

NSS 2017 Convention

Caving Trip and WNS Decontamination

The following guidance for caving trips and WNS decontamination for the 2017 NSS Convention has been jointly developed by and is supported by; the NSS 2017 Convention Committee, The Bureau of Land Management, The National Park Service, and the US Forest Service.

White Nose Syndrome (WNS), an infection that has killed millions of bats caused by the fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (*Pd*), continues to spread across North America and remain a significant concern for cavers and land management agencies. The National Speleological Society and the Federal agencies that are providing access to the caves during 2017 Convention have indicated their support for the [National WNS decontamination protocol](#). Many of the caves for Convention are normally closed to the public. Additionally, use of Federal lands by venues such as the NSS Convention often require special permitting (e.g. special use/recreation permit). To best meet our mutual goal of minimizing the risk of the potential spread of *Pd* by human vector and comply with the requests of the Federal agencies it has been decided to put certain requirements in place:

- All cave trips will be led by a designated Convention trip leader
 - DO NOT go to these caves on your own
- Absolutely no gear used in a WNS/*Pd* affected state (See Appendix A) will be used
- National WNS protocol indicates that “Brand new equipment can be used at any location where access is permitted, as long as it has not been stored or come in contact with contaminated equipment.”
- Loaner gear is available when requested
- A state-of-the-art decontamination facility will be available at the 2017 Convention. All gear must be decontaminated prior to each use at the Decon Station
 - A Decon Card will be issued upon completion of the decontamination procedure
 - Decon Cards must be submitted to the Convention trip leader prior to leaving for cave trip
 - All forms required for the cave trip must be completed and given to the Convention trip leader prior to leaving for cave trip

- Trip leaders will have a “decon kit” available to decontaminate equipment before entering cars. The kit will include garbage bags, 70% Isopropyl alcohol, and chemical wipes and sprays.
 - Trip Leader will submit a trip report to the Trip Coordinator within 4 hours upon returning to Convention site. The Trip Coordinator will submit all reports to requesting agency within 5 business days from the Convention end.
- Cave locations for Federal agencies are treated as sensitive information. Please do not collect or share these locations.

Any violations of these requirements or the National WNS protocol may result in the denial of your ability to join Convention caving trips.

Appendix A; Current WNS-affected states and Canadian Provinces

(Note: National WNS protocol indicates that no equipment should be transported “into or out of the United States of America (USA) that has been in contact with bats or their environments.)

This is important as the North American strain is different than those found in Asia or Europe.

Alabama	Arkansas	Connecticut	Delaware	Georgia
Illinois	Indiana	Iowa	Kentucky	Maine
Maryland	Massachusetts	Michigan	Minnesota	Mississippi
Missouri	New Hampshire	Nebraska	New Jersey	New York
North Carolina	Ohio	Oklahoma	Rhode Island	Pennsylvania
South Carolina	Tennessee	Texas	Vermont	Virginia
Washington	West Virginia	Wisconsin	New Brunswick, Canada	Nova Scotia, Canada
Ontario, Canada	Prince Edward Island, Canada	Quebec, Canada		

Appendix B; Procedure for Caving at the 2017 Convention

Step 1: Sign up for cave trip(s) at the Trips Station.

At the 2017 Convention, the Trips Station is inside the Santa Ana Star Center, inside the doors adjacent to the Decon Station. The only cave trips that are permitted to caves on Federal lands during the week of the 2017 NSS Convention are led trips associated with the 2017 Convention. Do not go to caves on Federal lands during the 2017 Convention unless you are on a led trip, even if you know the location of the cave and that cave normally does not require a trip leader. If you need loaner gear because your caving gear has been used in states that are WNS/Pd positive, loaner gear is available at the Trips Station.

Step 2: Stop by the Decon Station to decon your gear.

As stated in this document, no gear from states that are WNS/Pd positive can be used for caving during the 2017 Convention. Thus, the only gear to decon is gear from states that are WNS/Pd negative. You must decon your gear if it has been used in caves in states that are WNS/Pd negative. You must decon your gear between caving trips at the 2017 Convention, unless the caves are part of a cluster (see Appendix D). After deconning your gear, you will be issued a decon card. Decon cards are assigned to individuals and dated. If you have new gear that has never been used in a cave, you can obtain a decon card by showing the receipt for the new gear.

Step 3: Go to the departure point for the cave trip and submit their decon card to the trip leader. You will not be allowed to join a caving trip if you do not have a decon card.

Step 4: Go caving

Step 5: Repeat steps 1 through 4.

Appendix C: Step-by-Step Process for Decontaminating Caving Gear

At the Decontamination Station, you will find written directions and volunteers prepared to assist you. The procedure is as follows:

1. Wash mud and dust from your equipment. Hoses, power washers, tubs filled with water, and brushes are available for your use.
2. Place all gear (including boots and helmets, if your light can be detached from your helmet) that can withstand immersion into hot water (greater than 55 degrees Celsius or 131 degrees Fahrenheit) into mesh laundry bags (available at the decontamination station) and set the bag into the area designated for gear to be decontaminated.
3. Gear that cannot withstand immersion in hot water (primarily lights, or helmets and lights if the light is permanently attached to the helmet) should be sprayed with dilute bleach (supplied at the decontamination station), allowed to stand for 5 minutes, and rinsed with fresh water (supplied at the decontamination station).
4. Designated volunteers at the decontamination station will place the mesh bags with caving gear into a large tank filled with hot water (temperature between 55 and 65 degrees Celsius (131 to 149 degrees Fahrenheit) for 20 minutes. The current WNS protocol specifies a minimum temperature of 55 degrees Celsius (131 degrees Fahrenheit), but to maintain the temperature above the minimum, the decontamination station maintains the temperature slightly above the minimum.
5. After 20 minutes, mesh bags of gear are removed from the hot water by designated volunteers and placed in a designated pickup area. Cavers can retrieve the mesh bags of their gear and place their gear in plastic bags (provided by the decontamination station) or hang their gear on drying racks at the decontamination station. Mesh bags are returned to the decontamination station.
6. Cavers processing their gear through the decontamination station are issued decontamination cards, indicated that their gear was decontaminated. Decontamination cards are assigned to individuals and dated.

Appendix D; Cave Clusters at the 2017 NSS Convention

Cave clusters are groups of caves that are close together and can be visited without deconning caving gear between visiting caves within a cluster. All gear must be decontaminated before visiting any cave in the cluster, but you can visit another cave in the cluster without decontaminating your gear again.

Cluster A: Caves in the Sandia Mountains.

Cluster B: El Malpais caves (BLM and NPS)

Cluster C: Caves in Santa Fe National Forest