

## Stockman, Tina

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**From:** Soil & Water Conservation Program  
**Sent:** Monday, August 28, 2023 2:21 PM  
**To:** Soil & Water Conservation Program; DNR.Soil and Water Conservation Districts staff  
**Cc:** DNR.MGS SWC Staff  
**Subject:** FW: Process for Producer Notification of Bat Habitat Changes and FO Follow Up  
**Attachments:** Bat County Changes Map.pdf; Bat Habitat Producer Contact Summary.docx; 2023\_Bat\_Habitat\_Priority\_Changes\_Impacts\_Final.pdf

Good afternoon,

Please see the email below regarding NRCS handling federal contracts to address the new guidance on bat habitat.

For state cost-share contracts that are active and were not planned following the new guidance, the districts need to assess the practice implementation to determine the stage of implementation and if there will be any impacts to the bat habitat based on the new guidance. If there are practices with tree felling occurring, the appropriate action needs to be taken to address the bat habitat guidance. With the addition of the Northern Long-eared Bat, the bat habitat evaluation is now applicable statewide.

Thank you,

Soil & Water Conservation Program  
Phone 573-751-4932

*We'd like your feedback on the service you received from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Please consider taking a few minutes to complete the department's Customer Satisfaction Survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MoDNRsurvey>. Thank you.*

Missouri Conservation Team,

If you are involved in conservation planning, information in this email is of importance to you. Please read it in its entirety. A statewide teams meeting is scheduled for Monday, August 28, at 2:00 PM to review the process described below and answer questions. The meeting will be recorded for those not able to attend.

This guidance is a follow up to the statewide trainings held June 8 and 13, 2023, that introduced the interim changes to the Missouri Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities. If you were unable to attend one of the trainings or would like to view it again for a refresher, recordings are in the [Endangered and Threatened Species](#) channel within FPAC-NRCS-Mo Conservation Planners on Teams. For partners and others that do not have access to the Teams channel, the recordings can be accessed at this location on the [NRCSMissouri Youtube channel](#).

The next step in the process of implementing change is to notify impacted producers. As outlined in [MO Bulletin 190-23-3 ECS-Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities Update and Monarch Addition to Heritage Dataset.pdf](#), the revised guidance should have been followed in all new FY23 contract planning and development, and clearly shared with producers. For those practices contracted prior to June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (including prior fiscal years), **letters are being mailed from the State Office** to notify producers of important changes based on practices planned, location and proximity to maternity roost and/or hibernacula. Mailings began today and will continue over the next week.

**The attached *Bat County Changes Map* and *Bat Habitat Producer Contact Summary* provide the foundation and overview for the actions laid out below.**

