



BREAKDOWN

Volume 30, Number 2, August 2015

The *MAR Breakdown* is the journal of the Mid Appalachian Region of the National Speleological Society. It is published three times a year; prior to the annual business meeting and prior to the Spring and Fall field meets.

Subscriptions-

Event notices and MAR Breakdown newsletters are distributed electronically. When you attend a field meet, the email address provided on your registration form is added to the distribution list. You may also add yourself to distribution by going to <http://eepurl.com/P2f5j> and completing a short registration form.

Meetings and Meets-

The annual business meeting is held the last Saturday in February. Each spring and fall there is a field meet. Watch for dates.

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Pending No Host for the 2015 Fall MAR Field Meet

The next PCC Meeting will be held on

Sunday, September 27, 2015 at 10:00 am 81 Appalachian Drive, Carlisle, PA



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PA Cave Database: Dr. Will White is currently working on updates for the Juniata County caves.

Tony Canike will contact Dr. David Culver regarding his request for a list of cave entrance coordinates for Pennsylvania cave locations. A MOU is being drafted similar to the one used by the Virginia Region (VAR) to address this data request.

Paul Winter has access to the PA Cave Database, serving as a backup for Tony.

The list of current county stewards should be reviewed and updated. Amos Mincin offered to send an email to the grotto contacts (according to the NSS IO contact list) to verify the current list of county stewards. Amos also volunteered to assist Tony to coordinate/maintain the county steward list.

OLD BUSINESS:

Project List:

Corker Hill and Frustration Pit (Franklin County) – The caves have a new landowner. John Boswell will provide Karen Bange with the name to be included on the Christmas card list. The caves have limited access and Franklin County Grotto should be contacted prior to visitation for waiver forms. Access to the caves remains status quo with Franklin County Grotto serving as the point of contact, therefore the caves should be removed from the project list.

Dragon Cave (Berks County) – Amos Mincin reported that Mike Mostardi has been in contact with the cave owner. Mike serves as the point of contact for possible cave access.

J4 Cave (Centre County) – Paul Winter stated that he attended the MAKC board meeting and received several good suggestions. Interactions with Graymont will continue with the latest suggestions in mind.

Kepler Cave (Centre County) – Paul Winter has been communicating with the landowner and discussions are ongoing. Paul stated that relations are good.

PCC Tax Exempt Status: Gary Dunmire reported that the 990E form has been filed. Information will be provided to John Boswell.

NEW BUSINESS:

Milroy Cave: George Bange reported that Todd Karschner serves as a key holder for access to Milroy Cave.

Spring MAR 2016: Franklin County Grotto will be hosting the Spring MAR field meet on May 13-15, 2016 at Harper's Park, in Shade Gap, PA. Additional information and details can be found on the MAR website as they become available.

WNS Update: There has been some positive news recently regarding the battle against White Nose Syndrome. Additional information can be found at:

<http://blog.nature.org/science/2015/05/27/bananas-to-bats-the-science-behind-the-first-bats-successfully-treated-for-white-nose-syndrome/>

Next meeting: Assuming no person or group steps forward to host the 2015 Fall MAR field meet, the next PCC meeting will be held at Gretchen (Red) Schock's home on Sunday, September 27th at 10:00 am. Address is 81 Appalachian Drive, Carlisle, PA 17015.

Andy Filer moved and Paul Winter seconded to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Gretchen (Red) Schock, Recording Secretary

Fish And Wildlife Service Lists Northern Long-eared Bat As Threatened Its Potential Impact On Eastern US Caving Activities

By Randy Hurst

On April 2, 2015, the USFWS published in the Federal Register a Notice of Final Rulemaking listing the Northern Long-eared bat as a Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This listing (codified at 50 CFR § 17.40) may affect cavers for the reasons stated below.

The habitat of the Northern Long-eared bat encompasses the entire United States east of the Rocky Mountains except for some portions of Florida and Georgia. Of particular interest is the provision in the listing that distinguishes activities prohibited within and outside the “WNS buffer zone.” The WNS buffer zone is defined as any area within 150 miles from any county where WNS has been identified. This encompasses nearly all of the traditional caving areas frequented by MAR cavers, as well as NRO, VAR, SERO and TAG.

The Notice states that these bats hibernate in caves and mines, but generally use tree roosts in summer, including nursing females. The bats swarm entrances to hibernacula in the fall prior to hibernating. Hence, cavers are most likely to encounter these bats at their most vulnerable stage: during winter hibernation.

The primary threat to the northern long-eared bat is identified (unsurprisingly) as white nose syndrome. However, disturbance during hibernation by recreational caving is identified as a secondary threat, although caving in and of itself does not appear to be a cause of population decline. Nevertheless, recreational caving is identified as an additional stressor to a population that is in serious decline due to WNS. The discussion accompanying the FWS’s Notice of Final Rulemaking includes about ½ page describing what we already know: how even “non-tactile” disturbances such as changes in light and sound can detrimentally affect hibernating bats. Hence, recreational caving is identified in the rulemaking as a potential source of harm to the species.

Listing of a species as “threatened” invokes the protections of the Endangered Species Act, which generally prohibits “takings.” The statute defines “taking” as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct.” The courts have interpreted the term to include such ancillary activities as habitat modification or destruction and other activities that cause “indirect” injuries. (See Babbitt v. Sweet Home Chapter of Communities for a Great Oregon, U.S. Supreme Court 1995.) Thus, even otherwise innocuous activities that result in harm to individual animals (such as caving during hibernation, as discussed above) are prohibited unless specifically exempted by the regulations.

