National Speleological Society
Conservation & Science Division
SPRING 2025 REPORT

Prepared by Emily P. Davis, Division Head, emilyp@caves.org

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INTRODUCTIONS / SUMMARY

The Conservation & Science Division currently consists of 3 Departments (Conservation, Cave Management, and Cave Science); this report provides updates on their activities, projects, and issues ("3Ps"). Underneath these Departments are several committees, sub-committees, task forces and special projects plus 23 iconic NSS Nature Preserves. This Division directs activities designed to fulfil this NSS' mission to promote the scientific study of caves and karst, protect caves and their natural contents through conservation, ownership, stewardship, and public, and support responsible cave exploration. Contact information for committee leadership can be found in each section of this report.

This is the second reporting period for our Division since the organizational restructuring which occurred last year. I hope that our teams feel that they understand the new org chart and are being given the attention, resources and support they need. Some of the highest profile work that the NSS does is here in this report – issuing a new translation of our Minium Impact Caving Code into Spanish, helping determine the 2025 USA Cave Animal of the Year, delivering an excellent Cave Conservancy Winter Roundtable, transporting conservation outreach and fun to children all across the U.S., providing essential grants for research, ensuring U.S. and International cavers receive expedition grants, hosting NCKMS and the BoG meeting in Ely, NV, recognizing cave Landowners across the country, and getting all our NSS Nature Preserves live on the new online permit system.

We are all aware that an Executive Director (ED) will be hired within a few weeks. This significant change of leadership will bring with it new ideas and possibly even changes to this new structure – and we are ready. As both Conservation and Science are key parts of the NSS' mission, we know that the new ED will want to know more about our work and roll up their sleeves with us. We hope they will appreciate the time and effort that the Divisions' teams have put into consistently reporting on their work of that of our members and partners in the community. I know that we will accomplish our 25'-26' Operational Plan. But what we really look forward to is how we can think strategically with the new ED about what else we can do – and who else we can partner with to further the protection of cave and karst environments. More to come, and in the meantime a HUGE thank you to these teams from me and our board. Please enjoy this report!

DIVISION HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ NSS Minimum Impact Caving Guidelines have now been translated into Spanish! These vital conservation principles can now be shared with our many Spanish-speaking caving partners and colleagues. Conservation Department Head Val Hildreth-Werker, Jack Dumbacher and David Anchundia led the charge on this important work, and they will be posted to the caves.org/conservation soon.
- ✓ The Conservation Outreach team conducted 83 days of in-person educational events with CaveSim in 2024. Educated kids in 7 states, including our first-ever programs in Virginia. CaveSim has now done educational programs in 21 states! CaveSim will be in California in January and February, Texas in March, and New York before and after Convention in 2025 – spread the word!

- ✓ The Volunteer Value team is developing a google form for the Volunteer Value Database which will be made available to members and the public. We look forward to sharing these statistics!
- ✓ The NSS Conservation Department approved a new Conservation Task Force, the Florida Karst Conservation Task Force led by Fletcher Jacob who also serves as President of the Florida Speleological Survey and is a Preserve Manager at the NSS Warren Cave Nature Preserve.
- ✓ The Winter Cave Conservancy Round Table Winter was held in January featuring speakers from the Butler Cave Conservation Society and the Cave Conservancy of Hawaii and hosted ~20 attendees from Conservancies or those interested in their work. Our Summer Roundtable will feature Leslie Hatfield from the Northeastern Cave Conservancy at Convention in Cobleskill, NY, and their caves will be open to NSS members!
- ✓ The Land Trust for Northern Alabama (LTNA) Liaison, Julie Schenck-Brown is spearheading the development of a collaborative educational event with LTNA at the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve. NSS Preserve Managers Becky Williams and Chris Cargal are working with LTNA to plan an NSS Membership Day event in late spring/early summer at Shelta which will also be supported by the Huntsville Grotto.
- ✓ NCKMS will be held in Ely, NV October 6-10, 2025 and the NSS BoG meeting will also take place there. The 2027 NCKMS will be in the Driftless Area Karst (DARK) of Rochester, MN, and planning is underway!
- ✓ The Landowner Relations Network Committee (LRNC) presented two new Certificates of Appreciation this term to Jack Hart (NSS 4960) owner of Moses Tomb, AL and Robert Kindt owner of Kindt's Cave, Ohio, OH. A total of 113 awards have been presented to landowners in 19 states to date, including NSS members who are cave landowners. In addition, three TAG grottos (Sewanee Mountain Grotto, Huntsville Grotto and Dogwood City Grotto) sent out almost 200 holiday cards thanking landowners for their generosity and stewardship of caves. Welcome our new team member Brett Tannehill, NSS 74947, to the NSS LRNC! Please contact the LRNC if a landowner needs support or submit your own nominations for Certificates of Appreciation!
- ✓ While 15 of the 23 NSS Nature Preserves have been brought online with the online permit system, we had fully expected by the time this report was submitted that we would have all the NSS preserves online. However, we have failed to meet this goal since we have not received copies of releases, permit data, and other information. The Preserves Committee is meeting on February 17th and will set the final and imminent deadline by which all NSS Nature Preserves will be live on the online permit system.
- ✓ We have seen promising reports on bat populations in our NSS Nature Preserves. Bat counts performed at the NSS Warren Cave Nature Preserve this past season showed a marked increase in tri-colored bat populations (in part due to recent gating by David Springhetti) while counts at the NSS James Gage Nature Preserve showed increases in little brown and tri-colored bat populations over the past few years. Research is highly encouraged at our NSS Nature Preserves, but an application must be submitted and permission approved through our Preserves Science Subcommittee.
- ✓ The Research Advisory Committee has updated project criteria for NSS Projects and is working to update caves.org with a list of these projects. They approved the Kučka Korita Project as a new NSS Project this period.
- ✓ The next grant submittal deadline for the International Exploration Grant Committee is **May 31, 2025**, for awards to be allotted in summer 2025. This report includes details on the projects awarded this past December and the funding amounts.
- ✓ The 2025 USA Cave Animal of the Year is the tiny **Cave Shrimp**! Not only are they a fascinating and important cave crustacean, but we can take pride in helping protect the Alabama cave shrimp (*Palaemonias alabamae*) at our own NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve.
- ✓ We have the following vacancies in our Division: Regional Conservation Representative positions (MVOR, OVR, SERA) and Cave Science Department Head. Please share any potential candidates with us.

NSS CONSERVATION & SCIENCE DIVISION VISION/MISSION—All Things Caving Encompass Conservation • Promote cave and karst protection across many venues and audiences. • Make karst a household word, locally and globally! Vital groundwater resources around the world are often clean-karst dependent. • Support conservation-minded access. Without caver access, there is no active conservation, study, or exploration. • Advance science and conservation through minimum-impact ethics in safety, exploration, mapping, research, management, resource

monitoring, mentoring, stewardship, and recreation. • Value caves as archival vaults protecting Earth's rich heritage. Cave systems sometimes preserve important cultural legacies and significant natural history. Train cavers to be the best stewards of these key resources.

Conservation & Science Steering Committee
Val Hildreth-Werker, Conservation Department Head (conservation@caves.org); **Emily P Davis, Cave Management Department Head** (emilyp@caves.org)**; Emily P. Davis, Interim Cave Science Division Head** (emilyp@caves.org)

CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT REPORT

Prepared by Val Hildreth-Werker, Conservation Department Head conservation@caves.org

NSS CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES (Commission, Committee and Sub-committee Reports) Cave Conservation activities reported to the NSS Conservation & Science Division cover Committee activity, Subcommittee activity, Regional Groups, Conservation Task Forces, Cave Vandalism Deterrence Commission, and Networking Groups. Together, we encourage, involve, document, and network conservation outreach, issues, projects, and progress. This report details updates on NSS-associated Cave Conservation Teams and efforts.

Minimum Impact Caving Code, caves.org/conservation/minimum-impact/
Val Hildreth-Werker (NM) Lead, Jack Dumbacher (CA) & David Anchundia (Ecuador) Spanish Translation
These guidelines encourage practices that minimize negative impacts to caves. Compiled from the experiences and contributions of cavers, speleologists, and cave managers, these protocols describe safe, low-impact caving techniques. Caves often harbor unique components of Earth's natural and cultural heritage. Learn to avoid damaging biology, geology, mineralogy, hydrology, meteorology, paleontology, archaeology, anthropology, history, and native microbial communities in caves. Move gently, be good stewards, avoid damaging cave resources. Safety first—Take care of yourself and your team. Take care of the caves.

- We encourage introduction of Minimum Impact Guidelines at grotto meetings and before entering each cave.
- Caving cultures among grottos and caver teams traditionally have the standard practice of reminding each other of Minimum Impact behaviors and protocols.
- A special team has worked up a Spanish translation that can reach across various Spanish-speaking caving cultures. Translated by Jack Dumbacher and David Anchundia (researchers Val met in the Galapagos), the first Spanish version is ready for its debut as an addendum to this report.
- Jack Dumbacher sent this: We have taken the excellent "Minimum Impact Caving" document (compiled by Val Hildreth-Werker and Jim C. Werker for the NSS) and translated it into Spanish. Special thanks to David Anchundia (from the Charles Darwin Foundation of the Galapagos, Ecuador) for proofreading and making final suggestions and corrections. We hope that this will help welcome Spanish-speaking cavers into our community and help make caving more sustainable for everyone.
- A copy of the document is located at the following links, is ready for distribution and will be posted to caves.org.

2025 Minimum Impact Caving Guidelines - ENGLISH
2025 Minimum Impact Caving Guidelines - SPANISH

***[Division Head Comments:** Our Minimum Impact Caving Code is a foundational tool that we should all share with fellow cavers, old and new as mentioned by Val. Disseminate this through grottos and talk about it with your friends and colleagues. We have had several members comment that the NSS needs to better promote Conservation based caving practices, and this Code is a great place to start. This year we will also feature Conservation and this guide in our NSS Webinar Series. We cannot afford to take these principles for granted – take time to share this resource and remind each other to be more mindful of Conservation whether we are in a show cave or on the frontier of exploration. If not us, then who?]*

NSS Conservation Awards Committee

Victor A. Schmidt Individual Award / NSS Group Conservation Award
Val Hildreth-Werker (NM), Chair (award-groupconservation@caves.org, award-schmidtconservation@caves.org)

- The Victor A. Schmidt Conservation Award annually recognizes one NSS member who, over time, has demonstrated outstanding dedication to the conservation of caves. The recipient of this annual award is selected by the NSS Awards Committee and approved by the NSS Board of Governors.
- The Group Conservation Award recognizes the outstanding dedication to conservation efforts of one NSS Group or Internal Organization each year. The recipient of this annual award is selected by the NSS Group Conservation Award Committee and awarded during the annual NSS Convention banquet.
- Tips for Writing a Good Nomination are Included on the webpage, search for 'NSS Awards.' Please send nominations to: award-groupconservation@caves.org by November 15th of each calendar year.

Conservation Outreach Committee, Dave Jackson (CO) (jacksondmit@cavesim.com)
PURPOSE: To promote cave and karst conservation outreach to the public with STEM education and kinetic/experiential learning via the interactive CaveSim program. Do you know of a school that would benefit from in-person or online lessons? CaveSim will be in California in January and February, Texas in March, and New York before and after Convention. We'd love to teach more students about caves and conservation. Please pass along my contact info to teachers or administrators who might benefit from cave-themed lessons (physics, chemistry, biology, earth science, art, history, etc.)

