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LAKE GEORGE LAND CONSERVANCY'S BAT HIBERNACULA EXPLORATION

(Hague, NY) – Lake George Land Conservancy (LGLC) staff members Chris Krahling and Sarah Small joined New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) biologists Al Hicks and Scott Crocoll, and NYS DEC technician Mike Cooper to explore an abandoned graphite mine in Hague. During the visit, more than 1000 bats were counted, a mixture of five different species. Those species present were big and little brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus* and *Myotis lucifugus*, respectively), small-footed bats (*Myotis leibii*), northern long-eared bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*), and eastern pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus subflavus*).

Bat counts are conducted by NYS DEC staff in an effort to keep track of bat populations throughout New York state. Since bats are true hibernators, winter is the best time of year to monitor hibernacula (a space used by bats during hibernation) as the bats remain still and are therefore easier to count. Winter hibernation is also the bats' most vulnerable period, however, and great care must be taken to disturb the sleeping creatures as little as possible while conducting these important searches. Sensitive to light and sound, hibernating bats can be woken by people exploring caves, resulting in a depletion of essential energy reserves. If disturbed too often, a hibernating bat may not survive the winter.

Of the nine bat species found residing in New York State, the Indiana bat is the most rare and is listed as both state and federally endangered. There are currently eight hibernacula identified in Albany, Essex, Warren, Jefferson, Onondaga and Ulster counties. This species weighs about 0.2-0.3 ounces and is 2-3 inches long. Though its appearance is very similar to the little brown bat, it can be differentiated, among other things, by its pinkish nose and its lack of the dark facial mask that is characteristic of little brown bats. Indiana bats also can be found in tight clusters, whereas little brown bats generally are more loosely grouped. With the arrival of warmer weather, Indiana bats leave their hibernacula in search of flying insects, their single food source. In early summer, breeding females produce one young, which are capable of flying within a month. An Indiana bat may live 20-30 years.

Protecting the hibernacula of bats is one important way to help aid the survival and growth of bat populations. The mine's protection from curious human explorers, through a conservation easement managed by LGLC, is essential to the health of existing bat residents, as well as any future dwellers.

Founded in 1988, the Lake George Land Conservancy works to preserve the world-renowned water quality of Lake George and the rare plants and animals within the lake's 150,000-acre watershed by permanently protecting natural lands through conservation easement and fee acquisition. To date, more than a thousand concerned individuals have helped the Lake George Land Conservancy and partners protect over 40,000 feet of shoreline and more than 10,000 acres of land.

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