



A Tale of 3 Bats: Recent & Ongoing ESA Actions

Matt Fullerton

Oklahoma Ecological Services Field Office

Overview

- Three (3) bats undergoing ESA listing reviews
 - Tricolored bat, *Perimyotis subflavus*
 - Northern long-eared bat, *Myotis septentrionalis*
 - Little brown bat, *M. lucifugus*
- All have similar ecology & life histories (mostly tree roosting in summer, hibernate in caves during winter)
- All 3 experiencing widespread declines from White-Nose Syndrome (key threat)



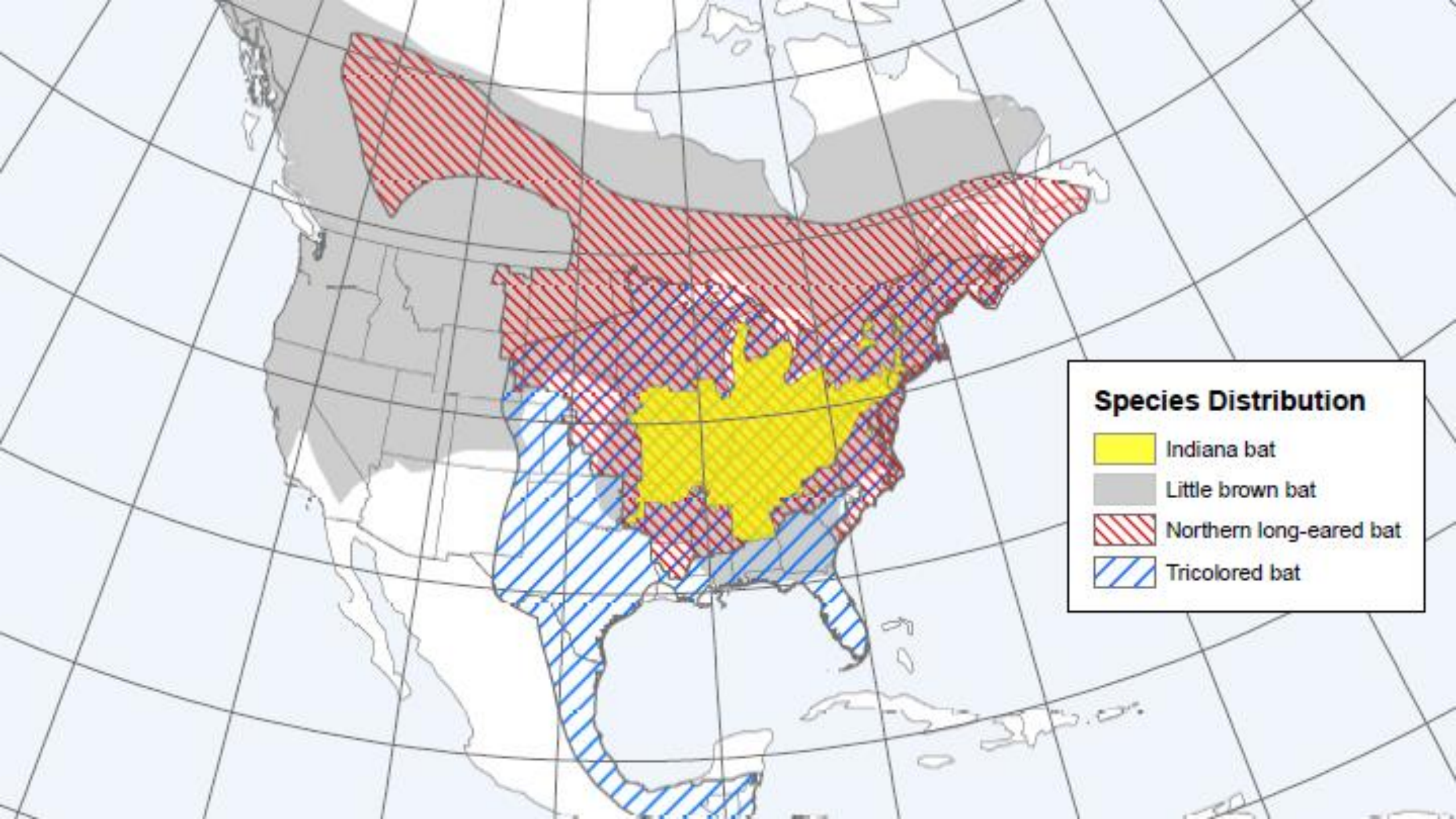
Background

- Service petitioned to list tricolored bat in 2016
- Northern long-eared bat listed as threatened in 2015; FWS litigated & court-ordered to re-evaluate status, pub. final rule by Nov. 2022
- Discretionary status review for little brown bat initiated due to significant WNS declines
- **All 3 species were evaluated together as a “batch” in a Species Status Assessment**