As noted above, the new rules are slightly different within and outside the WNS buffer zone. Outside the zone, the general prohibitions on taking are tempered by the following Exception: “Any incidental (non-purposeful) take of northern long-eared bats resulting from otherwise lawful activities.” (50 CFR § 17.40(o)(1)(ii)(B).) Noting that recreational caving is recognized as a secondary threat by the FWS, it would appear that recreational caving would fall under this exception and be allowed as long as cavers take reasonable care not to disturb hibernating bats (something that should be practiced anyway).

Inside the buffer zone, however (*i.e.*, throughout the MAR, VAR, NRO, and TAG caving areas), the exceptions are more limited: the only activities that are excepted from the general prohibition on taking are those related to forest management (lumbering) activities, routine right-of-way maintenance, and removal of hazardous trees for protection of human life and property (there is also an exception for deliberate removal of bats from houses if done properly according to state regulations). Note that all of these exempted activities affect summer habitat, which is less stressful since the bats are active and can relocate and

therefore are not as much at risk. There are no exceptions inside the buffer zone for “incidental takes” involving hibernacula. In particular, **inside the WNS buffer zone there is no exception for an “incidental (non-purposeful) take resulting from otherwise lawful activities”** as there is outside the buffer zone.

Consequently, caving in the MAR (and other Eastern areas) in any cave known or suspected to harbor hibernating Northern Long-eared bats could be a violation of the ESA and subject to penalties. Penalties under the ESA include civil fines of up to \$25,000 and federal criminal charges equivalent to a misdemeanor (\$50,000 fine and up to one year imprisonment for “knowing” violations). There is also a “citizen suit” provision allowing concerned citizens to initiate suit if the responsible agency (FWS or a state Environmental agency) does not take action. Hence, there is a risk that concerned conservation groups that become aware of winter caving activities could bring a federal civil action against either the individuals or group (Grotto) involved.

Of more importance than potential penalties, however, is the concept that cavers should be concerned about preserving ALL bat species in this time of severe stresses on their populations. Winter caving in known hibernacula for any species—threatened or not—is simply not responsible. Since the threat does not exist in summer, there appears to be no prohibition on caving at any other time of year. Please plan your caving trips accordingly, and let those you meet know about this important new law.

Host Needed For The 2015 Fall MAR!

As of August 2015 there is no grotto, or individual, slated to host the 2015 Fall MAR. If you are interested in hosting this event, a helpful guide to hosting a MAR field meet can be found on the MAR website. Think about it - can you or your grotto host the event? If there are no volunteers there will be no field meet. If you're interested in hosting the event, please contact a MAR officer.

2016 Spring MAR

Franklin County Grotto will be hosting the 2016 Spring MAR field meet the weekend of May 13-15, 2016 at Harper Park in Shade Gap, PA. More details will be posted on the MAR web site as they become available (<http://caves.org/region/mar/fieldmeets.htm>).

NSS MEMBER PRICE LIST

Effective April 2015

MID-APPALACHIAN REGION BULLETINS (including reprinted Bulletins)

1-4	Bulletins Caves of Shippensburg Area #1-4 REPRINT		7.00 + postage A
5	Caves of Western PA: REPRINT	29 caves, 19 maps	8.00 + postage A
6	Caves of S. Cumberland Valley REPRINT	93 caves 69 maps+6 large maps	17.00 + postage B
7	Caves of Fulton Co, PA <u>Revised/Corrected</u>	4 caves, 4 maps	5.00 + postage A
8	Caves of Blair Co., PA REPRINT	89 caves, 40 maps	7.00 + postage A
9	Caves of Huntingdon Co., PA REPRINT	94 caves, 36 maps	10.00 + postage B
10	Caves of Snyder Co., PA	20 caves, 14 maps	5.00 + postage A
11	Caves of Centre Co., PA	71 caves, 56 maps+1 large map	10.00 + postage B
12	Caves of Mifflin Co., PA	47 caves, 31 maps+5 large maps	10.00 + postage B
13	Caves of Perry Co., PA	13 caves, 6 maps	5.00 + postage A
14	Caves of Bucks Co., PA REPRINT	24 caves, 6 maps	5.00 + postage A
15	Caves of Lehigh Co., PA REPRINT	25 caves, 13 maps	6.00 + postage A
16	Caves of Northampton Co., PA	24 caves, 13 maps+1 large map	6.00 + postage A
17	Caves of Northumberland Co., PA	20 caves, 10 maps	5.00 + postage A
18	Caves of Berks Co., PA	64 caves, 32 maps	10.00 + postage B
19	Caves of Bedford Co., PA	54 caves, 33 maps	7.00 + postage A
20	Caves of Westmoreland Co., PA	337 caves, 187 map/10 large maps	29.50 + postage C
21	Karst of Sinking Valley and Kookan Cave Huntingdon and Blair Counties	103 pages with color photos , 4 fold-outs, 2 large maps	27.50 + postage B

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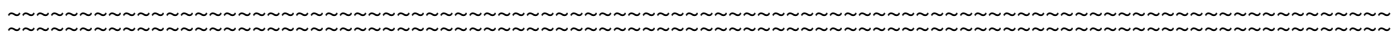
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