



News Release

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Forest Service Receives Indiana Bat Biological Opinion from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

ASHEVILLE....The U.S. Forest Service announced today that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has determined that the current Nantahala/Pisgah National Forest Plan does not jeopardize the future survival of the endangered Indiana bat. The FWS also concluded that, under the current forest plan direction, the amount of suitable and optimum habitat for the Indiana bat should increase over the next five years.

At the same time the FWS identified “Reasonable and Prudent Measures” that must be followed for future national forest projects in the four county area where the Forest Service found 28 Indiana bats roosting in an old dead hemlock tree last summer. The purpose of these measures, listed in the FWS Biological Opinion, is to minimize the risk of harm to Indiana bats from future forest projects.

National Forests in North Carolina Planning and Ecosystems staff officer Larry Hayden stated, “the U.S. Forest Service will prepare a Forest Plan amendment to apply these FWS “Reasonable and Prudent Measures” to national forest lands in Graham, Macon, Cherokee and Swain Counties. The Forest Service will also continue to monitor for the Indiana bat elsewhere on the Pisgah and Nantahala Forests . If we find the Indiana bat on other parts of the forest, we will apply these requirements to those areas as well.”

The Forest Service will begin a public comment period on the proposed plan amendment later this week. Interested persons can request a copy of the scoping notice for the proposed amendment from the Forest Service office in Asheville. They can also view and download this notice later this week from the National Forests in North Carolina website at <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc>. The FWS Biological Opinion is now posted on this website. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make available additional technical information about the Indiana bat and other endangered species on their web site at <http://nc-es.fws.gov>.

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The FWS Biological Opinion transmitted to the Forest Service on Monday compares the habitat conditions on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (NPNFs) with what is considered optimum summer roosting and foraging habitat for the Indiana bat.

The FWS report states that: “There are about 490,000 acres on the NPNFs that could provide optimal foraging habitat, optimal live potential roost trees, and suitable dead potential roost trees for the Indiana bat, all on the same acre... Suitable Indiana bat foraging and roosting habitat, given the parameters we were able to measure, appears abundant and well dispersed across the NPNFs.”

The Biological Opinion concludes that “It is the Service’s biological opinion that forest management and other activities authorized, funded, or carried out by the NPNFs, in accordance with the Forest Plan for the NPNFs, are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Indiana bat.”

The specific “Reasonable and Prudent Measures” that will be applied to future projects in the four county area give local forest managers two options: If the Forest Service surveys each project area for Indiana bats using Fish and Wildlife Service survey protocols, and no bats are found, then the current forest plan guidelines will be considered adequate by the FWS to protect the bat and its habitat.

The current forest plan contains a number of measures to maintain bat habitat and promote the recovery of the species. This includes protecting caves that might serve as future hibernacula for the Indiana bat.

If the Forest Service does not conduct on-site project bat surveys, then the FWS will require additional “Reasonable and Prudent Measures”. For example, the Forest Service would not cut shellbark, shagbark and bitternut hickory trees or other large living trees with loose, peeling bark where the Indiana bats can take shelter. Also, as many snags and hollow, den and cavity trees as practical would be maintained.

According to John Ramey, National Forests in North Carolina Supervisor, “We are gratified that the FWS has concluded that national forest management in western North Carolina can be done in such a way that provides adequate protection for the Indiana Bat while meeting the needs of other forest users.”

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