PROGRESS: We have accomplished the following Conservation Education with Cave Simulators since our last update:

- Added new features to CaveSim Trailer3, which debuted at the NSS Convention. Participants now receive positive feedback for picking up trash in the cave! The trash is tethered and connected to the CaveSim electronics sensing system. We have also added three new cameras and a public address system to the cave to monitor participants more effectively. CaveSim Trailer3 includes a wheelchair ramp which makes the new cave accessible.
- Conducted 83 days of in-person educational events with CaveSim in 2024. Educated adults and kids in 7 states, including our first-ever programs in Virginia. CaveSim has now done outreach programs in 21 states.
- Conducted 7 days of post-Convention educational programs in Virginia with the support of the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, the Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad, and generous individuals and other organizations. Zenah Orndorff did an outstanding job of coordinating these programs. Attendance at these free public events was strong, with over 300 people attending quite a few of the days. Venues included a children's museum, city parks, a school, a show cave, and state parks.
- Began work on Trailer4. Like the cave that we brought to Convention, Trailer4 will have a wheelchair accessible portion, and will have about 150 feet of passage in a 31-foot trailer.
- Welcomed two new team members who are assisting with construction of CaveSim systems.

PROBLEMS: None.

NSS Website Conservation Pages: Val Hildreth-Werker (NM) & Emily P. Davis (TN), Leads
(valhildrethwerker@caves.org; emilyp@caves.org)
Val reviews and approves content for the Conservation pages and works with the Division Head and NSS IT team to execute any changes on https://caves.org/conservation/.

Conservation Grants Committee
Val Hildreth-Werker (NM), Chair (valhildrethwerker@caves.org**)**

- New proposals for Save-the-Caves grant rewards are reviewed as received throughout the year.
- Recipients submit articles to valhildrethwerker@caves.org for the annual NSS News Conservation Issue. Recipients must also give a presentation during Conservation Tuesday Talks at NSS Conventions.
- A second conservation grant was awarded to the VAR region for $500 to provide funding for PPE and equipment; the first was made last fiscal year in the same amount. Grant applications are accepted throughout the year.
- A grant was made to Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy (MCKC) for $1,569 to support the protection of Pleasant Valley Cave in the St. Louis, MO area. It is a cave that has long been mismanaged and exposed to dumping and vandalism. Originally purchased by the Nature Conservancy in 1978 with half the money coming

from organized cavers via fund raising efforts by selling the now infamous "Yellow Bat Sticker." A rudimentary gate was constructed at this time. Records indicate that the cave was home to as many as 20,000 federally endangered gray bats. In 2017, it was found that the gate had been breached and the bat population gone. After several years of meetings, county council presentations and lawyers, the MCKC signed a MOU with Jefferson County in October of 2023, to fully manage Pleasant Valley Cave. It was adopted by county bill #23-1005. Since that date, MCKC has had a graffiti cleanup, trash removal trips, and an archeological assessment completed. They have also installed a live feed camera at the entrance. Since they took over management, there have been no unauthorized visitors. A bat friendly gate has been designed measuring 20x20 and up to 8' tall in places using an American Cave Conservation Association design. The gate was approved by the state Bat Biologist (Shelly Colatskie MDC), US Fish and Wildlife service (Vona Kuczynska), and Jim Kennedy of Cave Gators. This grant will help cover purchasing of steel for the construction of the gate, allow removal of the two old gates, and concrete which will lie below. The hope is that this will establish the original airflow into the cave, and promote usage for bats. MCKC will also install an informational kiosk covering caves, karst, bats, and water quality in Karst Areas.

- Belize Grant (report from Jut Wynn): This project was funded in 2022 to monitor wildlife popultions outside local caves in Belize, and they have gotten a lot of bang out of their buck from that funding. To date, they have published one paper, had one accepted by a journal (should be published before the fall), and a third paper is ready to submit. One of their former undergraduate students is also analyzing trail camera data collected across five caves; her analysis will represent a forth paper to be published—all from a very small amount of funding! They also published a paper last year on cave-dwelling crocodiles of central Belize where they documented a croc exiting a cave with one of their cameras! They plan to publish an article in the NSS News after the third paper is published. For copies of the article, email Conservation Department.
- To help our work, please donate to the NSS Save-the-Caves fund **HERE**!

Volunteer Value Team
Andrew Erickson, Coordinator (andrew@awerickson.com)
PURPOSE: To collect information on volunteer value delivered by cavers. These data can provide valuable statistics to demonstrate the activity of any cave project, whether conservation, survey, inventory, science, monitoring, gating, trail maintenance, educational tours, or administration. When this new system rolls out, it should be easy and fun to click in and document your volunteer cave hours. Hours include time spent on preparation, documentation, driving or other travel, decontamination, as well as in-cave.

PLANS/PROGRESS:

- Form is developed and is being tested. See the website https://caves.org/volunteer/volunteer-value/ Scroll down to the form. Check it out!
- Working with Pete Johnson to define and refine the process and Val Hildreth-Werker.
- Need to determine how to submit data to the Forest Service, Landowners, and other stakeholders.
- It would be great if we could find a way to interface by adding hours to the volunteer database on volunteer.gov
- Need API access or a method of dumping the NSS member database to include names, nss number, primary grotto and email address.
- This allows us to track who is doing what AND to gamify the program, encouraging cavers to contribute their own project data.
- Short presentation on the VV Program is being created and will be offered to grottos.

PROBLEMS: None.

Vandalism Deterrence Commission
Sarah Richards (WV), Chair (srichster@gmail.com)

- No new reports or activity from the Commission this quarter.
- We encourage members to contact us with information on cave vandalism that might lead to prosecution of crimes.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION SPECIALIST REPORTS
Link to Regional reports in blue – those in BOLD provided reporting this period.

Arizona Regional Association (ARA) [Based in AZ]
Mid-Appalachian Region (MAR) [Based in PA]
Mississippi Valley-Ozark Region (MVOR) [Based in MO]
Northeastern Regional Organization (NRO) [Based in NY]
Northwest Caving Association (NCA) [Based in OR]
Ohio Valley Region (OVR) [Based in KY]
Rocky Mountain Region (RMR) [Based in UT]
Southeastern Regional Association (SERA) [Based in TN]
Southwestern Region (SWR) [Based in NM]
Texas Speleological Association (TSA) [Based in TX]
Virginia Area Region (VAR) [Based in VA]

Arizona Regional Association

Steve Smith (AZ) (stevelsmith@usa.net)

Central Arizona Grotto (CAG) – Phoenix

- Summer cave closure for Redman Cave (*Myotis thysanodes* maternity site) ended on November 1. The cave gate was removed after the closure ended and there was a significant accumulation of guano in the stream passage indicating that the closure was working, and bats were using the cave throughout the summer months.
- A cache of helmets and other caving gear owned by CAG continues to be loaned out to Scout troops and other groups for visits to Peppersauce cave, among others.
- CAG met with 2 from the Tonto NF geology group who found a possible cave while performing administrative tasks for mining claims. Their find was indeed a cave that is new to the caving community. Afterwards, the Tonto personnel were taken to other local caves to improve their knowledge of the local cave resources.
- Members of CAG are participating in a multi-year project to locate caves in the Payson area using LiDAR data. The effort is spearheaded by the EGI president, but there are participants from several AZ grottos. In 2024, this effort generated more than $3,000 worth of Volunteer Value.
- CAG is attending the Kaibab NF stakeholder's meetings on the 30,000 acre Burnt Corral timber harvest. The Burnt Corral permit request is on the North Kaibab and has large areas of karst terrain.
- CAG is working on the Annual Report for collaborative cave management and volunteer efforts with Tonto NF. This report is expected to be submitted to Tonto NF in mid-late Feb 2025.

Escabrosa Grotto (EGI) – Tucson (EGI and SAG participated together in several projects).

- EGI continued to coordinate several 'orientation 'trips into Cave of the Bells for numerous Coronado National Forest personnel to provide them with a greater understanding of the scope - as well as the vulnerabilities - of the caves within the Coronado NF. We view this program as a great success!
- Coordinated the repair of the lock on Cave of the Bells, including fabrication of a new lock pin and the installation of a new shackle. During this work, a micro-camera with recording capability was employed to allow creation of a short informative video on exactly how the gate operates - which the Coronado National Forest will require visitors to view when they check out the key.
- Continued to coordinate the Sphinx Cave restoration project to clean mud from the walls in the entrance area and also refurbish several areas of the outside trail leading to the cave to reduce/prevent damage by cattle.
- Coordinated/assisted non-intrusive infrared bat surveys/counts during the maternity period outside the entrances of CMC, Onyx, and Chiricahua Crystal caves.
- Ida Cave: Coordinated the design and installation of a steel 'basket 'on the gate's bar to better fill the gap above the bar to prevent 'crawl-overs.'
- Coordinated or assisted in several recent caving trips for local Scouts to introduce them to safe caving techniques as well as a strong conservation message.

Southern Arizona Grotto (SAG) – Tucson (SAG and EGI participated together in several projects).

- SAG cavers assisted in the 'orientation 'trips into Cave of the Bells for numerous Coronado National Forest personnel to provide them with a greater understanding of the scope - as well as the vulnerabilities - of the caves within the Coronado NF.
- Assisted in repairing the lock on Cave of the Bells, included fabrication of a new lock pin and the installation of a new shackle. During this work, a micro-camera with recording capability was employed to allow creation of a

short informative video on exactly how the gate operates - which the Coronado National Forest will require visitors to view when they check out the key.
- Provided valuable assistance to the Sphinx Cave restoration project to clean mud from the walls in the entrance area and refurbish several areas of the outside trail leading to the cave to reduce/prevent damage by cattle.
- Coordinated/assisted in non-intrusive infrared bat surveys/counts during the maternity period outside the entrances of CMC, Onyx, and Chiricahua Crystal caves.
- Ida Cave: Assisted in designing and installing a steel 'basket 'on the gate's bar to better fill the gap above the bar to prevent 'crawl-overs.'
- Coordinated or assisted in several recent caving trips for local Scouts to introduce them to safe caving techniques as well as a strong conservation message.
- Peppersauce Cave: After a report on human waste and trash, a special trip was made to clean up the mess.

Mid-Appalachian Region

Tom Griffin (PA) (caver182@gmail.com)

Moler's Cave

- Moler's Cave has been extended by 1000 feet making it over a mile. A big thank you to Tommy Shifflett, Jeff Jahn & Chris Woodley and 13 others for taking the initiative to finish before the rain this year. Leading up to the property closing, Dr. Latterell had placed the land in a perpetual easement. In his "Will" he had listed 5 charities or nonprofits. Since his sister was the Power of Attorney, she was able to allow us in the cave. Since Dr. Latterell passed this all moved to an executor. In her words she could not remember and didn't write things down so Janet made her son the executor.
- The "Will" was more than they could handle so they hired a lawyer. This is where the closing of the cave came in. The lawyer said while the proceedings are going on it would be best to close the cave, also reducing liability. The lawyer has or is in the process of notifying the nonprofits to see if they can take the land. They have 9 months to respond. The Latterell family has no idea how this will turn out. There is a tree farm on the land since the will was made, we have no idea of the impact.
- Since then, Janet contacted me to let me know about the closing of Moler's Cave, which she was very sorry about. I will be receiving a letter from the lawyers explaining the same. This puts liability on me. I will stay in touch with the family. I don't expect any information until later this year. I sent a notice to Carol Tiderman on 12-5-2024 to put the notice out on the VAR Listserv. This is a hard closure for now.

Mega Hole Gate Project - **Ashley Haines**

- Mega Hole Gate Project - submitted by Ashby Haines. After the cave rescue event at Mega Hole Cave, the owner decided to install a gate. Tom Griffin designed and built the gate, with materials provided by Joe Schock. On November 2, Ashby and Adam met Tom and Red at Moler's Cave to pick up the gate. After a half-hour drive, they arrived at Mega Hole Cave. Joe carried the gate down into the sinkhole, and the team discussed the best approach for the project.
- First, they removed a rock blocking the entrance using a come-along and a handline. They then worked inside the cave to modify the first restriction. Earl Suitor used the Tri-State Grotto jackhammer to chip away at the rock, making it passable. Earl, Joe, Adam, and Ashby cleared loose rocks and dirt from around the entrance to stabilize it. Adam explored the cave, passing the first restriction but unable to get past the second. Ashby used Tom's hammer drill to widen the second restriction, but it still wasn't enough. They placed the gate and finished digging out the dirt to find a good spot for it. They decided to return later to pour concrete around the gate to secure it.

