



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington D.C. 20240



In Reply Refer To:  
FWS/D/072688

June 12, 2020

## Memorandum

To: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Directorate

From: Aurelia Skipwith, Director

Subject: Guidance for FWS employees engaging in Activities with Bats

This memorandum rescinds any previous recommendations issued by the Regions and programs on any guidance for mitigating the risk of humans transmitting SARS-CoV-2 to bats or coronavirus transmitted from bats to humans.

The Service recommends that activities performed by FWS employees, and activities performed by others on Service lands, involving direct contact with live bats be: conducted with use of COVID-specific personal protective equipment (PPE, follow the guidance (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and be in accordance with state, local, and other Federal requirements. Where Service applicants or permittees had planned surveys or research involving direct contact with live bats, either on Service lands or non-Service lands, they should follow the guidance above or consider alternatives to handling live bats, such as acoustics detection and guano collection. Acoustic survey data are equally acceptable to mist net survey data.

The requirement to use COVID-specific PPE is a minor addition to the protocols already required by the Service and states for mitigating the risk of spread of the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome, which includes use of disposable gloves, disposable or site-dedicated clothing, and adherence to decontamination procedures. Generally, activities involving direct contact with live bats requires state authorization, and states may have more protective requirements. Each Region is responsible for coordinating with its individual state wildlife agencies in implementing this guidance.

A recent risk assessment conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and National Wildlife Health Center\* concluded that the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from infected bat workers to bats is nonnegligible This guidance is informed by a risk assessment (Runge et al. 2020).

Citation: Runge, M.C., Grant, E.H.C., Coleman, J.T.H., Reichard, J.D., Gibbs, S.E.J., Cryan, P.M., Olival, K.J., Walsh, D.P., Belhert, D.S., Hopkins, M.C., and Sleeman, J.M., 2020, Assessing the risks posed by SARS-CoV-2 in and via North American bats—Decision framing and rapid risk assessment: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2020-1060, 43 p., <https://doi.org/10.3133/ofr20201060>.

The risk assessment also concluded that proper use of PPE, including an N95 respirator or equivalent, is expected to significantly reduce the exposure risk.

Please distribute this memorandum to your staff as appropriate. Questions should be directed to Jeremy Coleman, National White-nose Syndrome Coordinator, North Atlantic-Appalachian Region at (413) 253-8223 or [jeremy\\_coleman@fws.gov](mailto:jeremy_coleman@fws.gov).

6/12/2020

**X** Aurelia Skipwith

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Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Signed by: AURELIA SKIPWITH