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U.S. Weighs Endangered Species Listing for 2 Bats Threatened by Disease

- Allison Winter

Two bat species threatened by habitat destruction and a voracious disease may get protection under the Endangered Species Act through a review announced today by the Obama administration.

The Fish and Wildlife Service said in a Federal Review notice ([pdf](#)) that protections may be warranted for the Eastern small-footed and Northern long-eared bats.

The finding comes in response to a lawsuit filed last year by the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity that says a listing is warranted because of the spread of white-nose syndrome.

“Hibernating bats across the eastern United States are dying by the millions,” the center’s Mollie Matteson said. “We hope today’s announcement will serve as a wakeup call for urgent action to save our bats.”

The group has called for increased funding to research the disease and petitioned to ban “nonessential” human travel from caves on public land.

A fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, is thought to cause the disease that has spread since its 2006 discovery in upstate New York to 17 states and four Canadian provinces. The disease can kill between 90 and 100 percent of hibernating bats in any cave.

Today’s finding initiates what could be a lengthy process toward federal protection for the two bat species. The yearlong status review announced today will assess biological information on the distribution, status, population size and trends and threats to the species. That information will then lead to a decision of whether to propose federal protections.

In its initial assessment, the service said existing regulations may be inadequate to protect the species from habitat destruction and degradation, disturbances of hibernation areas and maternity roosts, and problems related to white-nose syndrome.

The Eastern small-footed bat, one of the smallest bats in North America, is found in eastern Canada and New England, as far south as Alabama and as far west as 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 Fish and Wildlife Service last December initiated a comprehensive review of the little brown bat, which faces regional extinction due to white-nose syndrome.