Germany Valley Grotto

- During the Spring VAR, May 9-11 Germany Valley Grotto will be working on the Silver Waters Cave gate project which was brought up during the last report.

Greater Allentown Grotto

- Lost River Cave – cleanup
- Jamie, Allie and Dwight pulled some trash out of the sink that Rose-Anna Behr (Karst and sinkhole specialist, Bureau of Geology Survey, DCNR) had identified at Northampton Community College.

Cleveland Grotto – William Lendvay, NSS 37203

- The Cleveland Grotto participates in cleaning up projects at:
  Hidden River Cave & American Cave Museum, 119 E Main St, Horse Cave KY

- Note from Tom Griffin: I know Cleveland Grotto is not in MAR; they still sent me this. I let them know I would add it to my report and asked if they would like to be part of my report notification.

No other responses for the following grottos this period: Bald Eagle Grotto, Baltimore Grotto, Buck County Grotto, Commander Cody Grotto, Franklin County Grotto, Frederick County Grotto (inactive), Greater Allentown Grotto, Huntingdon County Cave Hunters (understand are inactive), Loyalhanna Grotto, Northern New Jersey Grotto, Nittany Grotto, Out of Bounds Grotto, Philadelphia Grotto, Pittsburgh Grotto, Seven Valleys Grotto, Sligo Grotto, Western Maryland Grotto, York County Grotto, Mid Atlantic Karst Conservancy and Pennsylvania Cave Conservancy.

Northeastern Regional Association

Mitch Berger (NY) (mitchb@mit.edu)

- The Northeastern Cave Conservancy's (NCC) Knox Cave Preserve was briefly closed due to an historic blockage of the ladder found 100 feet into its entrance passage by multiple feet of rocks that washed into the cave over the winter. This was discovered during the Fall NRO event just after the cave reopened for the season. Over the course of five days of hard work, a couple dozen volunteers contributed hundreds of hours of effort hauling rocks out of the cave so that it could be reopened. The Volunteer Value for this massive effort was tabulated by the NCC as over $8,200.
- The NCC's Knox Cave Preserve has seen the first three work weekends of its major project to reconstruct the portion of the trail that descends the entrance sinkhole. On the first two of these weekends, a professional volunteer trail crew worked with our volunteers and trained them in the skills and equipment needed to construct a retaining wall and timber box steps. During the Fall NRO weekend, some of those volunteers trained newcomers to the project and continued the construction of the new trail. Having so far completed the first 22 box steps, the trail is one-third of the way up the 45-foot-deep sinkhole from the cave entrance. Volunteers trained as part of this project will be able to apply the same skills to other upcoming trail-building projects at other area preserves.
- The NCC received a $10,000 Community Development Non-Profit Recovery Grant from Albany County's American Rescue Plan Act program, which will be used to maintain and replace kiosks and changing areas, produce new signage for preserves and posters for kiosks, and obtain gravel to improve parking areas at some of its preserves in Albany County.
- Significant planning and work is underway by the NCC to make its various preserves ready to welcome the influx of visitors that the 2025 NSS Convention will bring to the area.

Northwest Caving Association (NCA)

Neil Marchington (OR) (climbingallday@yahoo.com)

Spence and Spirit Mountain Caves, WY Graffiti Removal

- Spence and Spirit Mountain Caves in Wyoming were cleaned up Sept 14-22nd.
- Spence Cave was not completed as a storm prevented helicopter access for the equipment needed. We did accomplish some minor cleaning and preparation for a return trip in April 2025. Spirit Mountain Cave was completed. An article for the NSS News Conservation Issue was written.
- There is about 1.5 miles of cave passage. This is a partnership between Western Cave Conservancy, Oregon High Desert Grotto, Bat Conservation International, and the US Bureau of Land Management.
- Major upgrades to the Oregon High Desert Grotto sandblasting trailer have been made. The upgrades led to more efficient operations.

Skeleton Cave Clean-Up Preparation Trip

- Skeleton Cave on the Deschutes National Forest is scheduled for Graffiti removal in May 2025. I've been coordinating with volunteers and the USFS to plan operations. This is part of a very large forest project to remove trash and reduce fire danger on this urban interface area.

Pluto Cave, CA

- A scouting trip to Pluto Cave, CA is planned for a possible clean up trip in 2025.

Undisclosed Cave, CA

- A clean-up trip to an undisclosed cave in N. CA is scheduled for 2/1/25. This clean-up will concentrate on

removing mud and micro trash left by cavers on highly decorated areas using battery powered low pressure washers and buckets/brushes.

Rocky Mountain Region (RMR)

Shannon Glazer (CO)

- Rocky Mountain Industrials (RMI) was ordered to stop mining by the U.S. Department of the Interior on January 3rd, 2025, citing permit violations. They are not allowed to sell common variety limestone under their current permit. It is hoped that this will further protect the recently discovered Witches Pantry cave. (https://www.postindependent.com/news/rocky-mountain-industrials-quarry-ordered-to-stop-common-variety-mining/?fbclid=IwY2xjawH2a0FleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHffGDvaVUQMAScHqhoggbTlgtAoKr1OJOY-GYDJS5LVtaD1LTfamJYAEKQ_aem_zGpKSoDuHbC8eauijX8ihQ)
- In Fort Stanton cave, the Fort Stanton Cave Project is working together with the BLM to help prevent the spread of white nose syndrome. BLM biologists have been conducting research in Fort Stanton to try and protect the bats who hibernate in the cave. (https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDKWVNupguH/)
- From the Southern Colorado Mountains Grotto: a crew has recently installed an environmental curtain in Narrows Cave in Williams Canyon to block airflow at the bottom of a stratigraphic pit. Todd Warren is continuing his graffiti removal project in Williams Canyon. There is also an ongoing project in Breezeway Cave (Williams Canyon) to repair broken formations. All participants have been trained by Mike Mansur and CRFP. Kelsie D'Aurilio has signed up the grotto with Colorado Springs Creek Week and is heading up the project of adapting part of Fountain Creek in Manitou Springs to keep clean and pick up trash. This area also includes Hunt's Cave, and stretches between Rainbow Falls and the roundabout at the west end of Manitou Blvd.
- From the Timberline Grotto in Colorado: as the lead grotto in Spring Cave projects for over 30 years, regular documented visits ensure that this cave will be in good shape for many years to come. Crews from this grotto have worked hard recently to clean up trash and ropes that had accumulated at two spots in the cave. Since this 2021 cleanup project, much less trash and ropes have been observed in the cave. All bats observed in the cave in 2023 appear to be healthy. Microbiology surveys were conducted in Spring Cave last year as well.

Southeastern Regional Association (SERA)

Emily P. Davis (TN) (emilyp@caves.org)

NSS-USFS Supplemental Project Agreement

The Supplemental Project Agreement between the NSS and USFS was signed for all of the National Forests in North Carolina in August 2023. The parties working with the NC FS are led by Buford Pruitt, Jr., who helped put the SPA put in place; he had already been working on several projects in the NS Forests under separate Special Use Permits and Letters of Authorization prior to the SPA. Additional survey trips of the rockhouse shelters are ongoing and the team has connected the FS with Jim 'Crash' Kennedy to advise on abandoned mine assessment.

Chattanooga Grotto

Chattanooga Grotto member Christina Richards prepared a Caving 101 presernation to the local community which included great information on conservation ethics and how to get involved with the NSS, SCCi and the grotto. Also, in December local favorite show cave Raccoon Mountain Caverns was gifted to University of Tennessee Chattanooga with the goal of promoting research through their Department of biology, Geology and Environmental Science (BGE). The cave is home to the endemic Crystal Caverns cave spider (*Nesticus furtivus*). According to NCKRI, only 7 other institutions aroun the country are known to own a cave. UTC has also started their own caving club and members have been invited to join grotto meetings.

Sewanee Mountain Grotto

The grotto has partnered with local show cave The Caverns to collect their recycling and are donating the funds from can recycling to the grotto for cave conservation activities.

Southwestern Region

Janice Tucker (NM) (janice.tucker@live.com)

- SWR organized a special graffiti assessment and mitigation project at Palomas Cave where a Regional Meeting was held. Thanks to Steve Peerman for organizing the event. Mike Bilbo, Carol Belski, John Corcharan, and Val Hildreth-Werker added their expertise in identifying rock art, and Val led a mini-workshop on graffiti in caves.
- In the High Guads, HGRP will continue during spring months. See HGRPCTF later in this document.

CFRP — Michael C Mansur (NM) (mcmansur@zoho.com)

- Several milestones reached: 1000 formations repaired, 5000 volunteer hours, 150 trips.
- CFRP received the 2023 USFS Southwest Region Restoration Volunteer and Service Award.
- Mike Mansur taught a Speleothem Repair Workshop at the 2024 NSS Convention with a field trip to Wonder Cave-24 people attended.
- CFRP Statistics to Date: 1210 formations repaired in 19 caves across the country; 5531.1 volunteer hours worked; 242 participants who had driven 352,325.5 miles round trip to participate.
- Third Edition of Michael Mansur's book, The Cave Formation Repair Project: Restoring the Beauty of America's Great Caves was released in May 2024
- Continuing the goals of the CFRP to identify which are to make repairs and restore broken formations in caves within the jurisdiction of the NPS, USFS, BLM, and privately owned caves, and to educate and train as many people as possible in the importance of cave formation repair and cave restoration. We will share our expertise, knowledge, and achievements with NSS Members, non-members, and the public.

Texas Speleological Association (TSA)

Colin Strickland (TX) (colin.strickland@austin.gov, **Drew Thompson (TX)** (drew.thompson@austintexas.gov), **Mark Sanders (TX)** (mark.sanders@austintexas.gov), **Eleonore Lec (TX)** (eleonorę.lec@gmail.com),

The TSA report includes Texas projects, updates, and innovations! Many organizations across Texas collaborate in karst and cave study, conservation, mitigation, and educational outreach.

Hill Country State Natural Area Karst Project, 2024

Marvin Miller, Coordinator mlmiller@gvtc.com

- 140 caver volunteer hours
- 62 meters of cave surveyed.
- 3 new karst features identified.
- 2 cave maps completed.
- Invertebrate collection in 2 caves
- Ridge-walked approximately 36 acres
- 2 reports written for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Government Canyon State Natural Area Karst Project, 2024

Marvin Miller, Coordinator mlmiller@gvtc.com

- 80 caver volunteer hours
- 12 acres ridgewalked
- 7 new karst features identified.
- 0 karst features evaluated.
- 1 cave maps completed.
- 1 Joint trip with TPWD to locate winter roosts for cave.

Virginia Area Region (VAR)

Janet Tinkham (VA) (janete@shentel.net)

- October 19-20, 2024- Cavers from Blue Ridge Grotto, VPI Cave Club and New River Valley Grotto volunteered at CaveSim, during Roanoke Go Fest (Downtown Roanoke, VA). The public's interest in CaveSim was amazing! The public took 1,024 trips over the course of two days. CaveSim does an excellent job of showing people how to "Cave Softly" and protect the cave environment. Whether you were there for set-up or take-down, at Cave Sim helping with the squeezebox, the vertical tower, inside the trailer, fitting helmets on thousands of heads, or talking with the public on area show caves and cave clubs. Many copies of ***Fragile Underground, BATS***, and the ***Virginia Cave and Karst Trail*** brochures were handed out, along with toy bat rings.
  PARTICIPANTS*: CaveSim*: Dave Jackson and Jesse Rochette (Colorado).
  Volunteers: Susan Burr, Carrie Doupnik, Kevin Johnson, Jason Sargent, Doug Feller, Trish Geiger, Jeff Huffman, Lauren Appel, Ernst Kastning, Lisa Graves, Nick Schmalenberger, Alex Thompson, Jerin Manalel, Gracie Cornish, Dave Socky, and MarySue Socky.
- October 23, 2024- Geology/Hydrology Hike hosted by Friends of the Cedars, led by Dr. Terri Brown at the Lee County Cedars Natural Area Preserve in Virginia.

