



## OHIO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE (OH-FIELD OFFICE) JOINT GUIDANCE FOR BAT SURVEYS AND TREE CLEARING MAY 2021

This document has been updated with new state guidance for the 2021 field season.

*This guidance applies to state recommendations only. Contact the USFWS to determine if federal consultation is also necessary to comply with federal law.*

### **Agency Contacts:**

**ODNR-DOW Permit Coordinator:** Wildlife.Permits@dnr.ohio.gov, (614) 265-6315

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### **Covid-19 Guidance:**

Surveyors should follow all covid protocols put in place by their agency. All surveyors should wear masks when handling bats and anyone exhibiting symptoms of covid-19 should not participate in bat surveys.

### **Ohio Mist-net Surveys:**

This document serves as guidance for bat mist netting activities in Ohio and does not supersede any requirements listed on your permits or facility certificate. All permit conditions must be strictly adhered to for permits to be valid and for renewal of permits beyond the existing year.

Due to the presence of White-nose Syndrome (WNS), mist-netting in Ohio must be conducted between June 1 and August 15 unless stated otherwise in your state permit. The ODNR Division of Wildlife (ODNR-DOW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Ohio Field Office (OHFO) have determined that delaying netting activities until June 1 will provide additional recovery time for bats affected by WNS. For presence/probable absence surveys, netting will not be accepted outside of the June 1 - August 15 timeframe.

To assess project areas for presence or probable absence of the state and federally listed Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) during summer residency, the USFWS developed the USFWS 2020 Range-wide Indiana Bat Summer Survey Guidelines (March 2020). This protocol, with minor modifications referenced here, can also be used in Ohio for the 2021 field season and includes surveying for the state-listed little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) and tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*). According to the range-wide guidelines, net surveys shall incorporate either nine net nights per square 0.5 kilometer (123 acres) of project area, or two net nights per kilometer for linear projects.

### **Ohio Acoustic Surveys:**

Acoustic bat surveys for presence/absence will be accepted by ODNR-DOW for the 2021 season. Surveys should

follow guidelines laid out in the USFWS Range-wide Indiana Bat Survey Guidelines (March 2020) with the following exceptions:

- Ohio survey dates are June 1 – August 15, 2021
- After conducting automated analyses using one or more of the currently available ‘approved’ acoustic bat ID programs<sup>1</sup>, qualitative analysis (i.e., manual vetting) of any calls recorded from state-endangered species (*M. sodalis*, *M. septentrionalis*<sup>2</sup>, *M. lucifugus*<sup>2</sup>, and *P. subflavus*<sup>2</sup>) must be completed.

At a minimum, for each detector site/night a program considered presence of state-listed bats likely, review all files (including no IDs) from that site/night. If more than one acoustic bat ID program is used, qualitative analysis must also include a comparison of the results of each program by site and night.

### **Before Field Season:**

- Anyone surveying bats using mist-nets in the state of Ohio must obtain a federal permit as well as a state scientific collection permit. The federal permit should include both the Indiana bat and the northern long-eared bat.
- Your ODNR-DOW permit consists of two documents: a Scientific Collector (Wild Animal) Permit and an endangered species letter signed by the Chief of the Division of Wildlife (in addition to your federal permit). Both ODNR-DOW documents must be obtained prior to field work and kept with you and any sub-permittees during field work.

