

PROTECTING THE NORTHERN LONG-EARED BAT HABITAT IN IOWA

Northern long-eared bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*) are listed as a federal endangered species. This means that the northern long-eared bat is likely to become an endangered species in the near future if measures to protect the population are not undertaken.



Northern Long-eared Bat by Steven Thomas/National Park Service.

The northern long-eared bat is present throughout Iowa, particularly in the south and central counties, during the summer. In the winter, they hibernate in caves and abandoned mines. They hibernate in only a few counties in Iowa.

The northern long-eared bat has been facing significant population declines due to a highly contagious fatal fungal disease called white-nose syndrome. Unfortunately several of caves in eastern Iowa have become infected with white-nose syndrome.

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The bats live in small colonies in the summer. They frequent corridors of small streams as well as mature upland forests. They roost under loose bark or in small cavities in trees. The trees can be either alive or dead. The colony uses a primary tree and several secondary trees. Throughout the summer, the bats eat a variety of flying insects, which is beneficial in reducing the number of those insects.

The bats breed in late summer, although the female stores the sperm throughout hibernation. Once temperatures rise and the hibernation period has ended, a single egg is fertilized. The pregnant female then migrates to her summer roosting site. The pup is born in late May to late July in the roosting habitat. Young bats start flying when they are 18 to 21 days old. They can live for 19 years.

In order for the bat to survive, critical summer habitat needs to be protected. Forested areas need to be protected. Snags need to be left standing in wooded areas. Even cutting trees when the bats are hibernating can destroy their homes and leave them without roosting sites. The Fish and Wildlife Service rules prohibit any killing, harassing, or harming of a northern long-eared bat that may occur when trees are removed within 150 feet of a known occupied maternity roost tree from June 1 to July 31 (during the pup season) or within a quarter mile of a hibernation site throughout the year. If a construction project would affect trees used by the bat, the Fish and Wildlife Service must be contacted for a permit.



Hickory trees, with their loose bark, are ideal habitat for the northern long-eared bat. Photo by Pam Mackey-Taylor

Sources

www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/nleb/FAQsFinalListNLEB.html

www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/nleb/nlebFactSheet.html

www.fws.gov/Midwest/Endangered/mammals/nleb/nhisites.html

Press release from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Protects Northern Long-eared Bat as Threatened Under Endangered Species Act”, April 1, 2015

Press release from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Protections Finalized for Threatened Northern Long-eared Bats”, January 13, 2016