

Bug-Eating Bats, Worth Up to \$53 Billion to American Farmers, at Grave Risk from Fast-Spreading Disease

\$10.8 Million Needed for Response to Unprecedented Wildlife Epidemic

A Letter to Members of the U.S. House of Representatives

June 1, 2011

Dear _____,

We, the undersigned, urge your swift action on a wildlife disease crisis affecting North American bats, which has serious implications for the economic well-being of American farmers, for pesticide use and food safety, and for the overall health of our environment.

Our groups represent farmers, consumers, and conservationists, all deeply concerned about white-nose syndrome, a bat-killing disease that has been spreading rapidly across the continent in the last several years. The rapid die-off of bats will affect people, as well as the natural world.

Earlier this year, a new scientific paper reported that the free, non-toxic pest control services that bats provide to American agriculture—by eating bugs that attack crops—is worth \$3.7 billion to \$53 billion each year. Without bats keeping insect populations in check, pesticide use will go up, and organic farmers, in particular, will lose one of their best allies in their quest to grow safe, affordable fruits, vegetables, and other crops for American consumers.

We call on you to appropriate \$10.8 million in the 2012 federal budget to white-nose syndrome research, management, and coordination. The response to this national wildlife emergency has been greatly hampered by a lack of funding for scientific research investigating the cause of the disease and a possible cure. Federal and state wildlife agencies have scrambled to find the resources to address this fast-moving, little-understood malady.

Given the threat to agricultural health, the potential for higher pesticide use, and potential losses to small, farm-based businesses across the country, we believe an immediate investment in addressing white-nose syndrome and finding an effective means of controlling it, is urgent and justified.

White-nose syndrome has caused mortality rates of 70-100 percent in affected bat colonies, and more than two years ago, scientists estimated that more than 1 million bats had been killed. Many more bats have died since that time. To date, white-nose syndrome has been found in six bat species, and is confirmed or suspected in 19 eastern and Midwestern states and four Canadian provinces. Biologists fear the disease may soon move into the West, as the fungus that causes the disease has been found as far west as western Oklahoma. Altogether, more than two dozen North American bat species are threatened by this epidemic.

The time for action against white-nose syndrome is now. If the disease spreads across the country and decimates bat populations across broad regions, the biology of bats dictates it will be

decades or centuries before they recover. Some species will likely never recover, and may be lost forever. These losses are not ones that farmers, American consumers, or anyone vulnerable to increased pesticide use, can afford.

We look forward to learning how you will respond to this pressing issue.

Thank you very much.

Signed:

Mollie Matteson, Conservation Advocate
Center for Biological Diversity
Richmond, VT

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Beyond Pesticides
Washington, DC

Patty Clary, Executive Director
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A Letter to Members of the U.S. Senate

June 1, 2011

Dear Senator _____:

We, the undersigned, urge your swift action on a wildlife disease crisis affecting North American bats, which has serious implications for the economic well-being of American farmers, for pesticide use and food safety, and for the overall health of our environment.

Our groups represent farmers, consumers, and conservationists, all deeply concerned about white-nose syndrome, a bat-killing disease that has been spreading rapidly across the continent in the last several years. The rapid die-off of bats will affect people, as well as the natural world.

Earlier this year, a new scientific paper reported that the free, non-toxic pest control services that bats provide to American agriculture—by eating bugs that attack crops—is worth \$3.7 billion to \$53 billion each year. Without bats keeping insect populations in check, pesticide use will go up, and organic farmers, in particular, will lose one of their best allies in their quest to grow safe, affordable fruits, vegetables, and other crops for American consumers.

We call on you to appropriate \$10.8 million in the 2012 federal budget to white-nose syndrome research, management, and coordination. The response to this national wildlife emergency has been greatly hampered by a lack of funding for scientific research investigating the cause of the disease and a possible cure. Federal and state wildlife agencies have scrambled to find the resources to address this fast-moving, little-understood malady.

Given the threat to agricultural health, the potential for higher pesticide use, and potential losses to small, farm-based businesses across the country, we believe an immediate investment in addressing white-nose syndrome and finding an effective means of controlling it, is urgent and justified.

We also urge you to pass S. 357, the Wildlife Disease Emergency Act of 2011. This legislation will create a structure that will enable the federal government and state wildlife agencies to more rapidly and nimbly respond to wildlife disease emergencies, such as white-nose syndrome in bats. As wildlife diseases become an ever-greater threat to our natural heritage and economic well-being, it is vital that we create a means by which to address these threats quickly and effectively.

White-nose syndrome has caused mortality rates of 70-100 percent in affected bat colonies, and more than two years ago, scientists estimated that more than 1 million bats had been killed. Many more bats have died since that time. To date, white-nose syndrome has been found in six

bat species, and is confirmed or suspected in 19 eastern and Midwestern states and four Canadian provinces. Biologists fear the disease may soon move into the West, as the fungus that causes the disease has been found as far west as western Oklahoma. Altogether, more than two dozen North American bat species are threatened by this epidemic.

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