



EVENT & ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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Outreach & Community Engagement

Expanding NSS outreach and visibility through participation in regional events, conservation initiatives, and other gatherings across the region

Key Engagements:

- Outdoor Recreation Fair - Orion Amphitheater | Outreach Booth
- Wing Night - Georgia Land Trust | Outreach Booth
- SERA
- 2026 NSS Convention
- Conservation Priorities Summit - Conservation Alabama | Representation
- OTR

Educational Programs & Public Engagement

Leading educational and public engagement programs designed to introduce students and the public to the NSS and cave conservation as a whole

Programming/Events:

- Birmingham Housing Authority Summer Program
 - 32 Kids | Grades K-7 | 4 Sessions
- Whitesburg Elementary Summer Program
 - 17 Kids | Kindergarten | 3 Sessions
- NSS HQ and Shelta Cave Open House
 - 51 Overall Participants | 25 Cave Tour Participants
 - Radio Spot & Interview

Event Support

Providing event planning and operational support to community members, grottos, regions, and more

Events

- Cave Fest – Sewanee Mt Grotto
 - Provided Eventenry implementation, registration hardware, curated SOPs, and event planning assistance

Convention Planning & Development

Planning and partnership development for upcoming NSS conventions

2026

- Improved Co-op processes resulting in more efficient bookkeeping
- Implemented a post-convention volunteer feedback survey to inform future planning
- Conducting post-convention volunteer interviews to gain further convention role insight

2027

- Multiple grant meetings held w/ the Texas Governor's Office
- Identified eligible funding opportunities and began preparations for:
 - Val Verde County Hotel Occupancy Tax Fund Grant
 - City of Del Rio Special Events Grant

2028

- Identified eligible funding opportunities and began preparations for:
 - City of Stevenson Tourism Promotion Grant
 - Skamania County Lodging Tax Grant
- Conducting ongoing negotiations with Skamania Lodge regarding convention arrangements

General Initiatives

- Developed a national sponsorship acquisition shortlist with contact information
- Digitizing historical vendor data | In Progress
- Developing an internal promotions plan for 2029 Convention bidders | In Progress

Outreach & Community Engagement

- Participate in 6 additional outreach and community engagement events

Educational Programs & Public Engagement

- Provide educational programming to 100 children through school and community-based initiatives
- Develop an MOU with NCKRI to establish a framework for in-school educational programming

Event Support

- Create curated SOPs for Pretix to support consistent event registration and operations
- Develop an Event Support Request Form and formalized support process for NSS grottos

Convention Planning

- Continue to gather data to start "mini manuals" for complex convention roles based on gathered insight from past volunteers
- Complete applications for 2027 convention when local grant cycle opens up and get us a bunch of money
- Develop a convention task timeline informed by historical convention planning data and established milestones. Intended to be reusable planning framework
- Complete digitizing historical vendor data
- Complete development of an internal promotions plan for 2029
Convention bidders

Concern

My main concern is that we don't currently have a volunteer reward system in place to help encourage and support them.

Current State

The NSS does a great job of recognition. Volunteers receive recognition through existing ceremonies, awards, and commemorative items; however, there is not really a consistent system of tangible benefits tied to volunteer participation.

Sometimes volunteering may require individuals to contribute not only their time, but also absorb costs associated with participating. Without benefits that help offset these costs or otherwise make volunteering easier, we may be unintentionally creating barriers to participation. This is particularly true for volunteers taking on larger or more time-intensive roles.

What Could Help

I think we should spend time exploring a sustainable volunteer reward system that both incentivizes participation and reduces barriers to volunteering. Questions we need to ask ourselves are:

- What benefits would volunteers actually value?
- What costs or obstacles can NSS reasonably offset?
- Should benefits scale based on time commitment or responsibility?
- What existing NSS resources could be leveraged to provide meaningful benefits without creating an unsustainable financial burden?

Luckily, we are already having some of these conversations, including discussions around comped membership for certain volunteers or maybe a rebate-style system. Moving forward though, I'd like us to develop something concrete and actionable that I can clearly advertise as a benefit when recruiting volunteers.

- Meeting everyone in person at convention!
- Watching the bat flight at Wing Night (it was so cool!)
- Getting rained out at OTR then relaxing by the fire pit
- Grabbing pizza for the work weekend and receiving a bunch of warm hugs in return
- Suffering in the heat with Kristine
- Making Bat snacks (aka rice krispies with fun packaging)
- Road Trip bonding with Michelle and Russell!
- Watching the kids run around after our bat wing program project
- Getting a bunch of old maps from Dave and making first graders read them
- Cracking jokes with Bob Roth
- Failing to crack jokes with Ed
- Walking around camp and being invited to watch a silent film edited version of the Star Wars the Empire Strikes Back while eating homemade calzones < Truly an original experience.