- November 9, 2024- New River Valley Grotto reported Trash pickup on Hickman Cemetery Road, Radford, VA a karst terrain. 5 people participated in the cleanup. They filled a total of 15 bags over a 3-hour period.
- November 12, 2024- Dr. Terri Brown led a hydrology/geology hike providing water science to Friends of the Cedars, a volunteer organization. This took place at the Lee County Cedars Natural Area Preserve in Virginia.
- November 13, 2024- Jeff, Lauren, Greg, Janet took 22 Geology students and their teachers on Cave /Karst Education field trip into Ogden's cave in Frederick Co., VA.
- November 16, 2024- Sinkhold clean up sponsored by Friends of the Cedars, Jonesville, VA.
- December 8, 2024- Eli Meyer reported organizing a sizable group of volunteers, mostly local cavers from Blacksburg / Christiansburg, mostly VPI Cave Club affiliated, but a few from the Chattanooga area, to build a gate and some fencing along Goodwin's Ferry road, on the NSS-owned parcel adjacent to the river to support the NSS New River Cave Nature Preserve. One of the neighboring landowners had complained to preserve management about trespassers off-roading through their property, which they were able to access through the NSS property. So, they raised $500 to purchase materials to build a pasture-style gate restricting access to the NSS parcel. Only about $300 of this was spent so the remainder was returned to the donor (who remains anonymous). Great work to build positive neighboring landowner relations!
- December 17-19, 2024- The VA Natural Heritage Karst Program conducted cave inventories for two cave beetle species, *Pseudanophthalmus parvicollis* (G1/S1, state endangered) and *Pseudanophthalmus hubbardi* (G1/S1), in the Shenandoah Valley, VA.
- December 30th, 2024- New River Valley Grotto opened a new cave in Giles County, VA and fenced the opening with help from Virginia Tech Grotto. 3 cavers participated over a 5-hour period. The landowner identified a sinkhole near a pond, which is a water source for his cattle. He was concerned he may lose a calf in the sink hole. Rocks were removed to open a small cave and then fencing was added to keep the cows out. Additional exploration is planned for 2025.

NSS CONSERVATION TASK FORCE (CTF) REPORTS

Please submit CTF reports & inquiries to Val Hildreth-Werker, valhildrethwerker@caves.org.

DARK Conservation Task Force

Dawn Ryan (MN), Chair (dryan@caves.org; dark@caves.org)

- The Driftless Area Karst (DARK), established November 2020, is a collaborative effort established to promote public awareness of karst features located in the Driftless Area of southeastern Minnesota and adjoining states.
- The DARK Trail is working on hosting the 2027 NCKMS. The Driftless Area Karst Trail and local NSS grotto members will be hosting the 2027 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium. We have been working on securing a location but most of the symposium will be held in Rochester, Minnesota and highlight the Driftless Area's karst. The theme is protecting caves and karst through partnerships.
- The DARK Trail teams received a grant and are working with partners to develop Discovery Site location markers (stops along the DARK trail).

Florida Karst Conservation Task Force (NEW!)

Fletcher Jacob (FL), Chair (fletcher.c.jacob@gmail.com)

- The recently formed Florida Karst Conservation Task Force (FK-CTF) aims to protect and preserve Florida's caves, karst landscapes, and groundwater systems through conservation, advocacy, and education. The task force operates on a project-by-project basis, focusing on specific challenges related to cave and karst protection that are not fully addressed by other organizations in Florida. Additional efforts include engaging with community stakeholders to identify at-risk areas for potential support, speaking at community events to raise public awareness, networking with like-minded organizations, and expanding recruitment to enhance capacity.
- Currently, Tara's developments surrounding Mill Creek Sink (NSS Nature Preserve) are stalled after the City of Alachua sent a letter affirming various deficiencies in the application, including failure to align with the city's comprehensive plan and to demonstrate that the project can be safely developed without impacting the cave system. Tara is required to submit new application proposals. Patti Spillman of the University of South Florida (USF) has offered to loan water quality monitoring devices and perform lab testing on water quality for free as FK-CTF seeks additional funding sources for a long-term monitoring plan in coordination with Alachua County Environmental Protection Department (AC-EPD) and the Suwannee Water Management District (SWMD)

- The Florida Karst Conservation Task Force (FK-CTF) is contesting a proposed development near Paradise Spring and its associated cave system in Marion County, a karstic area with significant aquifer and water quality risks. The task force is advocating for a Low Residential or Conservation Area designation, citing zoning inaccuracies, inadequate stormwater protections, and potential impacts on the aquifer and surrounding community. FK-CTF is working with a local stakeholder and legal strategies are being developed to address these concerns before the upcoming county planning meetings.

*[**Division Head Comments:** Fletcher, our NSS Preserve Managers, and local colleagues have been instrumental in helping us keep boots on the ground in Alachua County regarding development threats to our Mill Creek Sink Nature Preserve. We are excited to approve this new Conservation Task Force and ramp up local efforts and awareness of caves and karst in Florida.]*

Hawai'i Cave Conservation Task Force
Tomislav Gracanin (HI), Asa Aue (HI), Co-Leads (tnv@att.net; asaaue@gmail.com)
- Friends of CCH continue management and legal process to protect in perpetuity.
- No report this period, but big thank you to Veda Hackell for giving a great talk on CCH at the 2025 Winter Roundtable in January.

High Guads Restoration Project (HGRP) Conservation Task Force
Jennifer Foote (NM), Kevin Manley (CO), Co-Leads (highguads@gmail.com); http://www.hgrp.org/
- HGRP runs volunteer trips in the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico to assist the Forest with cave restoration, trail maintenance, ridgewalking, mapping, SAR pre-planning and science.
- We are tentatively planning for two large (16 person= 4 teams) weekends, last weekend of April and September. We also run many smaller individual trips throughout the year on an as needed basis.
- Email highguads@gmail.com for more info, we need to know who is coming a few weeks in advance to determine tasks. Sign up for email list at: https://groups.google.com/d/forum/high-guads-restoration-project
- Twenty volunteers contributed 253 hours to the USFS during FY2024.

Klamath Mountain Conservation Task Force (KMCTF)
Sadly, this position long held by Steve Knutson, is currently vacant (sssknutson@aol.com)
- No report this period as a new leader is being sought.

Dirty Danglers Conservation Task Force (AL)
Maggie Cole, Coordinator (thetagdirtydanglers@gmail.com)
- The Dirty Danglers Conservation Task Force (DDCTSF) was formed in February 2024 with a mission of bringing together conservation minded cavers in the Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia area to provide services as needed to assist in preserving and protecting the caves and karst landscapes of TAG. Our team roster extends beyond the boundaries of TAG.
- No report this period.

ExtraTerrestrial Subsurface Cavity Conservation Task Force - ET Cave CTF (US+)
Ceth Parker, Chairman ceth.parker@gmail.com
- The ET Cave Conservation Task Force was founded in June 2024. The initial ET Cave talk entitled "The Urgent Need for Extraterrestrial Subterranean Conservation" was given at the 2023 NSS Convention in Sewanee, TN.
- At the July 2024 NSS Convention in Sewanee TN, a Townhall Meeting was convened with more than 20 attendees that came to learn about the topic and to discuss the best path forward towards making policy.
- In the last two years the initial 2023 NSS talk has been given to more than 10 grottos across the country and has received very positive feedback.
- Notes from Townhall discussions that followed the grotto meetings have been compiled and are being formulated into a publication.

External Conservation Networking Updates
This section is reserved for NSS Conservation Division networks activities worldwide. No activity.

CAVE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT REPORT

Prepared by Emily P. Davis, Cave Management Department Head, emilyp@caves.org

Cave Management Department Personnel:

Committee or Function	Chair or Officer	Email	NSS Number
Cave Conservancies & Roundtable	Kim Fedrick	conservancies@caves.org	62825RE
Landowner Relations Network Committee	Julie Schenck-Brown	LRNC@Caves.org	30493RL (FE)
Nature Preserves & Land Acquisitions	Julie Schenck-Brown	Preserves@caves.org	30493RL (FE)
Land Trust for Northern Alabama Liaison	Julie Schenck-Brown	jschenck-brown@caves.org	30493RL (FE)
NCKMS Committee	Jim 'Crash' Kennedy	cavercrash@gmail.com	26791RL (FE, CM)

Cave Conservancies Committee
Kim Fedrick, Chair (conservancies@caves.org)
Conservancy Members: Appalachian Cave Conservancy, Butler Cave Conservation Society, Inc., Cave Conservancy of Hawaii, Cricket Maze Cave Conservancy, Karst Conservancy of Illinois, Indiana Karst Conservancy, Michigan Karst Conservancy*****, MidAtlantic Karst Conservancy, Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy, Northeastern Cave Conservancy Inc., Pennsylvania Cave Conservancy, Rockcastle Cave Conservancy, Texas Cave Management Association, Western Cave Conservancy, Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.*****, Cave Conservancy of the Virginias*, West Virginia Cave Conservancy*, Kentucky Karst Conservancy. **Denotes cave conservancies that are institutional NSS members.*

PURPOSE: A nexus and resource hub for cave conservancies. Maintains the list of NSS affiliated and non-affiliated cave conservancies. Offers support to cave conservancies through free web hosting, fundraising help, and acquisition grants. Hosts the Cave Conservancies Roundtable at each Convention and the Winter Roundtable via ZOOM.

PROGRESS: The Winter Conservancy Roundtable was held via Zoom and led by Kim Fedrick and Emily P. Davis. Tremendous thank you to our speakers - Paul Winter, chair of the Butler Cave Conservation Society (BCCS), and Veda Hackell of the Cave Conservancy of Hawaii (CCH). Paul gave an overview of the Society's history and current projects in the works. His talk provoked a robust discussion around fundraising (e.g. Corporate Matches and campaign-based solicitation) and expense reduction. The group also talked about carriers for property insurance and the benefits of having a line of credit. Veda gave a detailed talk about the CCH's current project to consolidate parcel lots in their portfolio and gave an overview of the savings for the CCH's yearly tax bills and landowner fees. She also thanked the NSS for the Cave Conservation Grant they received in 2023 which enabled CCH to execute the consolidation. The roundtable continued to discuss how to save money, and fundraising ideas, as well as how to manage cultural significance in preserves. We had guests from the NSS Nature Preserves team including Julie Scheck-Brown, Steve & Jeannie Bailey, Anne Dunlavy, Ryan Maurer, Emily Davis and Bob Simmons. Julie provided insight on land conservation, and ideas on how to work with local tax officials to lower tax liability. The group looks forward to our next meeting at the Convention in Cobleskill where Northeastern Cave Conservancy Executive Director Leslie Hatfield will give a presentation about their local preserves which will be open for visitation.

The following conservancies were represented at the Winter Conservancy Round Table: Western Cave Conservancy, Cricket Maze Cave Conservancy, Appalachian Cave Conservancy, Butler Cave Conservation Society, Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Kentucky Karst Conservancy, Cave Conservancy of Hawaii and the NSS Nature Preserves.

PLANS: We will continue to reach out to the conservancies on as needed basis and share important news with the conservancies as it becomes available. We are still working on the concept of adding Conservancy pages to caves.org with some type of interactive map – this concept was discussed at the past two meetings but progress has not been made. Jon Zetterberg has offered to assist in development if the team can consolidate information from the Conservancies for him.

PROBLEMS: The team decided not to provide Conservancy level updates again this quarter but opted to share an update from the Conservancy Roundtable instead. The Committee believes that annual conservancy level updates would be more convenient for our partners than quarterly updates. In the meantime, we encourage Conservancies to reach out to us and join our listserv and Roundtables to share ideas and resources!