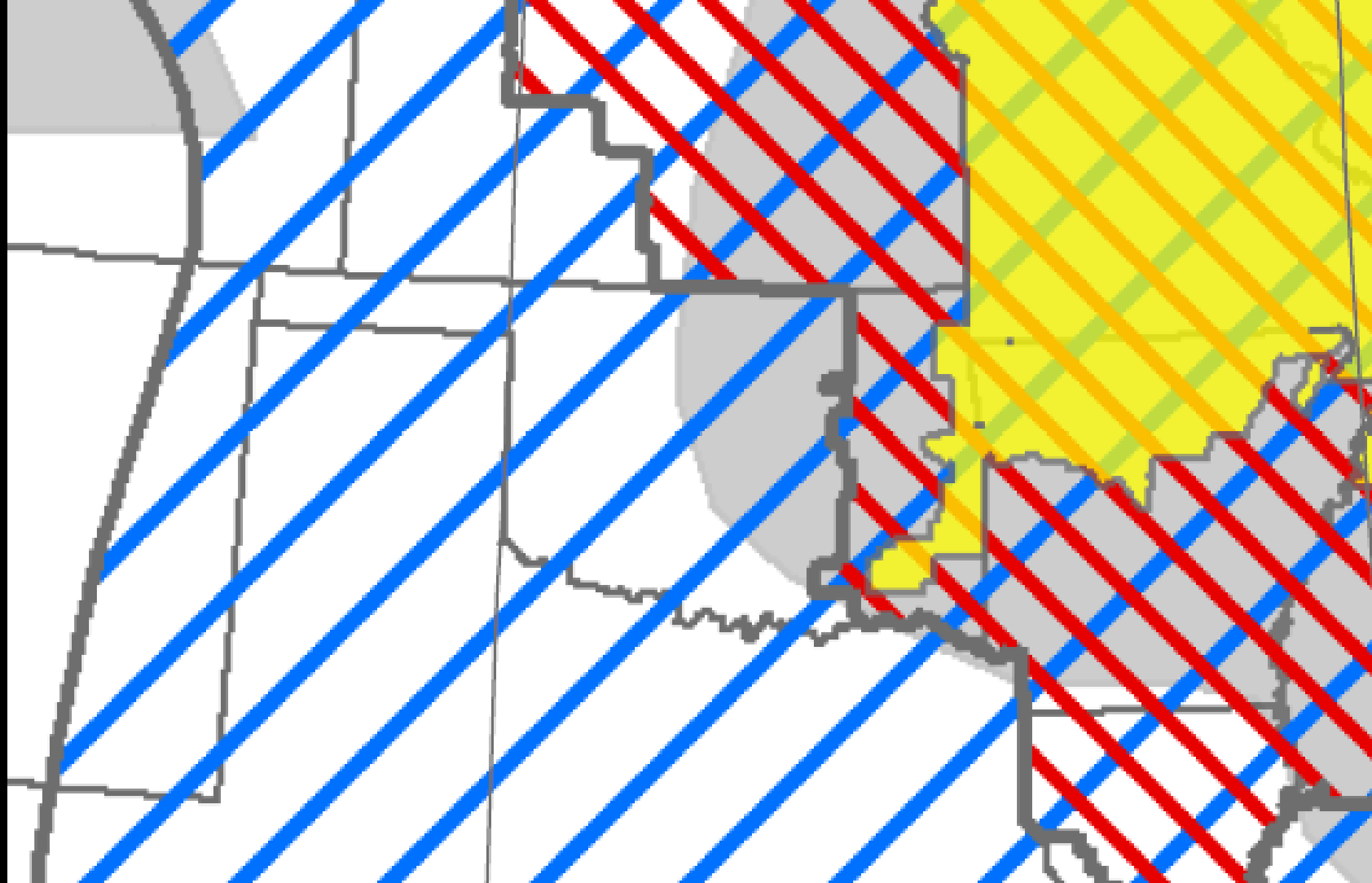
SSA Findings

- Data from North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat)
- Modeled all 3 species' viability, persistence, abundance under current & future condition scenarios
- Depending on species, rangewide abundance declines between 83-99% by 2030



Species Distribution

-  Indiana bat
-  Little brown bat
-  Northern long-eared bat
-  Tricolored bat



Tricolored Bat

- Widely distributed in eastern U.S.; small, insectivorous bat
- Roosts in tree foliage in summer; hibernates in caves and manmade structures (i.e., culverts)
- Before onset of WNS, was one of the most abundant bats in North America



Tricolored Bat Timeline

- **June 2016** - USFWS petitioned to list tricolored bat by CBD and Defenders of Wildlife
- **Dec. 2017** – 90-day finding published
- **Spring 2020** – “3 Bat” Species Status Assessment began
- **September 14, 2022** – **Proposed Rule for Endangered published on FR**
 - Comment period open for 60 days
- **12 months to publish final listing rule**

Northern long-eared bat (NLEB)



- Inhabits “cluttered” interiors of forests in eastern U.S. & Canada
- Roosts under bark & crevices of trees during summer
- Hibernates in caves, mines, rock crevices, and occasionally artificial structures

NLEB Timeline

- Listed as threatened with a 4(d) rule in 2014
- Service litigated over decision; court order to re-evaluate analysis
- Proposed rule to reclassify as endangered published March 2022
- If finalized, 4(d) rule exempting incidental take of the species would disappear



Little brown bat

- Similar in appearance to northern long-eared bat
- Wide-ranging across U.S. and Canada, w/ narrow OK distribution (confirmed in 3 counties)
- Pre-WNS, likely most abundant bat in eastern U.S.
- Uses human dwellings as roosts most frequently out of the 3 species
- Discretionary status review; 12 mo. finding planned for 2023



Challenges for the 3 bats

- Wind farm mortality, though mortality data is limited in portions of range
- SSA report determined **2nd highest threat to future viability for all 3 species**
- Climate change causing disruptions in life history periods
- Habitat loss and disturbance of hibernacula



