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## VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS TO MONTANA'S STATEWIDE BAT MONITORING PROJECT

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Over the last two years, the State of Montana has established a network of passive acoustic monitors to study bat activity patterns at selected locations throughout the state. These monitors, many of which are in remote areas, record bat calls each evening of the year. Their purpose is to document the number and species of bats as a function of time and location, with the intention of generating a statewide database on bat activity. These data could serve as an “early warning system” for the appearance of white-nose syndrome, a deadly fungal infection caused by *Geomyces destructans* that is ravaging bats in eastern portions of North America. WNS has not been detected in Montana, so the data being presently collected can be considered to be representative of bat behavior in the absence of the disease. A noticeable change in recorded bat activity could be an early indicator of the arrival of WNS. Whether or not WNS reaches Montana, the network is generating an extensive knowledge base about Montana's bats that will help address a variety of management issues. The Montana caving community has provided help in installing and maintaining the bat monitoring network and in recording observations about bats. Cavers are familiar with the state's caves, are experienced in working safely in caves, and have an interest in cave biota and the welfare of bats. They are well-suited to assist in a number of capacities, including maintaining the monitoring equipment, recording observations of bats, identifying hibernacula, and installing data loggers. This talk will describe volunteer activities around the state and the partnership between cavers and state organizations to increase the effectiveness of the bat monitoring project.