NSS - Land Trust of North Alabama Liaison Report

Julie Schenck-Brown, Liaison (jschenck-brown@caves.org)

PURPOSE: In 2019 the Land Trust of North Alabama (LTNA) and the National Speleological Society (NSS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote education and management of cave and karst resources at LTNA Preserves. The LTNA has preserved over 10,000 acres of important natural lands in North Alabama and offers more than 80 miles of public trails to relax, exercise, and connect with nature at one of their 10 preserves. In addition, LTNA owns more than 70 cave and karst features that are accessible to NSS members via a permit system, which I help manage. As progress continues under the direction of this MOU through relationships established with LTNA staff and volunteer Resource Advisory Committee members who continue to be incredibly supportive and enthusiastic about the Society's work, this report provides a summary of recent activities. I hope the promotion of the LTNA-NSS partnership as it relates to cave management, conservation, research, and their cave permit system within the North Alabama community will inspire relationships with other land trusts and conservancies.

PROGRESS: Specific duties completed every quarter include attendance at LTNA Resource Advisory Committee meetings to represent the NSS with a focus on cave science, conservation and access, as well as preserve management.

- Permitting cave exploration, science, and survey at LTNA Preserves continue to be managed and supported.
  - Dr. Matt Niemiller from the University of Alabama in Huntsville continues to conduct research at Muddy Cave. No other research or survey activities were completed this quarter.
  - NSS members have generally requested permits in sufficient time and understand that it may take up to 72 hours to process permits. However, the initial permit requirements have been expanded upon to explain the requirements of providing information on each caver's experience after a recent group would not provide sufficient information; this group was advised their permit was not issued since they did not meet the requirements mentioned in multiple emails.
- Finished the migration of the Land Trust of North Alabama (LTNA) files to the designated NSS Google Drive and assigned access to Marie Bostick, LTNA Executive Director, and Andy Prewett, LTNA Land Manager, as well as Emily P. Davis, NSS Conservation & Science Division Head and Jon Zetterberg who provides geospatial data assistance to the LTNA with the creation of LiDAR maps and related data for LTNA acquisitions, preserves, and management plans.
- Answered requests sent to the LTNA office about their caves as well as questions about caves during a special member event in October that discussed the historical use of caves at the LTNA Bethel Spring Preserve.
- Working on developing a list of LTNA caves that need a map for members of the Huntsville Grotto to survey.
  - Becky Willaims and Chris Cargal, Huntsville Grotto Executive Board members, have initiated a hands-on cave survey class for members of the Huntsville Grotto. The class will progress to survey in the cave with a focus on smaller caves that can be completed in 1-2 trips, to provide learning opportunities for all members interested in cave survey and cartography. Thus, they asked for a list of LTNA caves needing a map and will obtain permits.
- Met with Tim Gels, LTNA Education Director, after the annual LTNA Education Fair at the LTNA Chapman

Mountain Nature Preserve welcomed over 400 attendees for a day of outdoor exploration and environmental learning. The event featured CaveSim, a hands-on caving experience funded by a Branson Foundation Grant, alongside exhibits from other community partners. Unfortunately, Tim, who is the new LTNA Education Director, was not aware of the MOU the NSS has with the LTNA, and our organization was not included. During our meeting we discussed collaborative efforts promoting educational initiatives focused on caves and karst.

- After meeting with Tim and Maria Ingram of the LTNA, we think a collaborative educational event would be an ideal time for members of the LTNA to learn more about the underground. Since the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve has a long history with Huntsville residents and has garnered international claim for the re-discovery of the once extinct Shelta Cave crayfish, and our preserve team receives inquiries about visitation from the Huntsville community, we thought this would be an ideal setting and discussed the idea with the NSS Shelta Cave Preserve team members.
- Becky Williams and Chris Cargal, who serve as NSS Preserve Managers at the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve, as well as on the Huntsville Grotto Executive Committee, met with Tim and Maria to discuss the possibility of hosting a LTNA – NSS Membership Day event in late spring/early summer at the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve; the Huntsville Grotto Executive Committee has also pledged their support to provide equipment (cave helmets and lights) and members who will volunteer to ensure safety and conservation. We're very excited to see what develops and know it will be a wonderful opportunity to promote cave conservation, education and understanding of the NSS, the LTNA, and the Huntsville Grotto, as well as how we all work together to study, explore, and protect caves and karst through understanding and collaboration within our community.

PLANS:

- Planning to resume work on the caves and karst section of the LTNA Management Plans, which includes LiDAR and aerial maps produced by Jon Zetterberg, for the following LTNA Nature Preserves: Bethel Spring, Green Mountain, and Hickory Cove.
- Planning to investigate reports of unpermitted and clandestine digging to re-open the collapsed entrance of Richard O'Hara's Fare Well at the LTNA Blevins Gap Preserve.
- Continue to evaluate potential LTNA acquisitions for caves and karst features; coordinate cave data requests with Jon Zetterberg who assists with the production of georeferenced maps for the LTNA and NSS.

PROBLEMS: None reported.

Landowner Relations Network Committee Report
Julie Schenck-Brown, Chair (LRNC@caves.org)
Committee Members: Alan Camp, Alan Hatcher, Alexander Dobrowolski. Andy Zellner, Anna Pearce, Ashby Haines, Beau Gergel, Ashby Haines, Becky Williams, Ben Tobin, Brad Long, Brett Tannehill, Chuck Sutherland, Curt Harler, Dave Howell, Earl Suitor, Geary Schindel, Hali Steinmann, James Lavigne, Jean DeVries, John Lyles, Jon Zetterberg, Julian Benson, Kim Fleischman, Kristine Ebrey, Lesley Colton, Mathew Bull, Matt Pelsor, Maxwell Grisham, Megan Atkinson, Mike Moser, Miki Manning, Mystik Miller, Nathan Farrar, Peter Youngbaer, Robby Chandler, Samantha Tyler, Shane Stacy, Shawn Hogbin, Shawn Williams, Tom Griffin, Valerie Howell, Zach Angstead

PURPOSE: The NSS Landowner Relations Network Committee (LRNC) was established to work on private sector landowner relations at a national level and facilitate access to the resources of the NSS to promote education, exploration, conservation, and access to caves. Through this mission, members of the LRNC endeavor to establish a relationship with cave landowners that see frequent visitors and reach out to landowners of closed or limited-access caves to provide support from the NSS.

PLANS/PROGRESS:

- **New Member:** Please join us in welcoming Brett Tannehill, NSS 74947, to the NSS LRNC. Brett lives in Huntsville and has worked with WLRH Public Radio and Alabama Public Radio for the past 27 years. Being in the process of retiring, he attended a Huntsville Grotto meeting, joined that night and mentioned he wanted to help with landowner relations. We're excited to welcome him to our team!

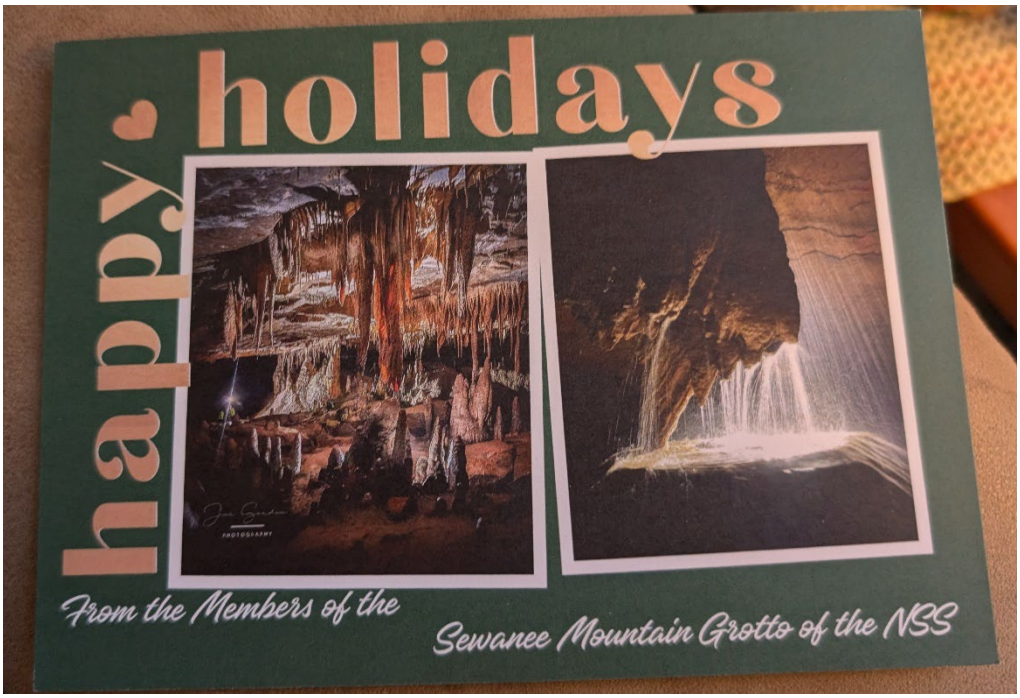
- **Voting for the 2025 NSS Outstanding Landowner:** Each year at the NSS Awards Banquet, we recognize a cave landowner or land manager whose efforts have been exemplary in supporting cavers and the mission of the NSS; and who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to cave access, conservation, education, and exploration. The recipient of this award is selected by the NSS Landowner Relations Committee (with final approval by the NSS Board) and receives an invitation to attend the NSS Convention and a plaque at the Banquet. Members of the committee understand that it's a great way to recognize the people who make caving possible and have until January 31st to vote. The results will then be presented to Bill Steele, NSS Awards Committee Chair, for approval by the NSS Board.
- **NSS Landowner-Caver Relations Certificates of Appreciation**: A total of 113 awards have been presented to landowners in 19 states, including NSS members who are cave landowners. Three nominations received since the fall report will be published once these landowners are recognized, and photos are obtained. Our goal is to recognize a landowner or land manager in every state, so we need our NSS members to submit nominations.
- **Landowner Outreach:**
  - An inquiry submitted to the NSS Membership Committee by a cave landowner was recognized by their committee member, Amber Jackson, NSS 71536, as needing follow-up by the NSS LRNC. In early December, Julie Schenck-Brown met with Derek Bijvoet, NSS 72969 and Anastasia Wengrowski, since we are neighbors, to walk their property and show them their cave entrance. Julie also provided information on the discovery of this cave by NSS LRNC member Shane Stacey, NSS 35619. In addition, Jon Zetterberg, NSS 67484 RL, FE, who is a member of the NSS LRNC as well as the NSS Preserves & Acquisitions Committee, created a LiDAR map and list of coordinates for surface depressions on their property, which they appreciated. Our gratitude to Amber for recognizing the need to refer landowner contacts to the NSS LRNC. Likewise, we will send any contact information for landowners who are interested in joining the NSS to the Membership Committee.
  - Beau Gergel, NSS 63846, of the NSS LRNC and Kentucky Speleological Survey, and Adam Hjermenrud, NSS 71369 met with a Campbellsville, KY landowner who had made an inquiry about caves on her property via the NSS website. The three walked the property and Beau provided information on the purpose of the KSS and NSS, as well as caving principles. In addition, Beau provided information on the Greater Cincinnati Grotto and Louisville Grotto intro cave trips to the landowner and offered to return and survey her cave.
  - Moler's Cave, WV – Tom Griffin, NSS 24333 FE, reports on the cave closure since Dr. Richard L. Latterell passed and his family hired a lawyer to settle the estate. The hard closure is based on the lawyer's concerns of liability. Tom also reports that in his will, Dr. Latterell specified several nonprofits who could take the land, and the lawyer is following up with these organizations. Prior to this closure, Moler's cave was extended 1,000 feet making it over a mile in length. Tom expresses a big thank you to Tommy Shifflett, Jeff Jahn and Chris Woodley along with 13 others this year for finishing the survey before the rains.
  - The Huntsville Grotto has formed a landowner relations subcommittee that includes the following NSS LRNC members: Max Grisham, James Lavigne, Brett Tannehill, Becky Wiliams, and Julie Schenck-Brown. Members of this grotto subcommittee will be answering the inquiries received from area landowners and conducting activities parallel to the mission of the NSS LRNC.
- **Holiday Cards for Cave Landowners:** The three largest grottos in the southeast (Dogwood City Grotto, Georgia, Huntsville Grotto, Alabama, and Sewanee Mountain Grotto, Tennessee) continued their annual tradition of mailing Holiday cards to cave landowners. For several decades, Julie Schenck-Brown has maintained a list of TAG landowners who graciously support cave conservation, access, and exploration, as well as a few who we hope will change their minds. In 2024, this list was significantly updated thanks to the efforts of Anna Pearce, NSS 70104, NSS LRNC member and Vice-Chair of the Dogwood City Grotto. Anna researched the names and addresses on the list, updating several records to include spouses and remove a few amazing people we have lost prior to sending the landowner invites for the TAG Fall Cave-In (see details of her efforts for this event in the Fall 2024 NSS LRNC report). Summaries of these wonderful outreach activities follow, and we hope to hear from others who conduct such notable efforts to support landowner – caver relations.