Future Implications

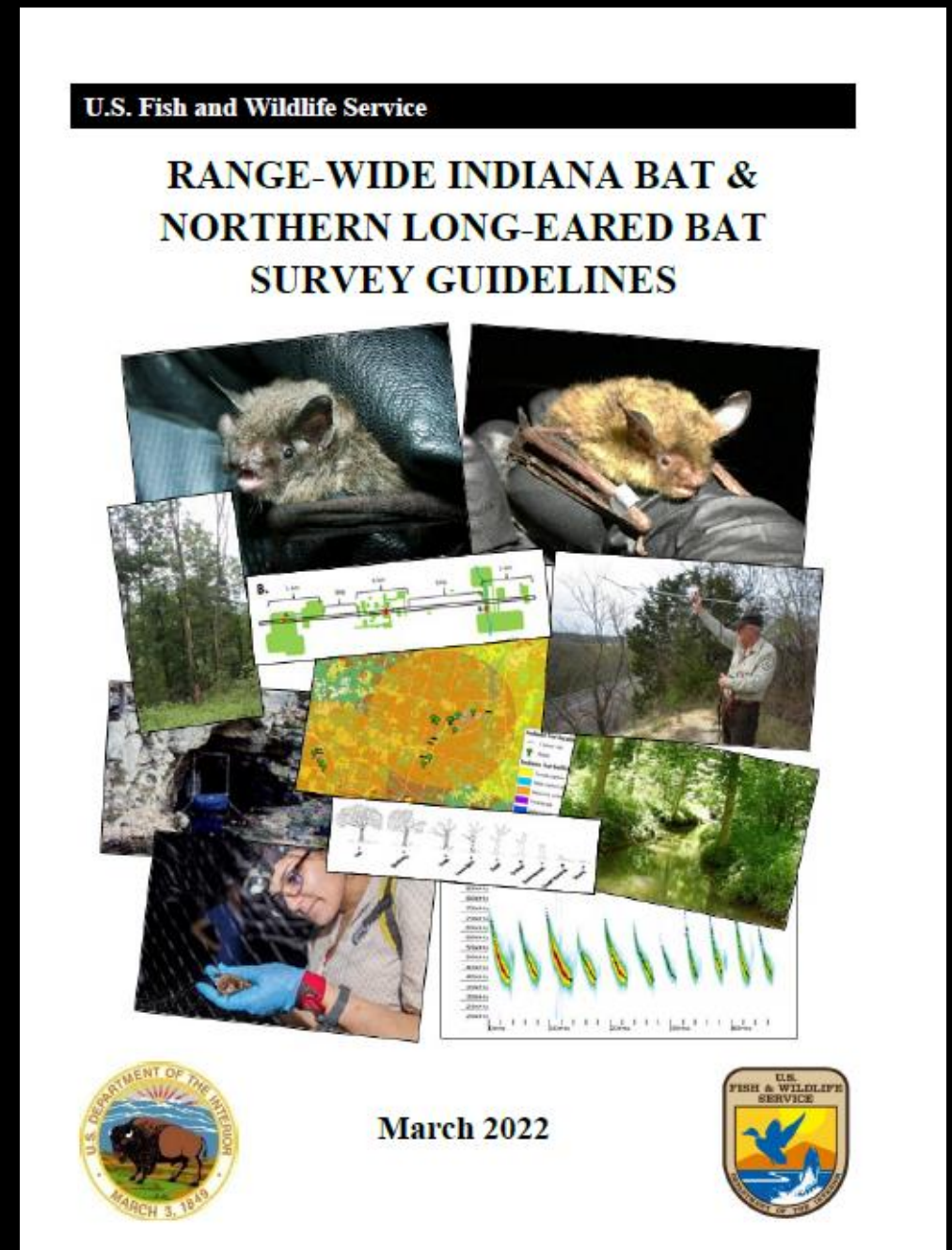
- Tricolored bat – statewide distribution; **if proposed rule finalized**, projects w/ potential for incidental take may need to coordinate and/or consult with FWS
- Northern long-eared bat – 4(d) rule would no longer be applicable for previously-exempted for seasonal tree removal activities
- Within range & suitable habitat, presence can either be assumed OR presence/probable absence surveys can be conducted for many listed species

Options & pathways for listed species

- Habitat Conservation Plan (No Federal nexus)
 - Associated with an ESA Section 10(a)(1)(B) permit
 - Mitigation plan
- Section 7 consultation (Federal nexus)
 - Applies to actions carried out / permitted by federal agencies
 - Informal consultation (not likely to adversely affect species)
 - Formal consultation / Biological Opinion (likely to adversely affect species)
- If proposed rule finalized, surveyors/biologists planning to handle or capture tricolored bats would need Recovery Permit (ESA Section 10(a)(A)).

Bat Survey Guidance

- Guidance out since 2011 for Indiana bat, w/ NLEB added in 2022.
- Different survey methodologies allowed
- Most recent vers., March 2022
- Service will be reviewing/updating annually



Is there good news for bats in the future?

- Tricolored bats are adaptable; have capitalized on using manmade structures as roosts (bridges, culverts)
- NLEB & LBB are persisting, and may be slowly rebounding in New England & parts of the Appalachians
- Prelim. data in Mississippi & Georgia indicate that southern TCB populations may be more resilient to WNS
- W/ WNS just recently showing up in the West (i.e., TX panhandle, western OK), unknown how TCBs will be affected in these areas long-term

Questions?? Please reach out!

!! Contact Info !!

Matt Fullerton

Fish and Wildlife Biologist,

Oklahoma Ecological Services
Field Office

Email:

matthew_fullerton@fws.gov

Phone (Office): 918-382-4518

