

**Opening Statement**  
**The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo**  
**Chairwoman**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**  
**Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife**  
**Thursday, June 4, 2009**

**Oversight Hearing on "White-nose Syndrome: What's Killing Bats in the Northeast?"**

White-nose syndrome is named for the striking fungal growth on the muzzles, ears, and wings of bats. Little is known about this disease, but it was first documented west of Albany, New York in February of 2006. Over the last three years, white-nose syndrome has spread to nine States, from New Hampshire to West Virginia. The mortalities are astonishing, reaching up to 100 percent in some caves and mines. There is great concern that white-nose syndrome may quickly spread to southern and mid-western regions and ravage both healthy and endangered species of bats.

White-nose syndrome in bats has profound public health, environmental, and economic impacts. Bats are nature's best control of insect populations, as a single bat can eat its entire weight in insects in one night. When not controlled, many insects spread disease and others are agricultural pests. One study estimated that the value of bats in controlling cotton pests in parts of Texas was as great as \$1.7 million dollars per year. Their decline will likely have far reaching ramifications for both agriculture and public health.

Bats with white-nose syndrome exhibit uncharacteristic behaviors and emerge from hibernation during the winter, consuming fat reserves, which may result in starvation. Transmission of the disease is not fully understood, but is believed to be bat-to-bat or possibly transferred by humans who visit affected caves. Given this limited understanding, the Fish and Wildlife Service has issued an advisory asking for a voluntary moratorium on caving activities in affected areas and some caves on Forest Service, State, and private lands have been closed.

While I commend this action, the severe mortality and the sudden spread of white-nose syndrome demonstrate the need for a rapid response beyond closing caves where bats live. We must quickly ascertain the causes of and vectors for the spread of white-nose syndrome to avoid what could be an ecological and economic disaster, if it remains unchecked.

I look forward to hearing from our invited witnesses who, under limited resources, have been working cooperatively and diligently to understand and manage white-nose syndrome in bats, and I appreciate their recommendations on how this challenge can quickly be met.