



Office of the Superintendent

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**JECA POLICY NUMBER:** RM-01  
**EFFECTIVE DATE:** June 14, 2012

N1615, K18(JECA)

**SUBJECT:** White Nose Syndrome (WNS) Management Policy

**CONTACT:** Chief of Resource Management

### **Background**

Jewel Cave National Monument is home to nine different bat species, with up to 1,400 bats hibernating in the cave during the winter months. For this reason, we are asking each visitor to help avoid spreading the fungus that causes White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), a fatal disease in bats.

WNS was first observed in bats in 2006 in a cave in New York. Infected bats show a white fungus on their muzzle, ears, and/or wings. Unfortunately, the cool, moist conditions in which bats often hibernate seem to provide an ideal environment for this fungus to grow. This disease has killed over five million bats in the eastern United States and Canada and is gradually spreading west. It has been found in caves near Mammoth Cave in Kentucky as well as caves in Buffalo National River in Arkansas and Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri.

WNS has not been detected at Jewel Cave or any of the nearby public or private caves in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Even though there is no evidence indicating that humans play a role in spreading the WNS fungus, in order to minimize the possibility, Jewel Cave National Monument is implementing decontamination procedures in accordance with National Park Service policy.

The bats at Jewel Cave inhabit only an area near the historic cave entrance, along the Historic Lantern Tour route (see attached map). Guided tours are conducted on a minimally developed trail in this area from June through mid-September. A primary bat hibernaculum, the area is closed to the public in the off-season from approximately October 1 to June 1. Resource Management staff conduct annual winter surveys of hibernating bats and have several years worth of documentation of the natural variability of the bat population.

Most park visitors go on the Scenic Tour route throughout the year (see attached map). The area is accessible only by elevator and a sealed service door (the Portal) and has no bat population. It is separated from the bat habitat of the Historic Lantern Tour route by nearly 5,000 feet of intervening cave passages. Virtually all off-trail trips enter Jewel Cave via the elevator entrance, and do not go near the bats.

The Resource Management Division will provide up-to-date information on WNS to park staff and will assist the Interpretive Division in developing programs and educational materials to increase public awareness.

### **Decontamination Policy**

Everyone entering caves within Jewel Cave National Monument will be screened for previous visits to caves or mines in North America (excluding developed tour routes at Wind Cave and other commercial caves of the Black Hills) or Europe, since 2005.

If clothing or personal items have been in a cave or mine known to harbor WNS, they may not be used inside park caves, regardless of any decontamination procedure. However, if the cave or mine is not known to harbor WNS, then additional screening will be determined by the area of cave that will be visited:

#### Historic Lantern Tour Route

This portion of Jewel Cave is accessed via the historic cave entrance.

- If casual clothing worn in caves or mines outside the Black Hills area has been washed since the last visit, then no decontamination is required. Otherwise, visitors should change into clean clothes.
- Personal items that have been in caves or mines outside the Black Hills area should be left in the car or cleaned with disinfectant wipes.
- All footwear that has been worn in caves or mines outside the Black Hills area must be changed or decontaminated according to current USFWS procedures.

#### Offtrail Travel

This includes the offtrail portions of Jewel Cave and nine other small caves which are administratively closed (per the Superintendent's Compendium) and may be visited only for approved research and management related activities.

- If caving clothes and gear have previously been used in any other cave or mine, they must be thoroughly cleaned and decontaminated following current USFWS and NPS-approved procedures before being used within Jewel Cave. Prior to using gear/clothing, users will need to certify that they have complied with this requirement.
- Exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on circumstances.

### Scenic Tour route

The Visitor Center and public elevator provide controlled access to this part of the cave. All walking surfaces are manmade and will be decontaminated at least annually.

- If casual clothing worn in caves or mines outside the Black Hills has been washed since the last visit, then no further action is required. Otherwise, visitors should change into clean clothes.
- Personal items that have been in caves or mines outside the Black Hills area should be left in their vehicle, placed in plastic bags and carried, or cleaned with disinfectant wipes.

The Resource Management Division will provide training to employees involved in the WNS decontamination process and will keep the information updated so procedures may be modified based on more recent information about WNS. The Interpretive Division will ensure the supplies needed for decontamination are maintained.

The most recent version of the WNS decontamination protocol can be obtained by going to <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/cavers.html> and clicking on “White-nose Syndrome Decontamination Protocols.”

This policy may be changed or modified as needed when improved information about WNS and its impacts becomes known. Should WNS be detected in the Black Hills area, this policy will be changed.

*/Signed, original on file/*

Lawrence E. Johnson  
Superintendent

# Jewel Cave Tour Areas