## Summary of actions taken:

- **Generated list of producers to be notified based on practices planned but not applied from 2022-2024 in EQIP, CStP and RCPP 18 contracts.** “Priority” practices were used to generate the list outside of 1-mile hibernacula and maternity roost buffers. The list of practices determined “priority” are on page 2 of the attached document titled *Bat Habitat Producer Contact Summary*. Practices selected have a higher probability of tree felling than other practices, but this is not an all-inclusive list and planners must evaluate planned practices with site specific information and knowledge of operation.
- **Letters mailed to producers from the State Office** - there are three versions of the [letter](#) being mailed to producers, depending on location and proximity to maternity and hibernacula buffers. A brief description of each letter is included in the *Bat Habitat Producer Contact Summary* attached. Each letter mailed will include the information sheet *2023 Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities Changes and Impacts*.
- **Field Office Actions Needed**
  1. Copies of the letters mailed for each county are available on the FPAC-NRCS-MO-Area x and channel FOSA XX Print FSA Farm Data
  2. A copy of the letter will be electronically filed in CD DMS under Evaluate Other Special Environmental Concerns Forms and Guidance. This document type is tied to the conservation plan.
  3. [Two Excel files have been placed on Teams](#) for contracts located within a [1-mile buffer of known maternity roost](#) or [1-mile buffer of known hibernaculum](#) for both Indiana bat and northern long-eared bat. All practices/activities are listed for each contract that meets either of these criteria. Most of the contracts on each list should be associated with northern long-eared bat buffers, but new buffers for Indiana bat may have been included in the most recent Natural Heritage Database update and should be reviewed as well.
  4. Each field office must review the lists of contracts and associated practices/activities for their county. Open and edit these Excel documents within Teams – **DO NOT DOWNLOAD THEM TO YOUR LOCAL HARD DRIVE OR SHARED DRIVE**. For each contract/practice, determine if any of the listed practices may involve tree felling, particularly for practices where it is not obvious and local planners have better knowledge of the actions. Beside each contract/practice record the date of review AND ‘yes’ responses to whether tree felling will be involved.
  5. Contact the Area Biologist when this task is completed and will review each planned contract/practice to determine if follow-up is needed. Additional information may be requested from the field office as Area Biologists conduct reviews and, if necessary, forward to the State Office for consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. No further action by the field office is needed for contracts and associated practices/activities that do not require follow-up.
  6. After Area Biologists provide reports back to the field office for contracts that do need follow-up, place a copy of this information in the contract folder, along with recording in the Assistance Notes.
  7. In most cases, additional conditions for implementation of activities will not be required (beyond following the no fell period and/or additional no forest activity periods in the spring or summer for sites located between 1- to 5 -miles from a hibernaculum). Contacting producers will only be necessary if additional conditions must be followed during implementation of activities based on USFWS consultation, which will be highlighted by the Area Biologist in reports back to the field office.

NRCS is only notifying EQIP, CStP and RCPP 18 participants, but bat habitat conservation priorities affect all conservation planning and programs. There may be instances where tree felling may be needed to implement a conservation practice that is beyond the scope of the priority practices used in generating the producer letters, in these instances planners will need to inform producers of changes.

We appreciate everyone's efforts as we increase our focus to protect a newly uplisted threatened species. In the coming months we will work with US Fish and Wildlife Service to complete a statewide biological assessment that will result in development of a biological opinion. When this process has been completed updated guidance will be provided.

