

**Opening Statement**  
**The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo**  
**Ranking Member**  
**Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs**  
**Friday, June 24, 2011**

**Oversight Hearing on "Why We Should Care About Bats: Devastating Impact White-Nose Syndrome is Having On One of Nature's Best Pest Controllers"**

White-Nose Syndrome is named for the striking fungal growth on the muzzles, ears, wings, and tails of bats. Much remains unknown about this disease, which was first documented west of Albany, New York in February of 2006. Over the last five years, White-Nose Syndrome has spread to at least sixteen States and Canada. The mortalities caused by White-Nose Syndrome are astonishing, reaching up to 99 percent in some caves and mines. Over one million little brown bats have been killed, likely contributing to a 78 percent decline in the calls of these bats in the night sky over the Hudson River.

White-Nose Syndrome in bats has profound public health, environmental, and economic impacts. Bats are nature's best control of insect populations, as a single bat can eat its entire weight in insects in one night. When not controlled, many insects spread disease and others are agricultural pests. A study by one of today's witnesses, Dr. Justin Boyles [*boils*], estimated that this benefit provided by bats to the agricultural sector is between \$3 to \$53 billion dollars per year.

Bats with White-Nose Syndrome exhibit uncharacteristic behaviors and emerge from hibernation during the winter, consuming fat reserves, which may result in starvation. Transmission of the disease is not fully understood, but is believed to be bat-to-bat or transferred by humans who visit affected caves. Some caves have been closed on federal lands, although federally managed caves account for only 34% of the known roost areas, while 60% are located on privately held lands.

It is clear that there are still large gaps in our understanding of this disease. We must continue to support research about causes of and vectors for the spread of White-Nose Syndrome, and on the effectiveness of potential control measures to better manage this disease and ensure that the night sky is once again full of insect-hunting bats.

Two years ago, this Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on White-Nose Syndrome, and found a commendable amount of cooperation and coordination among Federal and State wildlife and land management agencies. The recent release of “A National Plan for Assisting States, Federal Agencies, and Tribes in Managing White-Nose Syndrome in Bats” provides a framework to continue this coordination and I look forward to hearing more from our witnesses today on its implementation and on other recommendations on how to address this challenging disease.