



WELLS CAVE NATURE PRESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

(Pulaski Co., Kentucky)

The following Preserve Management Plan was adopted by the Board of Governors of the National Speleological Society to define management of Wells Cave Nature Preserve. The intention of this plan is to protect the property and promote good relations between the NSS and neighboring landowners. Please observe the rules and encourage others to do the same so that this unique and outstanding cave may be enjoyed by all. Contact the NSS Property Managers at WellsPreserve@caves.org if you have any questions or need to request special arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

Jim Helmbold, the current owner of two of the entrances of Wells Cave in Pulaski County, Kentucky has expressed the desire to give the property containing the two entrances to the National Speleological Society. The land parcel is less than three acres.

PURPOSE OF A MANAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of a management plan is to describe what is on a property and how it should be managed. It is an operating manual for the preserve. A plan is not a static document that once written is placed on the shelf and forgotten. It is a document that is to be used and referenced on a regular basis. The property manager must follow the plan unless there is a compelling and overriding reason for doing otherwise. Unless there is an immediate need, nothing should be done at a property that is not in the plan. If something new is desired, the plan should be amended only after careful, complete, and thorough analysis of the proposed changes or additions. Then, the amendments must be approved by the NSS Board of Governors. If the management plan is the basis for a management agreement with a third party, such as the USDA Forest Service, then any changes must also be approved by the third party.

RESOURCES

UNDERGROUND RESOURCES

Wells Cave contains approximately 11.5 miles of mapped passage. Mapping of the cave is not complete. There are four (4) entrances. Two are located on the proposed preserve. Another is located near Buck Creek on the Daniel Boone National Forest. The fourth is located to the northeast on private property and is not a convenient entrance.

BIOLOGICAL - A bioinventory has not been done in Wells Cave. However, a small colony of Indiana bats hibernate in the cave and an unidentified cavefish has been observed. Bat censuses are being conducted by the US Forest Service and the Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission.

GEOLOGICAL & HYDROLOGICAL - Wells Cave contains approximately 2.5 miles of major stream passage, known as River Passage. This stream resurges on Buck Creek. Recharge to the cave is primarily derived from runoff from nearby insoluble rocks.

Wells Cave is formed in the Mississippian Bangor Limestone. The cave appears to have both floodwater maze and distributary passages at the downstream end of the system.

PALEONTOLOGICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

ARCHEOLOGICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

HISTORICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

SURFACE RESOURCES

BIOLOGICAL - The Wells Cave property consists of abandoned field. Around the entrances are oak and hickory trees. The cave is located in the Buck Creek watershed, which is a Watershed Bioreserve project of The Nature Conservancy. Buck Creek provides habitat to three Federally listed endangered mussels.

GEOLOGICAL & HYDROLOGICAL - Economic quantities of coal are present in nearby ridges. Extraction of this resource is a potential threat to the cave and its biological community as well as to the Buck Creek watershed in general.

PALEONTOLOGICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

ARCHEOLOGICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

HISTORICAL - No significant or unique resources are known to exist.

ACCESS POLICY

The caves on the proposed preserve will not require special permission or a release form for normal caving. The owner has expressed the desire that the cave be kept open for recreational caving. A kiosk/registration box should be constructed on the property probably just inside the entrance sink and out of sight of the road. Anybody entering the cave would be requested to complete a trip card and place it in the IN Slot. On leaving the cave, they would move the card to an OUT box.

Wells Cave Nature Preserve
Trip Card

Date & time in ___/___/___ _____

Date & time out ___/___/___ _____

Trip leader _____

Number in Party ____ (Please list the trip members on the back.)

Purpose of trip _____

Was there anything unusual or any problem you noted on the property that of which the manager should be aware?

For entry to the cave, standard caving gear will be required. This includes helmet with a chinstrap; three sources of light, one of which is mounted on the helmet; and at least three people in the party.

