Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–2308

October 6, 2022

The Honorable Martha Williams
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Williams,

We write to you today concerned that restrictions the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) added to the Lakes States Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) for bat species will not improve species recovery but instead unintentionally devastate rural economies. Specifically, we are concerned that restricting timber harvesting and creating no-harvest buffer zones around trees during frozen conditions when bats are not present in the forests would be a detriment to family logging businesses who spur economic activity in rural communities.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Michigan DNR, and the Wisconsin DNR recently submitted Habitat Conservation Plans to the Service under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). If approved, these Incidental Take Permits (ITPs) would authorize the incidental take of the Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat. These states have also jointly submitted the Lake States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (Lake States HCP) to the Service.

The Service's receipt published in the Federal Register on August 29, 2022, titled "*Endangered and Threatened Wildlife; Receipt of Habitat Conservation Plan and Applications for Incidental Take Permits for Bat Species in MI, MN, and WI; Availability of Draft Environmental Assessment*" included restrictions severely limiting local forest managers from responsibly managing our forests.[1]

White Nosed Syndrome (WNS), a disease caused by a fungal pathogen, is the predominant threat to the species.[2] WNS is not at all caused by humans and has nothing to do with development. In fact, the Service itself explicitly agrees: "WNS has been the foremost stressor on the northern long-eared bat for more than a decade."[3] The fungus that causes the disease, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd), invades the skin of bats and is how "infection leads to increases in the frequency and duration of arousals during hibernation and eventual depletion of fat reserves needed to survive winter, and results in mortality."[4]

While the Service does note that other stressors do impact the species (wind energy and loss of habitat), it clearly identifies WNS as the largest reason for the bat's decline. The science is clear: sustainable forest management is not a threat. Despite ongoing forest management activities, the bats' forested area has generally been stable or increasing since 1953 throughout the northern long-eared bat range as forest

[1] 87 Federal Register 52807, August 29, 2022, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/08/29/2022-18496/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-receipt-of-habitat-conservation-plan-and-applications-for
[2] 87 Federal Register 16442, March 23, 2022, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/03/23/2022-06168/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-endangered-species-status-for-northern-long-eared-bat
[3] Id.
[4] Id.

management activities continue (Oswalt et al. 2019; Table 3).[5] Additionally, forest composition has shifted to include more larger trees. In fact, from 1953 through 2017, the area of timberland in sawtimber-sized trees has increased consistently, but the area occupied by seedlings and saplings has steadily declined [Oswalt et al. 2019 (Table 15);[6] Oswalt et al. 2014 (Figures 11a and 11b)].[7]

This information demonstrates that forest management activities have not negatively impacted bat habitat. In fact, forest management can be beneficial to bat species by maintaining or increasing suitable roosting and foraging habitat. Researchers have noted that bat communities respond well to active forest management as it provides diverse structure across a landscape (Vindigni et al. 2009).[8] Additionally, forest management that results in open canopy conditions (e.g., thinning) provides foraging areas and increased insect availability for bats (Bender et al. 2021).[9]

For these reasons we urge the Service, states, and industry to work together on the Lakes States HCP and avoid adding restrictions that could be economically and ecologically harmful.

Sincerely,

Pete Stauber
Member of Congress

Jack Bergman
Member of Congress

Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress

John Moolenaar
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Cliff Bentz
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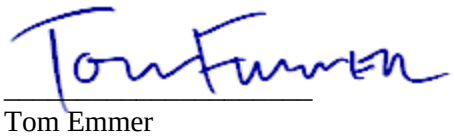
[5] Oswalt, S.N., Smith, W.B., Miles, P.D., Pugh, S.A., 2019. Forest Resources of the United States, 2017: *A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2020 RPA Assessment (No. WO-GTR-97*). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington, DC. https://doi.org/10.2737/WO-GTR-97

[6] Id.

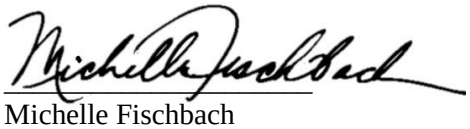
[7] Oswalt, S.N., Smith, W.B., Miles, P.D., Pugh, S.A., 2014. Forest Resources of the United States, 2012: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 update of the RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-91. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington Office. 218 p. 91. https://doi.org/10.2737/WO-GTR-91

[8] Vindigni, M.A., Morris, A.D., Miller, D.A., Kalcounis-Rueppell, M., 2009. Use of modified water sources by bats in a managed pine landscape. Forest Ecology and Management 258, 2056–2061.

[9] Bender, M.J., Perea, S., Castleberry, S.B., Miller, D.A., Wigley, T.B., 2021. Influence of insect abundance and vegetation structure on site-occupancy of bats in managed pine forests. Forest Ecology and Management 482, 118839.



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



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