



## NEWS RELEASE

# National Park Service

**Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Bushkill, Pennsylvania 18324**

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### **Delaware Water Gap NRA Closes Access to All Park Caves**

Superintendent John Donahue announced that all caves and mines within the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DEWA) will be closed immediately and remain indefinitely closed to public access. Caves affected by this closure include the Coppermine mine shafts and Tom Quick Cave in New Jersey and the Cold Air Cave at Mt. Minsi in Pennsylvania.

This moratorium on all caving activity within the park is to protect the native bat populations by preventing the spread of white nose syndrome (WNS). White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a malady of unknown origin that has killed hundreds of thousands of bats across the northeastern United States during the past three years and continues unchecked. It has been identified at some sites within the park and is suspected in others.

Caves infected with the WNS fungus may not show any obvious signs of its presence and the actual geographic distribution of all affected sites is not known. The primary agent of concern is a fungus that is new to science and may possibly be an invasive species. This fungus grows best in the cold and wet conditions common to caves and abandoned mines.

Human activity in affected caves may cause fungal spores and particles to become airborne and likely transported inadvertently from site-to-site on boots and other gear of cave users increasing the susceptibility and mortality of bats to WNS. Slowing the spread of WNS will buy time that is critical in confirming the cause and potentially implementing management actions to minimize the impacts to native bat populations. The observed devastation to bat populations, exceeding 90 percent mortality at many affected sites, and the evidence for human-assisted spread justifies that every precaution be made to managing activities that impact both caves and bats.

Donahue stated, "We recognize that the steps we are talking to close these areas will require understanding and sacrifice from the caving community and we regret this inconvenience. This measure will not be a cure for WNS, but it is necessary to help slow the spread of this affliction and to reduce the risks to bat populations in the park and throughout North America."

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