# DEC Reminds the Public to Avoid Seasonal Caves and Mines to Protect Bat Populations

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today urged outdoor adventurers to suspend exploration of cave and mine sites that may serve as homes for bat hibernations. Human disturbances are harmful to the State's bat population since the arrival of the disease known as white-nose syndrome, which has killed more than 90 percent of bats at most hibernation sites in New York.

"Research generated by DEC's Wildlife Diversity staff and our partners demonstrates that white-nose syndrome makes bats highly susceptible to disturbances," said DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos. "Even a single, seemingly quiet visit can kill bats that would otherwise survive the winter. If you see hibernating bats, assume you are doing harm and leave immediately."

All posted notices restricting the use of caves and mines should be followed. If New Yorkers or visitors to the State encounter hibernating bats while underground, they are asked to leave the area as quickly and quietly as possible.

Experts believe that when bats are disturbed during hibernation periods, it forces them to raise their body temperatures, which depletes their fat reserves. This affects bats' energy levels and places the bats in a comprised state, which can lead to death.

There are two species of bats currently protected under federal and state endangered species law. The Indiana bat, which is sparsely distributed across New York, is a federally threatened bat that was listed before white-nose syndrome began impacting bat populations.

The northern long-eared bat is protected as a threatened species under both federal and New York State Endangered Species law. The current population for this formerly common bat is approximately one percent of its previous size, making it the species most severely impacted by white-nose syndrome. Nonetheless, northern long-eared bats are still widely distributed in New York. Their presence is documented in most of the 100 or so caves and mines that serve as bat hibernation sites in the State. Anyone entering a northern long-eared bat hibernation site from October 1 through April 30, the typical period of hibernation for bats, may be subject to prosecution.

There is currently no treatment for addressing the impact of white-nose syndrome on bats, but DEC remains committed to finding a cure. Along with the New York State Department of Health, DEC has teamed up with researchers from the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and experts at a number of universities across the country to better understand the disease and focus on developing a treatment. It was this collaborative effort that helped identify that reducing disturbances at hibernation sites during the winter and reducing disturbances at roosting sites in the summer can help the surviving animals thrive.

By cutting trees during the winter, direct impacts to roosting bats can be avoided. DEC also encourages homeowners with bats in their attics or barns to explore non-lethal means of removing them from the structure.

[More information about white-nose syndrome and what you can do to help](https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/what-can-you-do-help) (link leaves DEC's website.)

[Details about the protection of the northern long-eared bat](https://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/nleb/) (link leaves DEC's website.)