

U.S. Fish, Wildlife Service issues opinion on treatment of Indiana bat

Fort Drum received a biological opinion March 24 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that concluded the installation's current actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the federally endangered Indiana bat. Additionally, conservation measures, terms and conditions, and reasonable and prudent measures were outlined to ensure that Fort Drum's actions will not adversely affect the Indiana bat.

This is the culmination of a multi-year effort Fort Drum embarked on in concert with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's New York Field Office in Cortland to help conserve the Indiana bat while still accomplishing the installation's mission.

"We congratulate the Army for using a programmatic approach to assess the potential for impacts to Indiana bats," said Robyn Niver, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It has been a pleasure to work with Fort Drum over the past 1 ½ years on this type of review."

The Indiana bat has been listed as a federal and state endangered species since laws first went into effect in 1967. Although primarily found in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee, 9 percent of the entire Indiana bat population is found in New York.

The first Indiana bat was confirmed on Fort Drum in August 2006 as a result of a survey conducted for a nearby development project. Since that time, Fort



ADAM MANN

This pregnant female Indiana bat was captured in Fort Drum's cantonment area in 2007 and was radio-tracked as part of a survey.

Drum's Fish and Wildlife Management Program has been undertaking survey efforts to learn more about Indiana bat biology and ecology to better guide future management decisions.

All of the information from survey efforts on and around the installation allowed Fort Drum to prepare a postwide biological assessment to analyze its activities and their potential impacts to Indiana bats through 2011. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided a thorough yet expedited review of the assessment and worked with Fort Drum to include multiple conservation measures that will allow the installation to further Indiana bat conservation.

To ensure no roosting bat is harmed, Fort Drum for years has prohibited tree cutting between April 15 and Oct. 1. Indiana bats

typically hibernate in nearby caves from October to mid-April. After they emerge from hibernation, they roost in trees. Indiana bats typically roost in trees greater than four inches in diameter; female Indiana bats typically use trees with diameters of nine or more inches to establish maternity roosts where they live together and raise their young.

For a bat, tree structure is more important than the species. Trees that have loose bark, cracks, or crevices provide ideal roosts for bats.

The most important long-term conservation measure Fort Drum has enacted is the establishment of a 2,200-acre bat conservation area that includes undeveloped portions of the cantonment area in the northern local training areas and along the West Creek and Pleasant Creek corridors. These are areas of known bat use, including a maternity colony of Indiana bats that has primary roost trees and foraging habitat on Fort Drum.

By continuing to follow measures outlined in the biological assessment and opinion and working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Drum will continue to demonstrate its commitment to the conservation of an endangered species, while continuing to meet mission requirements. □

FROM FORT DRUM FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM