

Access Control – Bat Cave Exclusion

Conservation Practice Info Sheet

GA-472

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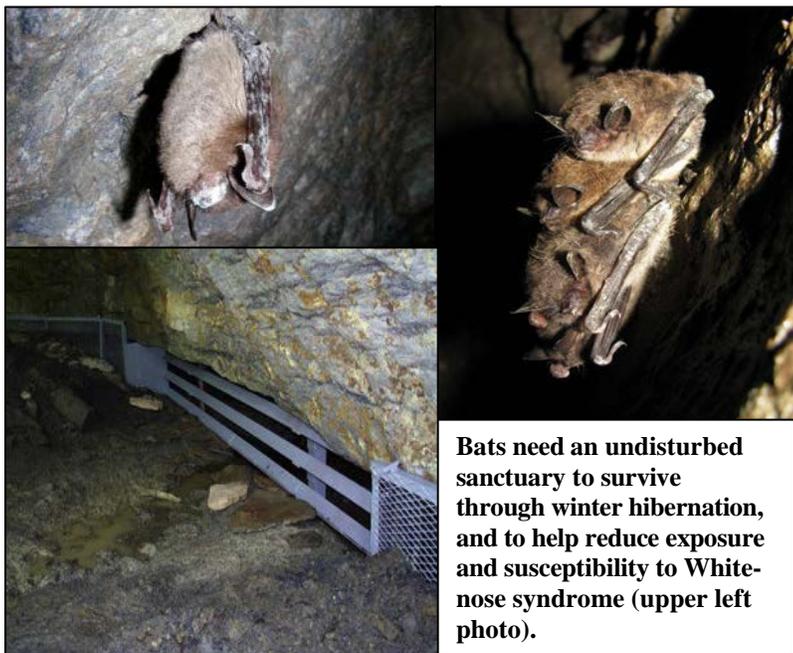
Even a small opening can lead to hibernaculum.

Do you have a cave, tunnel, or mine on your property? If so, you may have a “bat hibernaculum”—an area used by bats to hibernate through the cold winter months. If so, you are the guardian of a rare treasure. Bats can protect your property from pest insects during the growing season, with bats eating up to half their weight in insects every night. Although bats are voracious insect predators, they are also fragile creatures. Multiple species of bats are declining across Georgia, with up to an 80% decline documented for some species over the past several years.

Bats that use hibernacula are vulnerable to human disturbance during hibernation in late fall and winter. If you believe, or know, that bats are utilizing your cave, going inside may induce stress causing the bats to burn energy reserves needed for winter hibernation. Contact your local NRCS office and they will work cooperatively with the GA DNR or US Fish and Wildlife Service to document what types of bats utilize your cave and to determine whether bat gate installation is necessary.

A functional bat gate will:

- Prevent humans from using or vandalizing your cave and may also result in fewer people trespassing on your property.
- Prevent your bats from being harassed by humans as they hibernate overwinter. Some hibernacula are also used by a few bats during the spring and summer.
- Help to give your bats a fighting chance against the devastating white-nose syndrome. This fungus causes bats to wake up and search for food during the winter, which usually leads to the bat’s starvation or hypothermia and ultimately death. Bats can also wake up if humans are simply walking inside the hibernaculum, which leads to depletion of the bat’s energy stores. The fewer overwinter disturbances to bats, the healthier they will be upon spring emergence.



Bats need an undisturbed sanctuary to survive through winter hibernation, and to help reduce exposure and susceptibility to White-nose syndrome (upper left photo).

A few things to know:

- Bat gates keep *people* out, helping bats by reducing human disturbance during winter when bats' immune systems are susceptible to white-nose syndrome.
- Bat gates will not restrict you from your mine or tunnel—you will have access to get inside by using a key, but we ask that you not go inside during the winter.
- Bat gates cannot prevent white-nose syndrome from invading your cave. If the fungus is not currently present, a functional bat gate will prevent humans from accidentally bringing the fungus into your hibernaculum.



How a bat gate is installed:

There are many different styles of bat-friendly gates and the design of each gate will need to be site specifically tailored. Hibernaculum entrances of all types—small, large, vertical, and flush with the ground—can be gated. Bat gates are typically created at the hibernaculum entrance and look very similar to the one pictured at right, which can be varying in size.

Typically, bat gates are created by welding horizontal steel bars to upright crossbars that extend from the top part of the hibernacula entrance into the ground. One of the horizontal bars is locked instead of welded into place allowing access, when necessary.

Click [here](#) for more information on bat cave exclusion utilizing gates designed according to the Agency Guide to Cave and Mine Gates.

Interested?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, in consultation with the Georgia DNR and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, may be able to provide the expertise, design, and funding for bat gates if deemed necessary to protect hibernacula for declining bat species. To learn more about gating a hibernaculum, please contact your local NRCS office.



Photo credit: Katrina Morris, GA DNR