

State of West Virginia  
Department of Natural Resources  
Charleston 25305

July 9, 1984

Mr. Paul Stevens, President  
National Speleological Society  
5964 Seabright Road  
Springfield, Virginia 22152

Dear Mr. Stevens:

The Wildlife Resources Division of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources has followed with interest the purchase of Trout, New Trout, and Hamilton Caves in Pendleton County. Your organization is to be commended for the rehabilitation efforts and archaeological studies regarding these caves. I am most concerned, however, about the controversy over protection of the endangered Indiana bat, Myotis sodalis, in Trout Cave.

As you may be aware, Trout Cave once supported the largest known M. sodalis population in West Virginia, estimated by J. A. Fowler at 1600 - 2400 in 1941. Since then our State population has declined from over 5000 to about 500. Several caves which supported major M. sodalis colonies have few or none of these bats remaining. John Hall, a well-known authority on M. sodalis, found no Indianas in Trout in the 1970's. Thus, it is encouraging that a small, but by no means insignificant, colony exists in Trout Cave once again. The Indiana bat is considered the most sensitive to disturbance of all bats found in West Virginia hibernacula. The fact that they use only a small number of our caves indicates that they have very specific habitat requirements, which obviously are met in Trout Cave.

I urge you to continue NSS's exemplary record of cave conservation through protection of the Indiana bat. The Wildlife Resources Division strongly recommends a winter closure of the entire cave for a trial period of at least 3 to 4 years. We would be willing to help implement a cooperative monitoring program with the NSS. After the trial period, we could reevaluate the need for closure.

Your consideration and cooperation regarding the above matter would be appreciated. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely yours,

[signed]

Robert L. Miles, Chief  
Wildlife Resources Division

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cc: Peter E. Zurbuch