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DEDICATED TO THE EXPLORATION, STUDY, AND CONSERVATION OF CAVES
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The National Speleological Society and White Nose Syndrome

Mission Statement

The National Speleological Society (NSS) is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the scientific study of caves and karst; protecting caves and their natural contents through conservation, ownership, stewardship, and public education; and promoting responsible cave exploration and fellowship among those interested in caves.

The National Speleological Society is the nation's oldest and largest organization dedicated to the study, exploration, and conservation of caves and their natural resources. With over 10,000 members, and more than 250 internal organizations, we have been responsible for much of the discovery, mapping, and study of the nation's caves – over 50,000 documented. The NSS and affiliated cave conservancies own and manage over 100 caves, including those that protect endangered and threatened bat species.

The NSS has been involved at the forefront of the investigation into white-nose syndrome since its discovery in New York in 2007. We have participated in virtually all the national WNS conferences and symposia, helping underwrite the first national convening on WNS in Albany, New York in 2009.

At that conference, the NSS was asked to take the lead in raising and granting money for critical WNS research, as state and federal funding streams could not react quickly enough through their lengthy budget processes.

Our members stepped up to the plate, and hundreds of them have made individual contributions, totaling over \$100,000 for critical and timely white-nose syndrome research. The NSS Board of Governors, the National Speleological Foundation, and many NSS grottos and other internal organizations across the country chipped in. Bat Conservation International and the Center for North American Bat Research and Conservation also immediately became involved and together we have funded dozens of critical WNS research projects, alone and jointly. Sometimes these were complete projects; other times they provided bridge or gap funding until U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could make money available.

In 2009, NSS White Nose Syndrome Liaison, Peter Youngbaer, testified before Congress, successfully advocating for \$1.9 million in research funding. He was part of a four-person panel that included BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle, Boston University's noted bat researcher Tom Kunz, and Vermont's state bat biologist Scott Darling.

Our individual members have assisted in bat field surveys, both underground during hibernation season, and above ground conducting emergence surveys and summer acoustical monitoring. They have also actively participated in state and federal WNS planning. Some of our best scientists are involved directly



in lab and field research, and several of the state and federal agency personnel working on WNS happen to be NSS members, as well.

From the beginning, the NSS realized the importance of educating the public and its own members about WNS. We quickly set up and now maintain one of the most visited WNS Web sites at <http://www.caves.org/WNS>, updating it virtually daily. Included on it are downloadable educational brochures, PowerPoint presentations and other materials designed to help our members educate and inform the public. We developed training material to ensure cavers understand WNS cleaning and disinfecting protocols. We assisted the U.S. Forest Service and the National Caves Association (commercial caves) in developing their brochures and posters on WNS.

A particular target group that only NSS members are most likely to encounter are cavers who are unaffiliated with any grotto or cave conservation organization. These folks will continue to go caving regardless of restrictions, are unaware of safety, conservation, and WNS practices, and can cause harm to themselves and the cave environment, if we are not out there interfacing with them.

NSS members are deeply concerned about bats, and have studied and protected them for 70 years now. In fact, the black bats on a yellow background have served for decades as the symbol of cavers nationwide. The Society and related cave conservancies own and manage numerous hibernacula simply to protect and preserve bats.

Our NSS WNS Policy underscores our commitment to advancing the scientific investigation of WNS, determining its cause, and limiting its impact on cave organisms. It also recognizes that knowledgeable cavers are natural partners in the collaboration necessary to address WNS, and the best advocates for the conservation of caves and all cave resources, including bats.

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