Rules for the Wells Cave Nature Preserve

1. No recreational tours of the cave for pay will be permitted.
2. No campfires or camping on the property are permitted.
3. No one is allowed on the property between the hours of 9:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M., except for members of the Management Committee or as authorized in writing by The Wells Cave Nature Preserve Committee.
4. Visitors must use only established surface trail paths. To protect surface flora and to reduce erosion, no off-trail activities or use are permitted, including climbing and rappelling.
5. Disturbing or destroying plants or animals on the property or in the cave is not allowed except with written authorization for permitted research or monitoring.
6. All waste and trash must be carried away.
7. Parking on the property is only allowed in the designated parking area.
8. Visitors shall complete the Trip Card (example above).

USE CONFLICTS

At present there does not appear to be any use conflicts. However, two of the four entrances to the cave are owned by entities other than the NSS. The Wells Cave Nature Preserve Management Committee should ensure that there are good relations with the adjoining landowners.

PUBLICITY POLICY

The cave has not publicized in magazines or newspapers of general circulation. Caver publications like the NSS News may contain information on the latest discoveries. Some grotto publications may also have information, but these have limited circulation and usually do not give locations. Publication of the entrance location will be discouraged.

CAVE MANAGEMENT

When managing a cave, one must not assume that the management plan is effective. The cave should be monitored for degradation. The Wells Cave Nature Preserve Management Committee, in consultation with the NSS Administrative Vice-President, will evaluate the desirability and practicality of various monitoring strategies. The strategies include, but are not limited to, photo-monitoring, water quality monitoring, and periodic censusing of indicator species. In order for degradation to be noted, a baseline for adopted strategies should be established as soon as possible.

Lee Florea will be the interim chairman as the initial contact and he indicates that the Blue Grass has offered their support, along with Central Ohio, Greater Cincinnati, and Dayton Grottos. A NSS Nature Preserve Management Committee will be formed from these grottos and a permanent chairman will be nominated.

SURFACE MANAGEMENT

The cave entrance is located close to Kentucky Route 192 about 14 miles east of Somerset. Between the cave and the road is a mobile home that is not part of the proposed preserve. There is a small field immediately south of the entrance, north of the entrance is a much larger field. It is recommended that the southern area be closed to parking and that a more formal parking area be created in the field north of the entrance.

The condition of the surface biological community will be monitored in cooperation with entities such as The Nature Conservancy and the US Forest Service.

MANAGEMENT TASKS

- It is recommended that a formal trail be cut from the smaller entrance to the field north of the main entrance, where the parking area will be.
- The parking area will be marked.
- Qualified personnel will conduct a thorough bioinventory. This management plan should be amended when a bioinventory has been completed. It is recommended that cooperative agreements be reached with other owners of Wells Cave that ensure that the NSS has access to the entire cave.
- The USDA Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy should be contacted about cooperating and continuing monitoring efforts both above and below ground at Wells Cave.
- It is recommended that the Wells Cave Nature Preserve Management Committee be alert to opportunities for the NSS to secure protection for more of the privately held portions of the cave.
- Qualified personnel should conduct an inventory of paleontological and archeological potential in the cave.
- Periodic census of bat species will continue.
- The small colony of Indiana bats hibernates in a relatively obscure room in Wells Cave. The Wells Cave Nature Preserve Committee should consider if visitation to the hibernation room should be restricted during the hibernation season.

- A registration box will be built and maintained. A supply of Trip Cards will be made available to visitors. The completed Trip Cards will be reviewed and stored by the Wells Cave Nature Preserve Management Committee.
- Lee Florea will be the interim chairman as the initial contact and he indicates that the Blue Grass has offered their support, along with Central Ohio, Greater Cincinnati, and Dayton Grottos. A NSS Nature Preserve Management Committee will be formed from these grottos and a permanent chairman will be nominated.
- Existing data on Wells Cave should be collected and maintained. These data include cave maps, bat censuses, recharge area delineation, and cave visitation.

Commercial Use Statement: The Board of Governors of the National Speleological Society reaffirms its standing policy that bans the commercial use of our properties, and specifically, prohibits any activity where a charge of any type is made or a payment of any type made to anyone organizing or leading a trip to the cave preserve.