, Spider Cave, Hall of The White Giant, and Slaughter Canyon Cave**, the NPS will provide safety equipment – helmets, headlamps, kneepads and gloves. *Tour participants must provide four new AA batteries and may not use their own caving equipment.*

Researchers and recreational cavers with permits to enter undeveloped caves in the park must follow strict decontamination protocols developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To read more about WNS, decontamination, and the latest research, go to: www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome.

Why are bats important?

Bats are critical for healthy ecosystems and economies! *Bats hold key roles in nature as insect-eaters, pollinators, seed spreaders, and as prey.* Without bats, ecologically, some animals and plants would thrive and others fail in a domino effect that would have wide ranging impact. Without bats, economically, agricultural costs will rise as farmers and ranchers must use more pesticides and spend more on health costs for their animals who get insect-borne illnesses. Also, there could be potentially ill affects to people from vector-borne ailments. A study published in *Science* in 2011 estimates that without bats eating up crop pests, agricultural losses in North America could be over \$3.7 billion per year.

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For park hours of operation and a complete list of all tours and programs, please visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/cave or call 575-785-2232.

For guided tour reservations, www.recreation.gov or call 877-444-6777.