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**March 27, 2009**

## **Advisory Against Visiting Caves**

**By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Federal officials are asking people to stay out of caves in states from West Virginia to New England, where as many as 500,000 bats have died from a disease called white-nose syndrome.

The [Fish and Wildlife Service](#) made the request to guard against the possibility that people are unwittingly spreading the mysterious affliction when they explore multiple caves. There is no evidence that the disease is a threat to people.

White-nose syndrome is named for the sugary smudges of fungus on the noses and wings of hibernating bats. White-nose bats appear to run through their stores of winter fat before spring.

The disease was confirmed in eight states this winter from New Hampshire to West Virginia and there is evidence it may have spread to Virginia, said a wildlife service spokeswoman, Diana Weaver.

Some estimates of deaths are as high as 500,000 bats. Researchers worry about a mass die-off of bats, which help control the populations of insects that can damage wheat, apples and dozens of other crops.

The advisory seeking a voluntary moratorium on caving would also cover states adjacent to affected states, Ms. Weaver said. That swath stretches from Maine south to North Carolina and west to Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio.

Recreational cavers, who have supported past efforts to control white-nose syndrome, seemed bewildered by the breadth of the request.

Peter Youngbaer, white-nose syndrome liaison for the National Speleological Society, said the advisory covers tens of thousands of caves and would affect a large array of activities including organized caving events and equipment sales.

“The ramifications are mind-boggling, and I guess we’re all just trying figure out what to do,”

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said Mr. Youngbaer, who is based in Vermont.

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