### **During Field Season:**

- Prior to initiation of field work (a minimum of two weeks in advance), permittees must provide proposed mist netting plans to USFWS and ODNR-DOW in the form of an e-mail letter to the USFWS OHFO and copy to the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator. Plans must be reviewed and approved by USFWS OHFO and ODNR-DOW before ANY surveys take place. Study plans must specify objectives, location details, dates of proposed work, and all other relevant details. When handling bats, you must strictly adhere to the current WNS Decontamination Protocol (current version can be found at <https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/topics/decontamination>). Clothing, boots, gear, and equipment should all be thoroughly decontaminated between nights, as well as between netting sites.
- Request bat bands at least two weeks in advance of needing them. Bat bands can be obtained by e-mailing the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator with how many bands are needed, current permit number, sizes, and a mailing address. Bands will not be issued until your permits are valid. We have two sizes of bands—2.4 mm and 4.2 mm. The 2.4 mm split metal bat ring made of aluminum alloy is suitable for banding small bats. This band must be placed on all captured Indiana, northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bats. The larger 4.2 mm band is suitable for silver-haired (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*), big brown (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and hoary (*Lasiurus cinereus*) bats. You must band all Indiana, northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bats with ODNR-DOW bands; therefore, you should not be in the field without the 2.4 mm sized band.
- Only individuals who are named on the ODNR-DOW endangered species letter portion of the permit and on the corresponding federal bat permit may conduct and oversee mist-net surveys. Trained assistants may work on permitted bat activities under the direct and on-site supervision of a named permittee. All bat IDs must be verified by a named permittee. If an Indiana bat and/or northern long-eared bat is captured, the permittee shall notify the USFWS and the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator referenced above within 48 hours via email. If a little brown bat or tricolored bat is captured, notify the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator only within 48 hours via email. Reports of listed bat captures should include specific information such as spatial location of capture, band information, radio-transmitter frequency information, sex, reproductive status, and age of individual.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/midwest/Endangered/mammals/inba/surveys/inbaAcousticSoftware.html>

<sup>2</sup> State listing as endangered effective July 1, 2020

- For presence/absence surveys, ODNR-DOW requires all female and juvenile state endangered and threatened bat species (Indiana, northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bat) be radio-tracked if caught, in accordance with methods outlined in Appendix D of USFWS 2020 Range-wide Indiana Bat Summer Survey Guidelines.
- If you are taking any biological samples (tissue, fur, blood, etc.), this must be specifically authorized in your state and federal permits and noted in your survey proposal.

### **After Field Season:**

By March 15, you must submit your final ODNR-DOW report(s) from the previous summer. You are not required to fill out the ODNR-DOW Wildlife Diversity Bat Excel Spreadsheet; instead, please forward your USFWS Midwestern US Spreadsheet (found here: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/inba/inbasummersurveyguidance.html>) to the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator and ODNR-DOW Permit Coordinator and include your state permit number along with an electronic copy of the project report. Electronic summaries emailed during the field season are NOT considered as full compliance of this reporting requirement.

## Ohio Environmental Review Recommendations for projects involving disturbance near potential/known bat hibernacula (cliffs, caves, mines) or tree cutting:

**Step 1:** Coordinate with Ohio Division of Wildlife (DOW) regarding existing records for state-listed endangered bat summer and/or winter occurrence information. Potential hibernacula found during a habitat assessment must address possible suitability for Indiana bats, northern long-eared bats, tricolored bats, and little brown bats.

If project site contains a known bat hibernaculum(a) –

- For state-listed endangered species other than the Indiana bat, a recommendation of 0.25-mile tree cutting buffer around all known entrances to protect existing conditions at the hibernaculum(a). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should be contacted for guidance on projects occurring within 5 miles of known or potential Indiana bat hibernacula. If the project involves subsurface disturbance, consultation with DOW is required.
- Limited tree cutting may be permitted within the buffer. Coordinate with DOW.

If a project site does not contain known bat hibernaculum(a)

- Conduct a desktop habitat assessment of the project area. Tools such as the [ODNR Mines of Ohio Viewer](#), topographic maps, aerial photos, historical records, etc. should be used to determine if there are any potential caves, mines, karst features, rock ledges, or other features that may serve as potential hibernacula.

- If no such features are found, proceed to Step 2.

- If potential hibernacula are found during the desktop assessment:

- Assume bats are using these hibernacula and refrain from clearing trees from March 15-November 15

**-Or-**

- Conduct a field habitat assessment to determine if a potential hibernaculum(a) is present within the action area. We encourage impacts to ledges and rock outcroppings be avoided. If impacts cannot be avoided, features should be evaluated for potential roosting characteristics such as recesses, overhangs, and crevices.