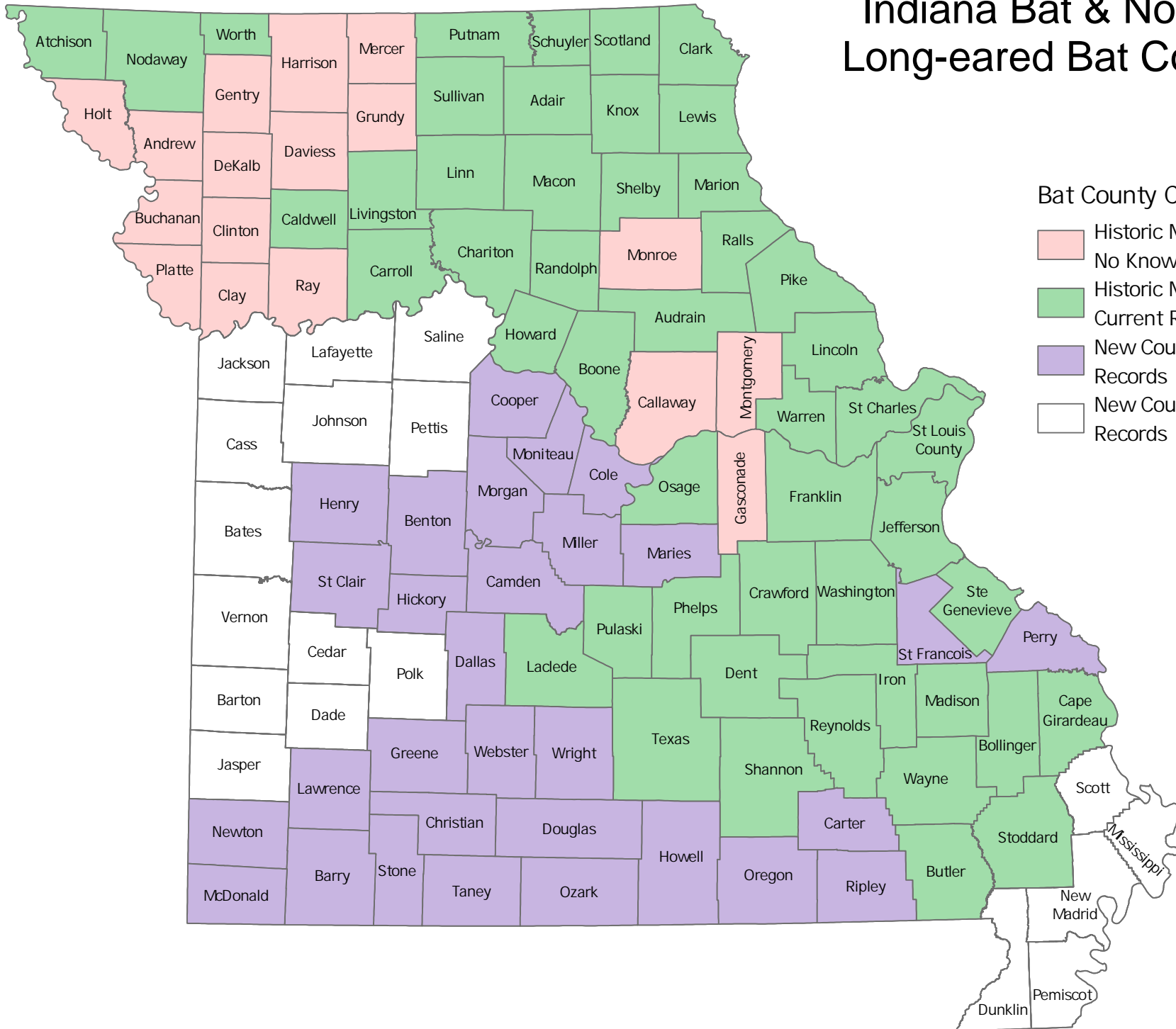
Thanks again for all you do to accomplish our mission of helping people help the land. This process has been a team effort and we have worked hard to minimize the workload it places on you at the field office level. Have a great weekend, and enjoy the cooler weather predicted!

*Selma Mascaro*

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# Indiana Bat & Northern Long-eared Bat Counties



## Bat County Changes

- Historic Maternity Counties with No Known Records
- Historic Maternity Counties with Current Records
- New Counties with Current Records
- New Counties with No Known Records

# Missouri Bat Habitat Priority Changes Producer Notification Letter Summary

Guidance based on IB and NLEB Map June 2023

All producer contacts will include the **Bat Habitat Priority Changes Impacts Information Sheet** dated July 2023. NRCS is reaching out to NRCS Farm Bill program participants. Letter will be sent on local FO letterhead for contact information. NRCS will notify DNR of changes and will assist with outreach efforts if requested.

## Outreach Based on Priority Practices:

### Peach/Pink Colored Counties

- These counties previously under IB restrictions
- Targeted notification sent to contract participants with planned **priority practices** 2022-2024, focused on DBH changes. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter No Buffers\_Final'

### Green Colored Counties

- These counties previously under IB restrictions but have areas that include maternity and/or hibernacula buffers that have changed.
- Targeted notification sent to contract participants **outside the buffers** with planned **priority practices** 2022-2024, focused on DBH changes. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter No Buffers'
- For contract participants within 1- or 5-mile **hibernacula buffer**, notification will include changes (DBH changes and extended absolute no fell dates) and that USDA NRCS will contact them if there are additional restrictions after consulting with USFWS. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter 5-mile Hibernacula Buffer Restrictions\_Final'
- For contract participants **within 1-mile maternity buffer**, notification will include changes (focused on DBH) and that USDA NRCS will contact them if there are additional restrictions after consulting with USFWS. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter 1-mile Maternity Roost Restrictions\_Final'
- If within 1 mile buffer of hibernacula or maternity roost, contact AB if not previously completed. AB will need list of planned practices, map of AOI (preferable PDF), and shapefile of property. Name of files should follow this format: Producer Name\_Practice(s) or CRP practices\_Tract Number, for example Joe Farmer\_CPS666\_T650.

