

Science News

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Wildlife disease bill introduced in Senate

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15 (UPI) -- A bill in the U.S. Senate would accelerate the federal government's response to wildlife disease crises like one now devastating bats, conservationists say.

Bats in North America have been decimated in the past few years by a new, fast-spreading illness called white-nose syndrome, a release from the Center for Biological Diversity said Tuesday.

"The slow response of the federal government to white-nose syndrome makes it painfully clear that we need a better system for quickly addressing wildlife crises," the center's Mollie Matteson said. "White-nose syndrome threatens the survival of bats around the country but so far the federal government hasn't responded in a way that matches the magnitude of this unprecedented outbreak.

"A system for national wildlife disease response, if adequately funded, will make a huge difference," she said.

The Wildlife Disease Emergency Act, introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., would allow the secretary of the interior to declare wildlife disease emergencies, fund rapid response, and address crises in cooperation

with federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Lautenberg introduced the bill Tuesday during a confirmation hearing for the new director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dan Ashe.

