From Amanda Kamps, DNR

Friday, April 16, 2021

Greetings wildlife rehabilitator,

During the Wildlife Rehabilitation Advisory Council meeting yesterday, we discussed the biosecurity requirements that are required in order to rehabilitate big brown bats and white-tailed deer this year. If you are licensed to rehabilitate either or both of these species, and if you want to rehabilitate them this year, please be advised you need to review the biosecurity information and are required to submit an application to me. Until then, you cannot admit either of these species. All applications will be reviewed and if approved then you may rehabilitate that species this year. An important note to make is that even if you receive approval to rehabilitate either or both of these species, no white-tailed deer or big brown bats will be held in rehabilitation beyond 180 days and overwintering will not be authorized.

Preventing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 to wild populations is in the interest of both animal and human health. It remains a concern whether SARS-CoV-2 can become established in a wild population. Beyond the potential threat to wildlife, this could pose a threat to human health as well should the virus become established in the wild and become a reservoir for future disease transmission.

Recently published research on SARS-CoV-2 has indicated that white-tailed deer can become infected with the virus, and can transmit it to other deer. While these transmission studies were not based on natural infections they do illustrate concern for their susceptibility, and that infected humans could be a source of infection when in close contact with live white-tailed deer, and that deer may transmit it to other deer without exhibiting any or minimal clinical signs.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies guidance issued in April 2020 helped mitigate potential risks associated with humans transmitting SARS-CoV-2 virus from infected humans to North American bats due to the high level of concern for their possible susceptibility. It is currently unknown if the virus has or will spillover to North American bats, if these bats are susceptible to infection, if they could serve as a new reservoir for the disease, or if the virus will result in morbidity and mortality, particularly in bats weakened by white-nose syndrome or other stressors. In WI, the temporary suspension of bat rehabilitation has been in effect since April 2020. A research study conducted by USGS indicates that big brown bats, during active seasons, are likely at lower risk of contracting the virus from humans, however there is no research available for other species of bat, or bats that are in an altered physiological state such as when in winter torpor.

Please let me know if you have any questions about the biosecurity requirements or even about SARS-CoV-2 and animal susceptibility.

Thank you,

Mandy