  Sewanee Mountain Grotto, Tennessee

  "We asked members to submit pictures. The EC voted on the top five and then grotto members voted at the November meeting. The two pictures tied, and they were complimentary in color, so we did a two-picture card.

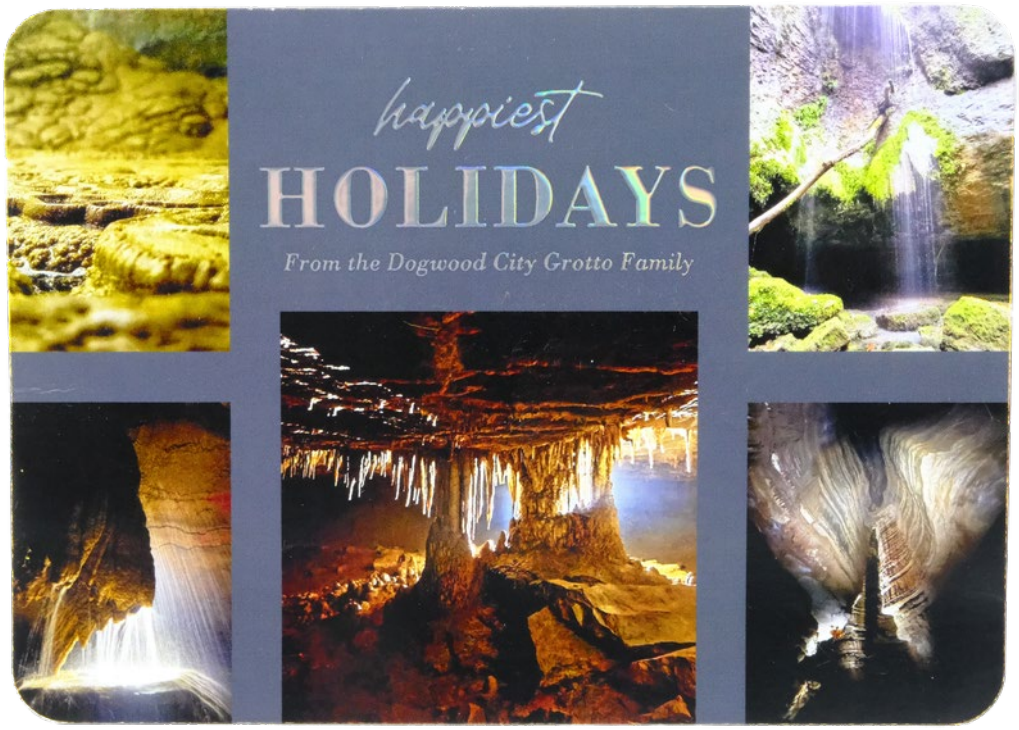
We sent I believe 76 cards - two were returned as unable to deliver. A personal handwritten note was included on each. The notes varied - either thanking them for their stewardship, allowing parking, providing access or other services to cavers. On the cards for the Lazy G, I thanked them for hosting the TAG Fall Cave-In."

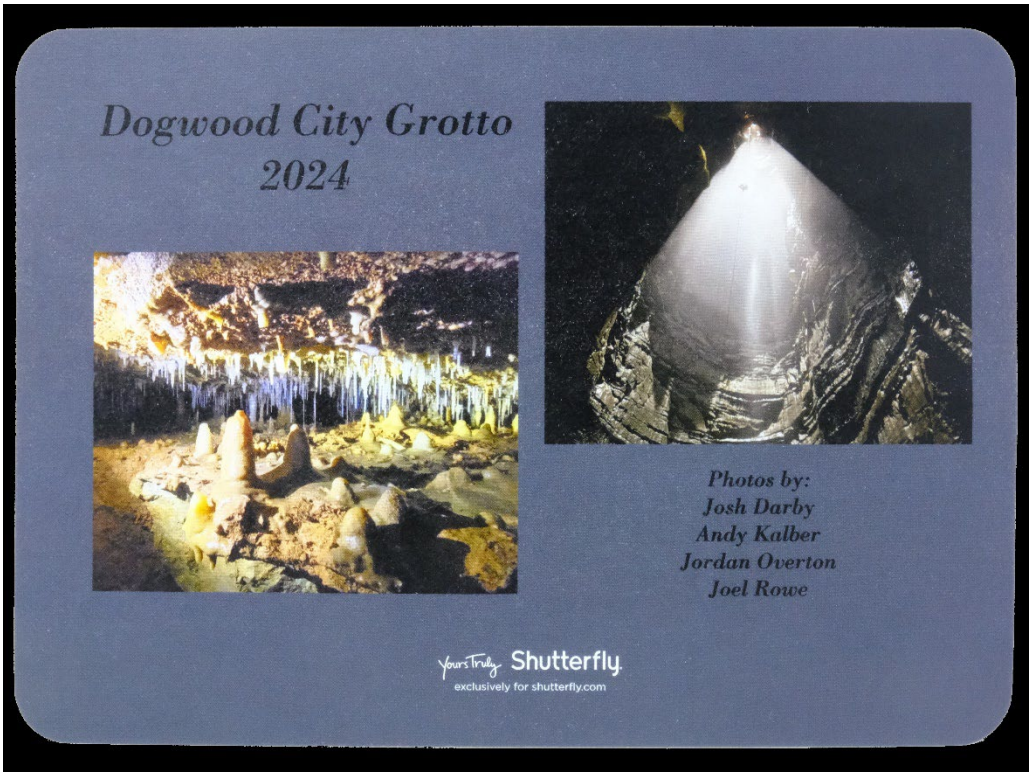
~Martha Mills, NSS 39864 RL, FE, Sewanee Mountain Grotto Secretary (Sewanee, TN)



Dogwood City Grotto, Georgia

"We did not have handwritten notes this time, but we did handwrite all the addresses. It was kind of fun! Anna Pearce, Destiny Snow, and I prepped all the cards at Nina's right before the Karstmas party. Great teamwork, and a way for us to show the grotto one of the things we do for landowners."
~Jennifer Young, NSS 71750, Dogwood City Grotto Public Relations (Atlanta GA)





Huntsville Grotto, Alabama

A total of 80 cards were mailed this year from the Huntsville Grotto and featured hand-addressed envelopes and a handwritten inscription that stated,

"We are grateful for your kindness and
the warmth of friendship that you share
with cavers throughout the year.
Thank you for being an amazing landowner!"

On the back of the card, photo credits were given to James Lavigne along with his NSS number (71330) and a photo caption, which did not identify the cave. (James is also a member of the NSS LRNC).



These three TAG grottos have a wonderful tradition that shows landowners the support of each grotto member, thus we appreciate their grotto leadership and membership for making these cards possible.

NSS Landowner Relations Network Committee Certificate of Appreciation – Jack Hart, NSS 4960

Moses Tomb is truly a TAG classic as it has a beautiful free drop of 230 feet walls adorned with flowstone from the lip to the floor. The sheer beauty of this Alabama cave is complimented by the kind and generous nature of cave landowner, Jack Hart, NSS 4960, who has welcomed cavers to his cave and cabin for several decades. Jack is also a member of River City Grotto (Florida), big game hunter, beekeeper, farmer, former U.S Marine, financial planner, and intrepid storyteller. Thus, Jack is truly a Master of all trades and has a huge heart.

Now well into retirement, Jack is hoping to realize his dream of moving to the property, which he calls Hart's Hovel, so he can spend more time with cavers who are welcome to enjoy the property, whether caving, hiking, or camping even when he is not present. Many cavers from TAG take Jack's offer of generosity as the sign of genuine love and support of cave conservation, access, and exploration. Thus, the NSS recognizes Jack Hart for his commitment to protecting Moses Tomb, while ensuring access for future generations of cavers.

NSS Landowner Relations Network Committee Certificate of Appreciation – Robert Kindt

In the October 2024 NSS LRNC Report, we included the nominations for Robert Kindt of Ohio, which were submitted by Curt Harler, NSS 22735 CLR, FE and Kendra Wecker, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Chief

Division of Wildlife. Curt and friends subsequently presented the award to Mr. Kindt and included this photo and caption of him after he proudly received his award.



Bob Kindt with his certificate presented to him by the National Speleological Society in appreciation of his cave preservation efforts. He allowed cave explorers/biologists access to document the Kindt's Cave Isopod, a species new to science. We appreciate his recognition and cooperation with preserving island cave habitat.

Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee
Julie Schenck-Brown [NSS 30493 RL, FE], Chair (Preserves@caves.org)
Committee Members: Julie Schenck-Brown, Emily P. Davis, Jon Zetterberg, and Hali Steinmann

PURPOSE: The NSS currently owns or manages 23 Nature Preserves throughout the United States, with ongoing work in support of our 24th acquisition. We are evaluating potential acquisitions as they are presented to our committee and still hope to have an NSS Nature Preserve in Hawaii with assistance from the Cave Conservancy of Hawaii and our many members who now call the islands home.

Each NSS Preserve is managed by a team of NSS members who serve as the interface between the public and the NSS as they provide oversight and maintenance, as well as manage conservation, recreation, and access for exploration, survey, and research. Our Nature Preserves are a commitment to future generations and ensure cave conservation, education, research, and exploration. We are proud to have such an outstanding portfolio of caves and karst landscapes accessible to NSS members and share this report.

NSS Preserve Managers:

Albert & Ethel Ogden Nature Preserve, Tennessee – Megan Atkinson & Chuck Sutherland
Dahm Springs Nature Preserve, South Dakota – Rene Ohms & Adam Weaver
Donald R. Russell Nature Preserve, Oklahoma – Clayton Russell
Great Expectations Nature Preserve – Bob Montgomery & Savannah Sawyer
Haggard Nature Preserve, Tennessee – Bradley Long & Lesley Colton
James Gage Nature Preserve, New York – Bob Simmons, Emily Davis, Mike Warner
John Guilday Nature Preserve, West Virginia – Earl Suitor & Cheryl Suitor
Kingston Saltpeter Nature Preserve, Georgia – Walt Cochran, Larry O. Blair, Joel Sneed, Kevin Glenn
Mammoth Crystal Nature Preserve, South Dakota – David Springhetti, Rene Ohms, Adam Weaver
McFails Nature Preserve, New York – Peter Haberland & Erik Nieman
Mill Creek Sink Nature Preserve, Florida – Andy Pitkin & Charles Roberson
Myrna Attaway Nature Preserve, Tennessee – Tina O'Hailey & Mareen Handler
New River Nature Preserve, Virginia – Travis Coad
Perkins Cave Nature Preserve, Virginia – Steve & Jeannie Bailey, Jason Lachniet, Terry Brown
Richard J. Blenz Nature Preserve, Indiana – Anmar Mirza
Schoharie Caverns Nature Preserve, New York – Christa Hay
Shelta Nature Preserve, Alabama – Becky Williams, Chris Cargal, Kevin Reeves
Sims Sink Nature Preserve, Florida – Buford Pruitt & Jr., Paul Moler
Thunderhole Nature Preserve, Tennessee – Megan Atkinson & Chris Hudson
Tytoona Cave Nature Preserve, Pennsylvania – Ann Dunlavy, Ryan Maurer, Hope Brooks
Warren Nature Preserve, Florida – David Lizdas & Fletcher Jacob
Wells Cave Nature Preserve, Kentucky – Bob Roth & Steve Vaughn
William J. Stephenson Nature Preserve, Alabama – Becky Williams, Chris Cargal, James Lavigne

PLANS/PROGRESS: The following is a status update from the Preserves Committee. Preserve level reports are submitted annually and are also included below.

