

Re: Docket # FWS-R5-ES-2011-0024

Thank you for reopening the public comment period, concerning the proposal to list the Northern Long-Eared Bat (NLEB) for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The 55 forest products associations signed on to these comments agree with the points raised in the November 5, 2014 letter to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, submitted by the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and other regional coalitions of state forestry and wildlife officials, and urge you to strongly consider the evaluation and recommendations of that letter in reaching your decision on listing the Northern Long-Eared Bat.

Specifically, the undersigned agree with MAFWA's following points:

- the difficulty of understanding and projecting White-Nose Syndrome (WNS)-related mortality trends or the means by which White-Nose Syndrome spreads throughout regional populations;
- commonly deployed forest management practices have actually been a key factor in developing NLEB habitat throughout the Bat's wide range;
- conventional forest management and timber harvest inflict only negligible harm, while significantly contributing to conserving NLEB habitat;
- across the NLEB's range, many state and federal agency partners are already implementing conservation actions to slow the spread of WNS and protect the NLEB while at the same time implementing normal forest management activities.

The listed associations support MAFWA's suggestion that, if an ESA listing is imposed, protection be limited to a "threatened" designation and that guidelines support the continuation of normal forest management on forest lands containing current or potential NLEB habitat.

When a species is listed as "threatened," the ESA does not specify what activities are prohibited but instead, as the MAFWA letter points out, Section 4(d) of the statute authorizes the Service to issue a special rule to apply the "take" and other prohibitions of ESA section 9 as appropriate. This would allow the Service to recognize that normal forest management activities cause negligible "take" of the NLEB and therefore should be expressly excluded from prohibited activities with respect to the NLEB. This is a reasonable course of action, as is the additional suggestion that the Service "engage with the states to develop this 4(d) rule." Such engagement is will be essential to developing strategies that will effectively protect both the bat and avoid unnecessary disruption to working forests and the forest products industry.

As the MAFWA letter reiterates, and the Service seems to agree, current forest management norms have nothing to do with NLEB's observed decline. Effective conservation measures will consist of developing and implementing a cure for White-Nose Syndrome, accompanied by educational measures to protect identified NLEB hibernacula from disturbance in the meantime. The Service's efforts and assets would be much more effectively deployed to those ends than in attempting to impose a new regulatory regime on sustainably managed forestland.

Alabama Forestry Association
American Forest & Paper Association
American Loggers Council

American Walnut Manufacturer's Association
Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers, Inc.
Arkansas Forestry Association

Arkansas Timber Producers Association
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
Empire State Forest Products Association
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
Florida Forestry Association
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
Hardwood Federation
Hardwood Manufacturers Association
Hardwood Plywood and Veneer Association
Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association
Intermountain Forest Association
Intermountain Roundwood Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association
Lake State Lumber Association
Maine Forest Products Council
Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
Michigan Association of Timbermen
Minnesota Forest Industries
Michigan Forest Products Council
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
Mississippi Forestry Association

Missouri Forest Products Association
Montana Wood Products Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Hardwood Lumber Association
National Wood Flooring Association
New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association
North Carolina Forestry Association
Northeastern Loggers' Association
Ohio Forestry Association
Oregon Women in Timber
Penn York Lumbermen's Club
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association
Professional Logging Contractors of Maine
South Carolina Forestry Association
South Carolina Timber Producers Association
South Dakota Family Forest Association
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Texas Forestry Association
Treated Wood Council
Virginia Forest Products Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Western Hardwood Association
Wisconsin Paper Council
Wood Component Manufacturers Association