

Firewood Cutting and Bat Habitat Conservation Measures

DCNR and the PA Game Commission jointly recently received a permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for impacts to the federally endangered Indiana bat and the federally threatened northern long-eared bat, during forest management activities on state lands. Sustainable forest management activities include timber harvesting, prescribed fire, firewood cutting, roads and trail maintenance or construction and fencing operations. The [Bat Habitat Conservation Plan](#) identifies activities that may impact bats and presents avoidance strategies and mitigation called conservation measures.

Firewood collection on state forest land provides the public an opportunity to secure a source of sustainable fuel along roadsides. Standing dead trees along roads also provide important habitat for the Indiana and northern long-eared bats. They roost and rear their young in the cavities and loose bark of standing dead trees. Therefore, the Bat Habitat Conservation Plan identified conservation measures to avoid and minimize impacts to bats through firewood cutting when it is most critical to do so.

Bat habitat varies across the state. Each forest district adapts its own strategy based upon local circumstances and prescribed strategies of the conservation plan. These variances include the numbers of roads closed; the durations of closure and prohibitions of removing standing materials. Contact your local [district office](#) for specific details of how these conservation measures are applied in your area.

Bat Habitat & Life Cycle

Bats use different habitat regions during different times of the year according to their life cycles. Mid-November through March, bats hibernate in caves, mines, or other sheltered areas. While there may be local variations, most bats emerge from hibernation beginning in April through the first half of May. Bats are vulnerable during this period because they are still “waking up” from torpor and roost in standing dead trees. June through July, bats use standing dead trees to rear their young. Bat pups are born in summer and cannot fly until August. Migration, swarming, and mating begins in the latter half of August and continues through the first half of November. Bats then return to their caves to begin hibernation in mid-November.

Firewood Conservation Measures

Limiting collection of standing dead trees in important bat habitat areas minimizes impacts to bats and complies with DCNR’s US Fish and Wildlife permit. The following are conservation measures for firewood cutting:

- 1. Do not cut standing dead trees from May 15-August 31 in certain areas where bats have a high likelihood of using them for maternity colonies.**
Rationale: This minimizes potential impacts to maternity colonies, when pups are most vulnerable.
- 2. Do not cut standing dead trees Apr 1-May 14 and Sept. 1-Nov. 1 along certain roads in areas where bats have a high likelihood of using them for roosting, mating and swarming**
Rationale: This minimizes potential impacts to bats when they emerge, congregate, roost, and mate.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is the Bat Habitat Conservation Plan and why do we need one?

The Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a requirement for obtaining an incidental take permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the take of Indiana and northern long-eared bats while carrying out our normal forestry activities. DCNR and the PA Game Commission jointly applied and were issued a permit for forestry management activities (timber sales, prescribed fire, fencing, roads/trails, and firewood program). The HCP is a requirement of the permit and it lays out how we will minimize, mitigate, and monitor impacts to the federally listed bat species while we carry out our missions. The HCP allows us to get credit for the work we do that provides habitats for bats, while minimizing and

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mitigating for the potential impacts and gives us flexibility to plan long-term. Please see the [Bat HCP FAQ](#) document on our website for more information. The complete Bat HCP and other supporting materials can be found on US Fish and Wildlife Service's [website](#).

Why is firewood cutting being singled out as an activity?

Each forest management activity that DCNR and PGC carries out was analyzed for potential impacts to bats and their habitats. Some activities had a negative impact while others had positive impacts. Activities that create habitat had positive impacts to bats. Firewood collection had a negative impact to bats because it targets standing dead trees along roads, the preferred habitat bats need to complete their life cycle. By limiting the removal of standing dead trees in certain areas with the highest potential to be used by bats, we are minimizing the impact and satisfying our permit requirement. Other areas may be free from firewood conservation measures, or open during other times of the year. Call [your local district office](#) for more information and suggestions.

How can we still have timber sales if I can't cut firewood?

Timber sales and firewood both have conservation measures included in the HCP to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to bats. Both activities must avoid cutting roost trees (trees with cavities or peeling bark) in bat habitat areas and during certain time periods and locations to avoid impacting bats. Timber sales in the vicinities of firewood closures are often contractually suspended during the same periods of closure. In addition, firewood cutting is often restricted near active harvesting areas as a normal procedure to account for public safety and the safety of the logging crew.

How do we determine which roads are closed?

Contact [your local district office](#) for specific information about where/when you may and may not cut standing dead trees for firewood. Bat habitat is not evenly distributed across all state forests. Some districts, or some roads within some districts, are within the bat habitat areas and others are not. In addition, because each district must manage firewood permitting individually, some districts may choose to close tracts or other methods, to make their process more streamlined. This FAQ provides general guidelines and background, but for specific information on what roads are open or closed, please contact your district office.

Why is the season for closure as long as it is?

Firewood cutting restrictions are targeted to the timing of the bats' life cycle. They are most vulnerable when they congregate in the spring after hibernation, when baby bats cannot yet fly during the summer, and when they form swarms and mate in the fall. These are the time periods, in certain areas of state forest lands, when the firewood collection conservation measures are enacted. Consider collecting firewood in other areas of the state forest that are not within the bat habitat areas, or during another time period. Contact your [local district office](#) for specific information on which roads are open for collection.

What districts have the firewood collection conservation measures?

- Spring/Fall firewood conservation measure (Apr.1 - May 14, Sept 1-Nov 1.):
 - Designated roads in Districts Rothrock, Bald Eagle, Pinchot
- Summer firewood conservation measure (May 15-Aug 31):
 - Designated roads in Districts Michaux, Buchanan, Tuscarora, Forbes, Rothrock, Gallitzin, Bald Eagle, Moshannon, Sproul, Pinchot, Tiadaghton, Elk, Tioga, William Penn, Loyalsock

Where can I get more information?

Contact [your local district](#) office for specific information about what roads are open or closed in your area. Additional information is available on our website. Visit the [Bat HCP FAQ page](#), which we will be updating regularly for annual report updates. To access the complete Bat HCP, and supporting federal documents, you may visit the US Fish and Wildlife Services' [website](#).