Donor Recognition: Several generous NSS members and friends stepped up in 2024 and the NSS Preserves & Acquisitions Committee is grateful for this ongoing support. We sent handwritten thank you cards to all donors who contributed $100 or more to the NSS Preserves Fund and the NSS Cave Acquisition Fund. We also want to recognize the donors here.

<u>NSS Preserves Fund Donations:</u>

Mark Wilson:	$500	Donation
Central Connecticut Grotto:	$300	Donation
Central New Jersey Grotto	$270	Donation
(Disbursement of Tom Pollack's estate funds to the NSS)		
Steve Millet (Schoharie Preserve)	$130	Donation
Aaron Stavens	$100	Donation
Tom Lupp	$100	Donation

<u>Cave Acquisitions Donations</u>

San Diego Grotto	$2072	Donation
2024 NSS Convention Donation	$760	Donation
Central New Jersey Grotto	$270	Donation
(Disbursement of Tom Pollack's estate funds to the NSS)		
Raymond Mainer	$100	Donation
Lee Gilman	$100	Donation

Familiars Preserve – Frankin County, TN

The Familiars Preserve project is still in progress, and the team reconvened to discuss ongoing development in the area which has led to new water line and gas line easements being proposed on Barbara Peeler's property. Emily P. Davis and Kristen Hanritty of TennGreen met with Ms. Peeler to discuss the easements and also drafting of the Conservation Easement to be held by TennGreen. As both the water and gas line easements will likely be placed on the property under eminent domain, there is little we can do to stop this progress. We discussed ways we can mitigate the damage to the property, and Ms. Peeler will receive some monetary compensation for the permanent and temporary waterline easements. A member of TennGreen's board of directors reviewed the gas line easement notice from Atmos Energy and determined that though the gas line will likely also be coming, it is not certain, but we should make our plans assuming it will come. The first draft of the TennGreen Conservation was reviewed by this team, with several additional review meetings planned for this spring. Ms. Peeler wanted additional details on what the NSS would like to see regarding the easement carveout (i.e. the area defined for a kiosk/caretaker residents/education center), and our Preserves Committee will be working to define this better for her. In addition, our team will be making a visit to the property this spring to define the carveout area to include in the easement document.

NSS Cave Acquisition Grants

No grant requests received this quarter.

Research at the NSS Nature Preserves (see also Preserves Science Subcommittee)

Cave microclimate and Tricolored Bat Projects

Dr. Skylar Hopkins of North Carolina State University and Dr. Matthew Niemiller of University of Alabama Huntsville have been conducting cave microclimate studies at four NSS Preserves. As we move into 2025, they have also been looking at logistics for data collection and discussing this with us in online meetings.

For the new tricolored bat project, they need to finish selecting at least 20 caves they can visit in both winter and summer to swab bats and the environment. They're prioritizing sites where a few tricolored bats have been seen in summer but can also include sites that aren't used by tricolored bats in summer. For those 20 or so caves, the academic team and/or partners will visit in Summer 2025, and they can also visit in either Jan-March 2025 or Jan-March 2026; whichever winter best aligns with bat surveys. They think they'll visit most caves in Summer 2025 to pull the logger data but might pull some during winter bat surveys or in the short windows when gray bats are not present/active. For a small subset of the caves, they have also offered to complete a second bio survey if that would be useful and asked to be notified if it's a high priority for our organization.

It was also reported that at the end of the microclimate project, the NSS is welcome to keep the data loggers, if we want them. If everything is working as it is supposed to, the loggers just need new batteries, and water refills every two or so years. Skylar also mentioned that there are occasionally some logger failures, and if this happens to loggers in NSS caves, her team can try to fix them. Since we think it would be useful to keep collecting microclimate data after this project ends, we will be making those arrangements.

Tri-Color Bat Count at the NSS Warren Cave Nature Preserve, Florida

Lisa Smith, a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, reported, "…after all the surveys were completed last year, Warren Cave was our largest tricolored bat cave hibernacula in the state last year and one of the few sites that is improving! Only one culvert had more bats than Warren so that new gate seems to be working!" In addition, she provided the following counts for the tricolored bat population, which has been considered by the USFWS these past two years for placement on the endangered species list.

Cave Name	Survey Date	# Tricolored Bats
Warrens	17-Jan-24	58
Warrens	01-Feb-23	39
Warrens	17-Feb-22	26
Warrens	02-Feb-21	27
Warrens	16-Jan-20	26
Warrens	12-Feb-19	16
Warrens	09-Feb-18	30
Warrens	10-Feb-17	31

The NSS Warren Cave Nature Preserve is one of our success stories thanks to the incredible work of David Lizdas and Jacob Fletcher who serve as NSS Preserve Managers; they have reignited their local caving community to understand, protect, and study Warren Cave and the tri-colored bat population has grown exponentially since David Springhetti volunteered his time and expertise to design and construct the new gate for Warren Cave, only requesting reimbursement for the cost of materials and his gas for the trip from South Dakota to Florida. These collective efforts have ultimately changed this preserve to one of our greatest reflections of conservation and preserve management. Truly an amazing transformation that we credit to David Lizdas's conservation vision and David Springhetti's commitment to help us protect this amazing Florida gem.

Bat Counts at the NSS James Gage Nature Preserve, New York

In January 2025, "Classic" Emily Davis, NSS Preserve Manager at the NSS James Gage Nature Preserve, led Ashley Meyer, Wildlife Biologist, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation into the "wet side" of Balls Cave for a bat survey. While Erik Neiman, NSS Preserve Manager for the McFails Cave Nature Preserve (NY), led Rachel Bakerian, Wildlife Biologist, Division of Fish & Wildlife at New York State into the "dry side" of Balls Cave for their bat survey. Classic reports, "Last time I was in the wet side was 2012. There were 5 or 6 bats then. This time 31." This increase gives hope as even the count of tri-colored bats has improved; the data provided to the NSS Preserves & Acquisitions Committee follows:

NSS James Gage Nature Preserve – Bat Survey of the "Dry" Side	
Species	**Count**
MYLU (Little Brown Bat)	106
PESU (Tri-colored Bat)	6

NSS James Gage Nature Preserve – Bat Survey of the "Wet" Side	
Species	**Count**
MYLU (Little Brown Bat)	30
PESU (Tri-Colored Bat)	1

Historical Numbers:

YEAR	MYLU	MYSO	MYSE	MYLE	EPFU	PESU	UNMY	UNKN	TOTAL
2025	**136**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**7**	**0**	**0**	**143**
2012	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
2011	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
2010	37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	37
2009	56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	56
2008	108	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	110
2007	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
1985	940	0	1	0	0	27	0	0	968

1980	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	400

Research Permits Requirement
The NSS Preserve Managers have been reminded that all ongoing research at our 23 NSS Nature Preserves needs to be coordinated through the Preserves Research Committee and the NSS Preserves Committee. The researcher(s) will need to email PreserveScience@caves.org, so they can complete a simple Google Form that helps us track research at the preserves and ensure we are receiving copies of the data. Even if a researcher is with a state or federal agency, an NSS research permit is required.

NSS Preserves Cave Rescue Plans (coordinated by Jon Zetterberg)
We are working on developing a reporting mechanism for incidents at the preserves, possibly like the ACA reporting system or at least linked to the ACA submission form so we can obtain data more readily if there is an incident at an NSS Preserve. Regarding that, we have discussed the possibility that not everyone will complete an ACA report and other data management issues. However, with the mandatory use of the NSS online permit system, we will have better data if we even have an incident again.

We also recognize the need for cave rescue plans at each NSS Preserve, which has been an ongoing project that has not made great progress. As each location presents unique factors to be considered, we are grateful that some of the preserve managers are NCRC trained and will work with NCRC personnel and emergency management groups to complete these plans. However, there will be an emphasis on completing these plans this year.

NSS Preserves Permit System
Since the NSS Board made the decision to require use of an online permit system, which is hosted by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (SCCi), we have expressed to the NSS Preserve Managers that the permit system is required so we can be accountable to our insurance company, the NSS Board, and membership; specifically, we recognize the need to provide data on visitors and preserve use, which will help us ensure our conservation goals are met and manage liability. The Preserves Committee is meeting on February 17th and will set the final deadline by which all NSS Nature Preserves will be live on the online permit system.

While 15 of the 23 NSS Nature Preserves have been brought online with the online permit system, we had fully expected by the time this report was submitted that we would have all the NSS preserves online. However, we have failed to meet this goal since we have not received copies of releases, permit data, and other information. While working to obtain the permit data, it has been mentioned several times that all NSS Preserves require releases and permits for any type of visitation or activity.

Per the direction of Pete Johnson, NSS Chair of the Board, all NSS Nature Preserves will be operating under the online permit system and there will no longer be any permits issued via email or other means. The NSS Preserves that have not provided permit information will at the minimum have a release that can be signed electronically. As we receive the information from the NSS Preserve Managers, we will continue to work with Josh Schultz to populate this data.

A New York state lawyer is also being contacted regarding the requirements for releases in that state, as well as guidance for the permit system implementation regarding non-caving use. As the caves at the New York preserves are closed until May 15th per state law related to WNS, we have some time to develop the release for these three NSS Preserves, which will also be the highlight of the 2025 NSS Convention. And while we still have much work ahead of us, we are ready to have the online permit system fully implemented at all 23 NSS Nature Preserve.

NSS Preserves Activity
- **NSS News Special Issue:** We are excited to have the 23 NSS Nature Preserves featured in a dedicated issue of the NSS News thanks to the creative vision of Joel Despain, NSS Production Editor, and Adam Weaver, NSS Layout Editor as well as NSS Preserve Manager at the NSS Dahm Springs Nature Preserve and the NSS Mammoth Crystal Cave Nature Preserve. This special issue will no doubt be a collectible item and a great tool for education, conservation, management, and landowner relations.
- **Preserves Signs:** Based on the feedback of the NSS Preserve Managers and visitors to the preserves, we have ordered new signs, which are required to be posted at each preserve. The signs clearly state that a permit is

required for visitation and is another level of management we have utilized to ensure all visitors to our preserves obtain a permit through the online permit system.

