
Los Angeles Times

JUNE 28, 2011

Rare bats, battered by white-nose syndrome, may warrant endangered species protection

By Louis Sahagun - Los Angeles Times

Two types of bats may deserve Endangered Species Act protection because of the threat from white-nose syndrome as well as habitat destruction, federal wildlife authorities announced Tuesday.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said it had launched a status review of Eastern small-footed and Northern long-eared bats in response to a petition filed in January 2010 by the Center for Biological Diversity, which fears those animals are now on the brink of extinction due to white-nose syndrome, an infectious and lethal cold-loving fungus.

“The writing is on the cave wall,” Mollie Matteson, conservation advocate for the center, said in a statement. “If action isn’t taken to close caves in uninfected areas, conduct research on treatment and protect bats from other threats, we will lose these two bats and perhaps many others.”

The Eastern small-footed bat is one of the smallest bats in North America and occurs from eastern Canada and New England south to Alabama and Georgia and west to Oklahoma.



The Northern long-eared bat is associated with old-growth forests and ranges from eastern North America to the Midwest and northward across Canada.

The review is only the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough study of all the biological information available on distribution, status, population size and trends; life history; and threats including white-nose syndrome, which has killed more than a million bats since its discovery in 2006.

The agency in December initiated a comprehensive review of the little brown bat, which faces regional extinction due to white-nose syndrome.

Over the last five years, the fungus has swept across 19 states, as far west as Oklahoma. It has killed mostly little brown bats, which have lost an estimated 20% of their population in the northeastern United States in five years.

The fungus seems to prefer the 25 species of hibernating bats, but each of the 45 species of bats in the United States and Canada may be susceptible to white-nose syndrome.

A recent study published in Science estimates that the value of pest control provided by bats each year is at least \$3.7 billion nationwide.

“Without aggressive efforts to secure their habitat and stem further losses from all causes, including human transmission of the new bat disease,” Matteson said, “these bats may soon join the sad list of American species we know only from textbooks and museums.”