## Outreach to All contract participants:

### Clear/White Colored Counties

- No previous felling restrictions.
- No known maternity or hibernacula locations.
- Notification to **All** contract participants, all planned practices 2022-2024. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter No Buffers\_Final'

### Purple Colored Counties

- No previous felling restrictions.
- Notification to All contract participants.
- For **All** contract participants **outside** the maternity and hibernacula buffers, notification of restrictions for planned practices 2022-2024, focused on DBH changes. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter No Buffers\_Final'
- For contract participants within 1- or 5-mile **hibernacula buffer**, notification will include changes (DBH changes and extended absolute no fell dates) and that USDA NRCS will contact them if there are additional restrictions after consulting with USFWS. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter 5-mile Hibernacula Buffer Restrictions\_Final'

- For contract participants **within 1-mile maternity buffer**, notification will include changes (focused on DBH) and that USDA NRCS will contact them if there are additional restrictions after consulting with USFWS. Send letter titled: 'Bat Habitat Priorities Producer Notification Letter 1-mile Maternity Roost Restrictions\_Final'
- If within 1 mile buffer of hibernacula or maternity roost, contact AB if not previously completed. AB will need list of planned practices, map of AOI (preferable PDF), and shapefile of property. Name of files should follow this format: ProducerName\_Practice(s) or CRP practices\_Tract Number, for example Joe Farmer\_CPS666\_T650.

**Priority Practices:**

- 666 Forest Stand Improvement
- 643 Restoration of Rare and Declining Natural Communities (if possible, limited to woodland and glade restoration scenarios)
- 649 Structures for Wildlife (edge feathering and down tree structures)
- 394 Firebreak (if possible, limited to the two Constructed scenarios on forest land use)
- 655 Forest Trails and Landings
- 314 Brush Management
- 410 Grade Stabilization Structure
- 378 Pond
- 578 Stream Crossing
- 382 Fence
- 516 Livestock Pipeline



# 2023 Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities Changes and Impacts

## Interim Information Sheet



### Overview

On March 31, 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) reclassification of northern long-eared bat from threatened to endangered became effective to protect the species from potential extinction in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). The ESA protects threatened and endangered species and their habitats by prohibiting "take," which includes harm, harassment, pursuit, wounding, killing and other actions, including significant habitat modification or degradation that could kill or injure listed animals, except under federal permit. This includes actions taken by agencies/organizations that adhere to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standards and specifications, whether federally funded or otherwise.

NRCS policy is to avoid or otherwise mitigate adverse effects on endangered species and to consult with USFWS when needed to ensure protection of the species. With this up-listing, the northern long-eared bat became the fourth bat species listed as federally endangered in Missouri. It uses similar habitat as the Indiana bat, which has been listed as endangered since 1966. Both species use roost trees with loose, exfoliating bark or cavities during their active season. Indiana bat required felling restrictions in almost 60% of Missouri counties under the previous Missouri NRCS Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities.

### Contract Impacts

Missouri NRCS has revised the Bat Habitat Conservation Priorities due to up-listing of the northern long-eared bat. These updates expanded tree-felling



Northern long-eared bat

restrictions to encompass the entire state and led to revised tree diameter and hibernacula exceptions.

These recent changes may impact how participants or technical service providers (TSP) implement conservation practices or activities in contracts, such as for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and/or Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract and schedule of operations.

#### Major changes include:

- Tree-felling restrictions previously in place in portions of the state for Indiana bat have been expanded statewide with the inclusion of northern long-eared bat.
- Size for suitable roost trees was decreased from 9" diameter at breast height (DBH) to 5" DBH. Trees  $\geq 5$ " DBH with suitable roost characteristics cannot be felled from April 1 through Oct. 31, known as the no-fell period.
- Treatment within 1 mile of a known maternity roost or hibernaculum

requires consultation with USFWS.