- **NOTE:** The USFWS Range-wide Indiana Bat Guidelines, Appendix H, contains instructions for completing a habitat assessment, but only includes criteria for Indiana bat hibernacula.

**Step 2:** When conducted, a presence/absence survey must follow current DOW guidelines.

**Step 3:** If a state-listed endangered bat is captured or recorded during the survey:

- Recommendation of no summer tree cutting, or limited cutting following guidelines detailed below, within 5 miles of the capture site if a roost is not located.
- Recommendation of no summer tree cutting, or limited cutting following guidelines detailed below, within 2.5 miles of a roost tree if located.

If no state-listed endangered bat is captured or recorded during the survey:

- Summer tree cutting may proceed for 5 years before a new survey is needed under state guidance.

**Limited summer tree cutting guidance for bats that are only state-listed endangered:** Limited tree cutting in summer may be permitted after consultation with DOW, but clearing trees with the following characteristics should be avoided unless they pose a hazard: dead or live trees of any size with loose, shaggy bark; crevices, holes, or cavities; clusters of dead leaves; live trees of any species with DBH  $\geq$  20.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **When does the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey protocol have to be used?**

This protocol should be used anytime Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, or tricolored bat summer presence/probable absence surveys are conducted in the state of Ohio.

### **How many detector nights are required for presence/probable absence acoustic surveys?**

As described in the current USFWS Range-wide Indiana Bat Guidelines:

Linear projects: a minimum of 2 detector nights per km (0.6 miles) of suitable summer habitat

Non-linear projects: a minimum of 8 detector nights per 123 acres (0.5 km<sup>2</sup>) of suitable summer habitat.

At least 2 detector locations per 123 acre "site" shall be sampled until at least 8 detector nights has been completed over the course of at least 2 calendar nights (may be consecutive). For example:

- 4 detectors for 2 nights each (can sample the same location or move within the site)
- 2 detectors for 4 nights each (can sample the same location or move within the site)
- 1 detector for 8 nights (must sample at least 2 locations and move within the site)

### **How many net surveys are required for presence/probable absence?**

Net surveys for presence/probable absence shall incorporate, at a minimum, either nine net nights per square 0.5 kilometer (123 acres) of project area, or two net nights per kilometer for linear projects. For linear projects, there must be at least one net night of survey on two different nights (minimum of two nights). This does not allow for two net nights on a single night for surveys.

### **How long are the results of the surveys valid for an assessment of an area?**

Mist-net or acoustic surveys documenting probable absence of state-listed endangered bats are valid for five years.

### **When can acoustic or net surveys occur in Ohio?**

In Ohio, acoustic or net surveys may only be conducted from June 1 through August 15 unless indicated otherwise in your state permit. Any surveys outside of the June 1 - August 15 timeframe cannot be used in Ohio to assess the presence/probable absence of state-listed bats.

### **Can a presence/probable absence survey be conducted within a known Indiana bat and/or northern long-eared bat capture/detection buffer?**

Surveys generally cannot be used to document presence/probable absence of state-listed endangered bats where presence of the species has already been confirmed by prior surveys.

### **What if a project is proposing to clear trees between April 1 and September 30 when bats may be present but no bat records exist in the project area?**

Any Ohio project that is not within a known bat record buffer, and tree clearing between April 1 and September 31 is being proposed, may have a presence/absence survey conducted between June 1 and August 15 following the range-wide guidance. If a presence/absence survey is not performed, presence of listed bats is assumed.

**How does take of northern long-eared bats differ from Indiana bats?**

Under Ohio law, there is no exemption for take of any listed bat species.

**Where do I get bands?**

If you need bands, email the ODNR-DOW Bat Survey Coordinator at least two weeks in advance with your current ODNR permit number, how many bands in each size (2.4 and 4.2 mm) you will need this season, and a current address to ship the bands.

**Do I have to band every bat?**

No, currently this is optional. However, you are required as per your state permit to band all Indiana, northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bats.