



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Lava Beds
National Monument

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Lava Beds National Monument News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lava Beds National Monument Annual Winter Bat Survey Completed

TULELAKE, California— Lava Beds National Monument staff recently completed eight days of bat hibernacula surveys. The purpose of these annual surveys is to track the health and status of the monument's winter bat population. Most monument bat species hibernate during the winter to survive the long, cold season when their food source (insects) is unavailable. Caves that are used by bats for hibernation are known as *hibernacula*, and these sites are chosen by the bats for the stable, cold temperatures that allow them to conserve energy by slowing their metabolism. Because bats remain relatively inactive while hibernating, winter is the ideal time to obtain accurate counts of bat populations. Surveys are only conducted once each winter to minimize disturbance to the bats. This year's survey of lava caves yielded a count of 1,447 Townsend's Big-Eared Bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), 4 Big Brown Bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and 13 bats of the *Myotis* genus (it is not possible to identify these bats to species level without handling them, which would cause unwanted disturbance). These numbers are consistent with previous surveys. The bat population at Lava Beds is in good health.

Careful planning and superb weather, allowed teams to safely hike to all of the 78 randomly selected caves. Surveys have better accuracy when conducted within a single week, as this reduces the possibility of missing or duplicating the counts if bats become active and move between caves. Surveys are conducted by slowly scanning the cave ceilings and recording the number of individual and clusters of hibernating bats. Counts varied from zero bats to more than one hundred bats per cave, with most caves containing less than 20 bats.

There are many potential threats to the local bat population such as climate change and disease. These surveys are part of the efforts park staff has taken to better understand and protect these bats. The statistically sound hibernacula survey protocol improves the monument's understanding of its bat population. "I was excited and pleased to see that our numbers for the vast majority of sites

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are stable or even slightly higher than in past years. Despite declines of the Townsend's big-eared bat in other parts of California, the species appears to be doing very well at Lava Beds," noted Katrina Smith, the monument's bat specialist. Records from previous winter bat counts dating back to 1961 provided the baseline needed to create a valid survey protocol. Over time, the new protocol will produce a trend line for an estimated total winter bat population at Lava Beds. It is important to be able to estimate the population, as it is impossible to survey all 700+ monument caves in a one-week period.

Monitoring winter hibernacula and summer maternity bat activity is vital to understanding the long-term health of this important resource for the Klamath Basin. Bats control pest populations by eating millions of insects over the course of one year. Lava Beds is committed to protecting all bat species within the monument. Visitors are involved in protecting bat population health by participating in the white-nose syndrome (WNS) screening process at the monument's visitor center. WNS is a fatal disease affecting cave roosting bats. Lava Beds reports no sign of WNS during the 2014 survey.

Visitors can help protect bats as well. During your next visit to Lava Beds, be on the lookout for bats in and near caves. If you see a bat, keep quiet and exit the cave. It is important not to disturb hibernating bats. If awoken, bats could use valuable energy they need to survive the winter months. Please report all bat sightings to a ranger!

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Lava Beds National Monument, established in 1925, is a land of turmoil, both geologic and historic. Over the last half-million years, volcanic eruptions have created a rugged landscape dotted with diverse volcanic features. Lava tube caves, Native American sites, historic battlefields and a high desert wilderness experience await you!

For more information about visiting Lava Beds National Monument, call 530-667-8100, email labe_interpretation@nps.gov, or go to www.nps.gov/labe.

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