- Areas within 1 to 5 miles of hibernacula have extended no felling dates.
- Forested habitat removal is limited in size to either 5 or 10 acres based on distance to an Indiana or northern long-eared bat known capture location.

For more information on how these changes impact your Farm Bill contract call your local USDA NRCS office.

This guidance is applicable to any and all practices or activities planned through a Farm Bill program but not yet applied, regardless of date planned in the contract. The guidance provided through this interim information sheet is subject to change as Missouri NRCS continues to work with USFWS to complete a biological assessment and develop a biological opinion that will provide thorough, long term guidance on the best management practices for the implementation of conservation through Farm Bill programs that will minimize impact to threatened and endangered bat species in Missouri.

## Management Considerations

Existing summer habitat trees can be treated with non-felling techniques when implementing forest stand improvement.

Non-felling forest management techniques, such as girdling and hack-and-squirt, of live trees in areas of existing summer roosting habitat can provide alternate habitat in the future. Felling of existing suitable roost trees may occur only from Nov. 1 - Mar. 31, after the annual no fell period of Apr. 1 to Oct. 31 has ended. For more information on non-felling techniques, refer to Controlling Undesirable Trees and Shrubs Information Sheet by scanning the QR Code with your phone's camera.



<https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/>



Non-felling forest management techniques, like girdling, can provide alternate bat habitat in the future.

## Bat Habitat Terminology

“**Suitable roost trees**” are live or dead standing trees that are  $\geq 5$  inches DBH and have loose or exfoliating bark, cracks, crevices, visible cavities, broken tops/ branches and/ or plates or slabs of loose bark on the trunks or branches. Individual trees may be considered a suitable roost tree if within 1,000 feet of other forested/wooded habitat.

“**Forested habitat removal**” is the loss of forest to another land cover type. This does not include forest management where the land cover type will remain as forest. Unlike forest management, habitat removal permanently removes forested habitat from the landscape. Forest management includes techniques such as forest stand improvement (FSI) / timber stand improvement (TSI), woodland restoration, glade restoration and prescribed burning.

“**DBH**” is the tree diameter measured at 54 inches from the ground.

## Northern Long-Eared Bat Biology

The northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) is a medium-sized, insectivorous bat occurring across much of North America. Throughout the winter, the species hibernates in underground sites called hibernacula, which are usually caves, and uses a variety of wooded habitats during the active season stretching from spring through fall.

During the active season (i.e., non-hibernation period), roosts occur in cracks, cavities, crevices or under loose bark of live or dead trees or in man-made structures. Maternity colonies may be up to 30 individuals. Northern

long-eared bats use smaller diameter trees more often than Indiana bats and have been found in trees as small as 3” DBH. Tree species are often used for roosting by the northern long-eared bat in proportion to their occurrence in the surrounding landscape, so it appears that the structure of the tree and immediate surroundings is more important than species. Northern long-eared bat roost trees may occur in the forest understory and are often located on side slopes or ridge tops.

Northern long-eared bats are adept at foraging within and under the forest canopy. This species is known to glean prey from foliage. The northern long-eared bat has been shown to forage mainly in upland forests rather than riparian areas.

The northern long-eared bat has been considered relatively common throughout much of its North American range. While other negative influences on the population were considered in the listing proposal (i.e., habitat destruction or range curtailment, overutilization, regulatory inadequacy, collisions with wind power turbines, and other factors affecting existence), the leading reason for the listing is the disease white-nose syndrome (WNS). Hibernacula counts indicate declines of 98-99% in northern long-eared bat numbers across eight states in the northeastern United States, making it imperative that every effort be made to protect this species habitat and ensure optimum opportunity for propagation and pup rearing.

### Missouri's Bats and Agriculture Impacts

Bats are estimated to provide a **\$961M** value to Missouri agriculture per year through insect management!

Missouri's gray bat population of about **800,000** alone eat **540 tons** of insects per year in Missouri, which is equivalent to about **223 billion** insects!



Photos courtesy of Missouri Department of Conservation

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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