- **Locks for the NSS Preserves –** We have received copies of keys for all existing locks at the 23 NSS Nature Preserves (except the Great Expectations Nature Preserve, which Savannah Sawyer is working on obtaining) or have provided combo locks with a backup key override to the preserve management teams. The preserve managers have also been notified to change the combination as frequently as they feel is needed and to store the combo in their respective preserves drive.
- **Volunteer Button on the Online Permit System –** Working with Josh Schultz and Ray Knott, SCCi Executive Director, we now have a volunteer button for use by the NSS Preserve Managers when they are working at the preserve they manage. This information will ultimately help us celebrate the incredible amount of time that our amazing NSS Preserve Managers donate to the NSS through their labor of love, which is motivated by conservation and preservation management.
- **Shelta Cave Preserve Day with the Land Trust of North Alabama (LTNA) –** Becky Williams and Chris Cargal, who serve as NSS Preserve Managers at the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve, as well as on the Huntsville Grotto Executive Committee, are working with the Land Trust of North Alabama (LTNA) to host an inaugural LTNA – NSS Membership Day event in late spring/ early summer at the NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve; the Huntsville Grotto Executive Committee has also pledged their support to provide equipment (cave helmets and lights) and members who will volunteer to ensure safety and conservation. We're very excited to see what develops and know it will be a wonderful opportunity to promote cave conservation, education and understanding of the NSS, the LTNA, and the Huntsville Grotto, as well as how we all work together to study, explore, and protect caves and karst through understanding and collaboration within our community.
- **Northeast Bat Working Group (NEBWG) –** We are proud of our NSS Preserve Managers who attended the NEBWG held this year in Harrisburg, PA. Ann Dunlavy and Hope Brooks from the NSS Tytoona Cave Nature Preserve, "Classic" Emily Davis, and Mike Warner from the NSS James Gage Nature Preserve, as well as the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, attended this annual meeting that included several other NSS members. Ann reports, "It's a lot of information, but since we do so much bat education, we like to get there at least every couple of years to catch up. "

The NSS Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee wants to thank everyone who makes NSS preserve management possible, as NSS Preserve Managers are often the first contact visitors have with the NSS and provide information on local grottos, caving safely, and conservation efforts. Without our preserve managers, the NSS could not guarantee access to caves for exploration, research, and survey. Thus, we are grateful and excited to share details about the amazing work completed at our NSS preserves, as well as share the plans for this year.

NCKMS Committee
Jim 'Crash' Kennedy, Chair (cavercrash@gmail.com)
PURPOSE: To coordinate the National Cave & Karst Symposium biennially.
PROGRESS: All systems are go for 2025 NCKMS with website, registration, media, and schedule either complete or well underway.
PLANS: The 2027 NCKMS team is actively working on planning as well. They have secured their own bank account and are reviewing the venue contracts now.
PROBLEMS: None reported.

CAVE SCIENCE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Prepared by Emily P. Davis, Interim Cave Science Department Head, emilyp@caves.org

Cave Science Department Personnel:

Committee or Function	Chair or Officer	Email	NSS Number
Preserves Science Subcommittee	Hali Steinmann	hali@caves.org	65702RL

Geospatial Committee	Adam Weaver	adam@caves.org	62352RL (FE)
International Exploration Grant Committee	Cyndie Walck, Dr. Patricia Kambesis	karstgirl@yahoo.com, pat.kambesis@wku.edu	24176RE (FE)
U.S. Exploration Grant Committee	Jason Ballensky	jason@ballensky.com	17304RE (FE, LB)
Research Advisory Committee	Dr. Donald McFarlane	dmcfarlane@jsd.claremont.edu	31696RE
Biological Response Committee (BRC)	Dr. Matthew Niemiller	biologicalResponse@caves.org	53235RL (FE)
U.S. Cave Animal of the Year Committee	Gretchen Baker	gretchenbaker@caves.org	50323RL (FE)

Preserves Science Subcommittee
Hali Steinmann, Chair (hali@caves.org)
PURPOSE: To provide technical review, counsel and approval of research occurring associated with NSS Nature Preserves. We encourage research of all kinds at our preserves, but all new research projects must be approved by this subcommittee and an application submitted via the google form. Please contact this committee for more information on performing research at our preserves.
PLANS: Hali Steinmann who is also a member of the NSS Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee, has accepted the position of Preserves Science Subcommittee Chair. This year, we will be reviewing all known NSS Nature Preserves research to obtain status updates from researchers, connect with Preserve Managers to ensure all research activity (e.g. bat counts, data loggers) is being reported, and inform teams of the new online permit system. We will also be discussing the potential for more widespread research projects and/or data monitoring at the Preserves.
PROGRESS: We are reviewing records of all known research projects now and contacting the primary investigators to obtain updates now.
PROBLEMS: No issues to report.

Geospatial Committee
Adam Weaver, Chair (adam@caves.org)
PURPOSE: To collect and oversee cave location and map data submitted to the NSS.
PROGRESS: No update provided.
PLANS: No update provided.
PROBLEMS: None reported.

International Exploration Grants
Cyndie Walck, Co-chair (karstgirl@yahoo.com) & **Pat Kambesis, Co-chair** (pat.kambesis@wku.edu) **Committee Members:** Carol Veseley, Mike Ficco, Ben Hutchins
PURPOSE: To receive, review and approve grants from the NSS International Exploration Fund.
PROGRESS & AWARDS: The international exploration fund was allotted a budget of $7564.63 for the Fiscal year starting April 1, 2024. $3850 was awarded in June 2024 (see previous report), and $3800 was awarded in December 2024 (see below).

Applications Awarded in December 2024:

Expedition	Submitter	Contact	Recommended Amount
Exploration and Mapping of Krem Amarsang, Northeast India	Mike Zawada	mike.zawada5000@gmail.com	$900
March 2025 Proyecto Espeleologico Purificacion (Mexico)	Abigail Mack	abigailmack79@gmail.com	$2,100
Belize Maya Cave in Monkey Bay National Park, Belize	Jessica Ratcliffe	jr3689@nau.edu	$800

Trip Summaries of December 2024 Grant Recipients:

- *Krem Amarsang, India*: This expedition will focus on continued exploration and mapping of a large cave in Meghalaya as well as photo and video documentation. Exploration began in 2012 and 2017, finding an underground river with large rimstone dams and waterfalls. The project involves cooperation with American, British and Meghalayan cavers.
- *Proyecto Espeleologico Purificacion*: This expedition will build on over 50 years of work in this incredibly productive karst area. Frequent expeditions continue to work in the area with several new deep caves found and many yet to be explored. Objectives for this trip include pushing the bottom of Cuchilla and leads in Valkyrie River, high leads in Sotano de Caracol, continue mapping caves in Las Chinas area and Tinajas Prietas.
- *Belize Monkey Bay*: This trip will focus on the exploration and mapping of a recently discovered cave in Belize: Altar Cave was documented for the first time in 2023as part of the Cave Dwelling Animals of Xibalba (CAX) Project. The cave houses Maya artifacts dating to the Late Classic Period (900-1000AD) that indicate that the cave functioned as a ritual performance space in antiquity. Our primary objective is to determine whether activities in each zone were linked, and we will generate 2D and 3D maps of the cave.

PLANS: The next grant submittal deadline is **May 31, 2025**, for awards to be allotted in summer 2025. We are working with Mike Ficco and been working on a supplemental program to increase the funds available to the International Exploration Grants program.
through the Cave Conservancy Foundation (CCF). The purpose of this collaboration is to enable the NSS International Exploration Grant Program to increase the size of its grant awards through periodic supplemental donations from CCF. Guidelines have been submitted to the NSS for this process.
PROBLEMS: We will need to know our budget for next Fiscal year (now communicated by Emily P. Davis). Most of these expeditions are made by volunteer cavers who pay for travel, equipment and expenses out of their own pockets. The exploration grants we award are a small part of the expedition costs, and are used for group expenses such as ropes, bolts and guides. In the past, recipients have been able to divide the grant between team members to limit amounts to less than $600. If they are not allowed to split the grant funds, one individual from the team will have to file and pay taxes on this small amount. This is both a burden to that individual and either they take a hit and pay the taxes and do the paperwork for the team, or the amount of funds available to the project is reduced by that amount. It would be advantageous to be able to split the grant award between the expedition team members. *[**Division Head note:** This was budgeted and the funding communicated to the Committee]*

U.S. Exploration Grants (Sara Corrie Grants)
Jason Ballensky, **Chair** (jason@ballensky.com)
Committee Members: Stan Allison, Dave Black, Hans Bodenhamer, Nikki Fox, Jon Lillestolen
PURPOSE: To receive, review and approve grants from the NSS US Exploration Fund.
PROGRESS: We have awarded two grants this period: 1) Liam Tobin for Hidden River Cave, KY and 2) Samuel Bonal for Little Brush Creek Cave, UT.

PLANS: The Committee is working with the NSS Webinars Committee on a webinar scheduled for later in 2025 to feature an awardee expedition and information about this grant program. We know that this promotion will be well received and will bring in more proposals in the next grant cycle.
PROBLEMS: None

Research Advisory Committee
Donald A. McFarlane, Chair, (dmcfarlane@jsd.claremont.edu), http://www.caves.org/committee/rac/
Committee Members: Joyce Lundberg, (Assoc. Prof, Carleton University), John Mylroie (Mississippi State Univ; emeritus), Keith Christenson
PURPOSE: To receive, review and approve research grant applications and serve as a general resource for researchers. The Committee also reviews applications from parties wishing to become official NSS Projects.
PLANS: Since our last report, we have awarded two the Ralph Stone Graduate Fellowships, as follows:

1) Gretchen Hilt, Southeast Louisiana University, for her project "Utilizing environmental DNA as a conservation tool to monitor rare Georgia Blind Cave Salamander (Eurycea wallacei) in understudied subterranean cave environments.
2) Nicholas Puenete, University of Colorado, Boulder, for his project "More than Stone: Mapping Ancient Speleothem Movement Across the Yucatan, Peninsula"

We have also approved the Kučka Korita Project as an official NSS project. There has been no other business.

PROGRESS: No new applications for NSS Project status have been received.
Biological Response Committee (BRC)
Dr. Matthew L Niemiller (AL), Chair; Keith Christenson (PA), Meeting Representative
(biologicalResponse@caves.org)
Members: Matthew Niemiller (AL), Jennifer Foote (NM), Mike Slay, and Keith Christenson (PA).
PURPOSE: The current purpose of the BRC is to "field questions and represents NSS for all aspects of caving that involve biology. It's a great source to find information of how management actions have or could impact habitats." The BRC is responsible for coordinating the NSS's response to biological threats to caves and karst. Initially created in response to WNS, the committee is currently evaluating its purpose, tasks, and goals moving forward in a WNS-endemic world. https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/ is the primary source for information on WNS. Additionally information on WNS can be found on the NSS website at www.caves.org/WNS/.
USFWS WNS decontamination protocol and updates can be found at this link:
https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/static-page/decontamination-information.
PROGRESS/PLANS: The Committee will meet in mid-November and planned to participate in the 2-day 2024 WNS Virtual Meeting 6/11-6/12.
PROBLEMS: None reported.

U.S. Cave Animal of the Year Committee
Gretchen Baker (NV), Chair (gretchenbaker@caves.org)
PURPOSE: This team selects the NSS U.S. Cave Animal of the Year, develops promotional material and NSS News article, and liaises with other national CAOTY programs. The CAOTY is featured in the April issue of the NSS News each year and stickers are given out and sold at the annual NSS Convention. We also continue our Facebook page.
PROGRESS/PLANS: The 2025 USA Cave Animal of the Year is the **Cave Shrimp!**

- The 2025 USA Cave Animal of the Year is the **Cave Shrimp**! Not only are they a fascinating and important cave crustacean, but we can take pride in helping protect the Alabama cave shrimp (*Palaemonias alabamae*) at our NSS Shelta Cave Nature Preserve. It is only known to three caves in AL.
- Dr. Matthew Niemiller and Shiloh McCollum are working on an article for the NSS News Conservation Issue and for the NSS website. Kara Posso and Don Arburn are working on sticker design. Devra Willingham and Raquel Lugo are working on additional outreach activities for Cave Week. Emily P. Davis is getting stickers made to distribute at the NSS Convention and the International Conference of Speleology (ICS) in Brazil.
- Gretchen Baker has been coordinating with Cave Animal of the Year sponsors from other countries and hopes to meet with some of them at the ICS.

- It would be great to get money in the budget for stickers to be handed out at the NSS Convention and other caving events so we can continue this each year and keep raising awareness of the fascinating creatures that live in caves and promote the NSS mission of cave conservation. *[**Division Head note:** This was budgeted and communicated to the CAOTY Committee]*.

PROBLEMS: None reported.

---------- END OF 2025 SPRING CONSERVATION & SCIENCE DIVISION REPORT ----------