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One more reason Micron is waiting until fall to break ground in Clay: endangered bats

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The endangered Indiana bat, which weighs less than half an ounce, has been found on the site in the town of Clay where Micron Technology plans to build a massive semiconductor factory. The presence of the bat won't stop the project, but it will require Micron to do additional study and get federal approvals. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) Andrew King, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



By [Glenn Coin | gcoin@syracuse.com](mailto:gcoin@syracuse.com)

Clay, N.Y. – [Micron Technology](#) has found two species of endangered bats on the wooded site where the company plans to build one of the nation's largest semiconductor plants.

The presence of the Indiana bat and northern long-eared bat, both protected by the federal Endangered Species Act, won't doom the Micron project or necessarily delay it. Micron will be required to do additional studies, jump through more regulatory hoops and buy or set aside land elsewhere to replace bat habitat destroyed during construction.

Micron plans to cut down nearly 500 hundred acres of forest over the next 20 years as it builds four fabrication plants, or fabs. The company will buy land in another location to replace the habitat destroyed by construction, a top Micron official said.

The presence of the bats is one reason Micron won't break ground until November. Trees where endangered bats roost can be felled only from Nov. 1 to March 31, when the bats have gone into hibernation in nearby caves.

Each fab would cover 27 acres, and the complex would also have parking lots, offices, utility substations and other support structures. Construction is not what would harm the bats, however, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

"A bulldozer isn't going to kill a bat," said Tim Sullivan, a biologist in the service's Cortland office. "The fact that they're taking the habitat away, that's the impact."

That impact needs to be outlined in a report submitted to the federal government, then analyzed by the fish and wildlife service.

The bats were found by sound, not sight: Consultants set up microphones at 17 locations last spring and summer. Different species of bats emit sounds at different frequencies, so they can be identified by sound alone.

Micron's consultant is now compiling a detailed report called a biological assessment. That will then be submitted to the U.S. Commerce Department because [Micron expects to get federal funding](#) for the project. Commerce must then consult with fish and wildlife to decide how to mitigate the loss of places for bats to roost.

That process could be done by late summer, Sullivan said. Micron has said it hopes to have all environmental studies completed and approved by October.

Both the Indiana and northern long-eared bats are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, which turned 50 last year.

Under the act, a project would be halted by the finding of an endangered species only if that was the last remnant of a species and the project would lead to extinction, Sullivan said. The two bat species are found throughout the Northeast, although in much smaller numbers than they used to be.

Both bats have been hard-hit by white-nose fungus, a fatal infection that has slashed the populations across the Northeast. The population of the northern long-eared bat has fallen by 90% since the fungus was first detected in 2006.

The bats are just a few inches long and weigh less than half an ounce. In hibernation, Indiana bats snuggle so tightly together that 300 bats can fit in a square foot, Sullivan said.

Micron is already required to conduct wide-ranging environmental impact studies for the state and federal governments, which take months to complete. Given how extensive and time-consuming those broader studies are, the additional bat study and its review by the fish and wildlife service likely won't slow down the progress of the Micron plant, Sullivan said.

Micron hired a consultant, AKRF Inc. of White Plains, last year to do a bat study. Bats, which fly at night and spend days tucked away in leafy trees, are hard to see, so AKRF conducted what's called an acoustic survey. Consultants used microphones, perched atop 15-foot poles in the woods, to record bats communicating with each other or searching for prey.

AKRF set up microphones at 17 locations from May to July last year. At one spot, so many Indiana bat calls were detected that it was likely bats were breeding there and mothers were raising their pups in the trees, AKRF's report said.

Micron wasn't surprised the endangered bats were found, said Scott Gatzemeier, Micron's senior vice president for front-end U.S. expansion. Previous studies by the Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency, which owns the land where Micron plans to build, had suggested the bats were there.

"They were very transparent," Gatzemeier said. "We knew that we'd have this window and so we'd built it into our schedule the entire time."

Gatzemeier said Micron is already looking at buying land to offset the loss of trees.

In a statement, Micron said it is working "to ensure that habitat (including onsite habitat) for species such as the Indiana bat is preserved. We have a commitment to protecting the environment at all our Micron sites."



Two species of endangered bats were discovered at the site of Micron Technology's planned semiconductor plant in the town of Clay using microphones to detect sounds bats make at night while in flight. Each species emits sounds at different frequencies, so they can be identified by sound only. (Photo courtesy of AKRF Inc.) AKRF Inc.

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