

Lake States Forest Management Bat HCP

Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin currently are engaged in developing the Lake States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (Lake States HCP).

Once approved by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the States can apply for a federal incidental take permit pursuant to Section 10 of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), and request authorization for the incidental take of Indiana bats, northern long-eared bats, little brown bats, and tricolored bats during normal forest management activities across the three states.

All cave-hibernating bats are in precipitous decline due to the fungal disease white-nose syndrome. It is increasingly likely that these four bat species will be listed as endangered under the federal ESA. Developing an HCP is complex and time-consuming, and will take a *minimum* of 4 - 5 years. Taking up the HCP once a species becomes endangered could result in more restrictive conservation measures. By starting the HCP process now, the States can ensure a solution is in place when the listings occur. This will avoid a period of time where seasonal restrictions, or project-level consultation with FWS are the only mechanisms for timber harvest to occur.

The Lakes States HCP serves as a framework for conserving the four bat species and meeting federal legal requirements while providing the necessary flexibility for the States to manage their forests. This regional approach streamlines compliance by considering the impacts of forestry on covered species at a landscape scale rather than on a project-by-project basis (e.g., the stand level), and by providing management and regulatory consistency across all three states.

Throughout the HCP development process, the States work closely with the FWS to assess the incidental take potential of various forest management activities, and then to avoid, minimize or mitigate that level of potential take. The Lake States HCP describes the costs and benefits of forest management for bats, and details conservation measures to offset forest management impacts on bats.

All stakeholders, including the general public, will be able to view and comment on the draft Lake States HCP when it is posted on the Federal Register.

Michigan non-federal forestland owners—public or private—may participate in the Lake States HCP. They also have the option to develop their own HCP through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, if desired.