

**Pennsylvania State Game Lands, State Forests, and  
State Parks Habitat Conservation Plan for Indiana Bat (State Lands HCP)**

***Frequently Asked Questions***

*Last updated January 2014*

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission manage a combined 3.8 million acres of mostly forested public lands for many uses and values, including wildlife habitat.

Forest management strategies and uses for these lands include removing timber and prescribed burns, both of which have the potential to impact the foraging, roosting, maternity colony, spring staging, fall swarming and migratory habitat for all bat species that occur in Pennsylvania, including the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). However, timber removal and prescribed burns also help create foraging habitat and can be beneficial to Indiana bats.

To avoid these impacts to the greatest extent possible and mitigate them where they might occur, the agencies are working through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on a Habitat Conservation Plan for Indiana bats. One of the benefits of this plan is that it allows the agencies to limit and address impacts across the entire 3.8 million acres over a 30-year period, rather than on a project-by-project basis. This allows the agencies to be more proactive in planning for the conservation of Indiana bats across the state lands system. Initiatives such as seasonal restrictions, canopy retention, and hibernation protection will be incorporated into the plan to aid in the conservation of Indiana bats.

**Please see the frequently asked questions below for more information about the HCP and its development and public comment process:**

**What is the goal of the habitat conservation plan (HCP)?**

The overall goal of this HCP is to develop and implement a conservation plan that will accomplish the following objectives:

- Avoid and minimize incidental take of Indiana bats resulting from forestry management and other related activities to the maximum extent practicable on state lands;
- Accommodate current and future forestry management activities on state lands;
- Support state conservation goals such as those described in the Game and Wildlife Code, the Conservation and Natural Resources Act (Act 18), the Wild Resource Conservation Act, the Cave Protection Act, and other applicable state laws and regulations; and
- Identify targeted conservation efforts that can improve the value of state lands for Indiana bats and thus help stabilize and aid in the recovery of the species.

**What is the HCP process?**

To obtain an ITP, applicants develop an HCP and apply for a permit. To submit a permit application, the following are necessary: application form, HCP document, Implementation Agreement (as applicable), application fee, and a draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. While processing the permit application, the USFWS prepares the ITP and a biological opinion under Section 7 of the ESA and finalizes the NEPA analysis. This process is displayed in detail below (Figure 1).

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**What are the covered management practices within the HCP?**

This HCP addresses the agencies forest management activities that are critical to managing a diverse and sustainable habitat on state lands, but have the potential to incidentally take Indiana bats. Activities occurring on state lands that are not listed below are subject to their own permitting requirements. The HCP covered activities are as follows:

- *Forestry Regeneration and Operations*: timber harvests, timber salvage, fencing and firewood collection
- *Roads and Trails*: roads associated with timber harvests, trails, and maintenance/use associated with roads and trails
- *Prescribed Fire*: burning and fire breaks
- *Activities associated with the HCP implementation*: habitat restoration and HCP monitoring efforts

**Why are energy exploration and development on state lands not covered under the HCP?**

Natural gas and coal deposits are found beneath most state lands, and the extraction of these resources has the potential to impact Indiana bats. All such energy extraction efforts are subject to their own compliance processes and are excluded from coverage by this HCP, which focuses solely on the forestry and forestry-related activities as described above.

**Who is a part of the HCP Stakeholder Group and how were they selected?**

The stakeholder group is comprised of experts and professionals in the timber, prescribed fire, and wildlife fields. The participants represent conservation organizations, academic institutions, and business and development interests related specifically to forest management activities and/or Indiana bat biology and were selected to provide input on timber, prescribed fire and wildlife management on state lands. The following participants are included in the HCP Stakeholder Group:

Forestry professionals

Forest Investment Associates  
Allegheny National Forest – U.S. Forest Service  
Generations Forestry  
Kane Hardwood  
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association  
Glatfelter Pulpwood  
US Forest Service - Northern Research Station  
Pennsylvania State University

Prescribed fire professionals

Fort Indiantown Gap National Guard Training Center  
Natural Lands Trust

Wildlife professionals

PA Chapter of the Wildlife Society  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
The Nature Conservancy  
PA Biological Survey - Mammal Technical Committee  
National Park Service  
Bat Conservation International

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**Why wasn't my organization invited to participate as a stakeholder in the development of the HCP?**

In order to limit the stakeholder group to a manageable number of participants, the only groups invited to participate were those who could provide direct input on the covered activities in the HCP (e.g., land resource management agencies, wildlife professionals, timber professionals, and fire professionals). However, the public will be afforded an opportunity to fully participate and comment on the HCP through the federal review process.

**What steps are required for PGC and DCNR to complete the HCP process and what is the process for the agencies to receive the ITP?**

In order for PGC and DCNR to obtain an ITP, an HCP will need to be completed and subsequently approved by the USFWS. The issuance of the ITP is a federal action by the USFWS. Certain federal actions, such as the issuance of the ITP, require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. § 4332 et seq. (NEPA) The objectives of NEPA include disclosing environmental information, fostering intergovernmental coordination and cooperation, and enhancing public participation in government planning and decision making. The NEPA environmental document (EA - environmental assessment or EIS - environmental impact statement) will assess and analyze the potential effects of the action on the human and natural environments, including biological resources and economic and social resources. Through the NEPA process, the effects of issuing an ITP as described in the HCP will be disclosed to the public, and the public will be afforded the opportunity to participate in the process and comment on the issuance of an ITP.

**How can my organization participate in the process?**

Upon completion of the preliminary NEPA analysis, the Public Draft NEPA document and Public Draft HCP will be published in the *Federal Register*, and the public will have a 45-day period to submit comments on both the NEPA and HCP Public Drafts. During this 45-day comment period, a public meeting will be held to present an overview of the documents as well as to answer any questions. Prior to approval of the Final NEPA document, the public will have a 30-day period to submit comments on the Final NEPA document. Please see the HCP process flowchart below for information on the HCP and NEPA processes.

**Where is the HCP process currently?**

*As of January 2014, the following has occurred:*

- The HCP has been in development with feedback from the stakeholder groups. A preliminary draft document is nearing completion.
- The USFWS began its early scoping for the Proposed Application for an ITP and HCP, announced Nov. 12, 2013, and closed Dec. 12, 2013. We are in the early stages of the NEPA process.
- In early January 2014, the PGC and the DCNR will investigate opportunities to include the Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), which was proposed to be federally listed in October 2013, in the HCP. The intent is to complete the preliminary draft state lands HCP (for Indiana bat), incorporate northern long-eared bats into the HCP, and then go through the HCP and NEPA public comment and review period as outlined in the flowchart below.

For other questions, please contact Tracey Librandi Mumma, PA Game Commission at [tlibrandi@pa.gov](mailto:tlibrandi@pa.gov) or Ellen Shultzabarger, DCNR at [eshultzaba@pa.gov](mailto:eshultzaba@pa.gov).

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**Figure 1. The HCP Process**

