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NFWF Announces \$1.36 Million in Grants to Find Cure for Bat Disease

Six grants were awarded that will test strategies to stop white-nose syndrome from decimating bat populations in Texas and across North America

HOUSTON, TX (October 24, 2017) – In the hopes of delivering a Halloween treat for bats, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) today announced more than \$1.36 million in grants to combat white-nose syndrome (WNS) and promote the survival of bats in North America.

The grants were awarded through the Bats for the Future Fund (BFF), a public-private partnership between NFWF, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Shell Oil Company and Southern Company.

The projects supported by the six grants announced today will test a [variety of treatments](#) including a vaccine, a probiotic “cocktail,” anti-fungal disinfectants and treatment with ultraviolet light.

“The Bats for the Future Fund is supported by a diverse mix of public and private interests who have pooled their resources in order to prevent more bats from becoming infected with this terrible disease,” said Amanda Bassow, NFWF’s Northeastern regional director. “These six projects show real promise to stop white-nose syndrome in its tracks.”

Since signs of WNS were first observed in New York State in 2006, the disease has spread rapidly. WNS now has been confirmed in 31 states and five Canadian provinces, and new states are added each year. Most recently, the fungus that causes WNS was detected this year in Texas and Nebraska.

“White-nose syndrome is the single biggest threat to many North American bat species and one of the most pressing conservation challenges facing America’s wildlife today,” said Jeremy Coleman, national white-nose syndrome coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Investing in defeating this disease must be a priority, and the Bats for the Future Fund provides an important forum for partnering organizations to engage in these critical efforts.”

More than 6 million bats have died over the past decade from WNS. In some sites, up to 100 percent of bats have disappeared.

“Bats provide an incredibly valuable service by keeping insect populations in check and therefore keep our agriculture lands productive and our forests healthy. White-nose syndrome has to be addressed and we are making progress as partners,” said Deputy Chief of Forest System Leslie Weldon. “This grant is one small part of finding a solution, and we’re proud to be part of it.”

The disease is caused by a cold-loving fungus that attacks hibernating bats. More than half of the bat species in the United States and Canada hibernate to survive the winter and are potentially susceptible. Without a solution, several bat species may be in danger of extinction.

“Our partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation represents a key part of Shell’s conservation efforts,” said Marti Powers, Shell US External Relations Manager. “We are proud of the work they do and our mutual goal of protecting critical habitats.”

Bats play key roles in nature while also providing important benefits by controlling insect pests. Recent studies estimate that bats eat enough pests to save the U.S. corn industry alone more than \$1 billion per year in crop damage and pesticide costs, and more than \$3 billion per year to all agricultural production.

“Bats are facing the biggest challenge they have ever faced,” said Mike Daulton, executive director of Bat Conservation International. “This funding is a critical lifeline. The Bats for the Future Fund is like a rescue helicopter on a mountain. It’s that important to the survival of these bats.”

Texas Tech University and Bat Conservation International are receiving a grant for \$321,846 to assess whether specific microclimate conditions can be manipulated to minimize the severity of WNS.

“Southern Company and its subsidiaries have a long history of involvement in environmental and conservation partnerships that benefit imperiled and at-risk species and the habitats they depend on,” says Jeff Burleson, Southern Company environmental and system planning vice president. “These projects will aid efforts to ensure bats carry out their important role in the ecosystem for generations through broad applications where bats are affected by white-nose syndrome.”

To learn more about the Bats for the Future Fund or to download the 2017 Bats for the Future Fund Grant Slate, visit www.nfwf.org/bats.

About the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal agencies, corporations, foundations and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 4,500 organizations and committed more than \$3.8 billion to conservation projects. Learn more at www.nfwf.org.

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