



FY 23 Conservation & Science Operational Plan

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Not Started	In Progress
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Activity	Strategic Goal	Status	Assigned to	Update	Challenges / Opportunities
a	Implement the Nature Preserve online permit system. Complete implementation with remaining preserves in 2025.	3.c.1 Complete	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	All Nature Preserves are live on the new online permit system as of the NCS Convention and we have exceeded 1000 permits issued to date. Most of our preserves are setup for manual approval so our Preserve Managers can communicate with or vet visitors. We continue to tweak the system to tailor it to each preserve, but the process is functional now.	We have received some feedback that automatic approvals for some preserves is better as the permit can be requested and issued same day. We are considering auto approvals for caving at 2 Preserves, but this decision is up to our Preserve Managers and we still provide 24-48 hour turnaround on most permits which is about where we would like to be.
b	Ensure Cave Rescue Plans and Management Plans are in place for all Nature Preserves.	3.c.1 In Progress	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	We continue to work on development of Cave Rescue Plans and Management Plans. All Preserves will have a Cave Rescue Plan completed by the end of the year and last quarter we implemented a new Accident Reporting Protocol to help manage risk.	We will work with each Preserve Manager to document an update Management Plan one by one now that the permit system implementation is complete, but we have been working on this item for several years.
c	Process in place to ensure all property taxes are in place and exemptions are secured where possible.	3.c.1 Complete	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	A spreadsheet was developed with our bookkeeper with all parcel numbers so that we can track receipt and payment each year.	
d	Capture and archive research, media, imagery and publications relating to NSS Nature Preserves.	3.c.1 Ongoing	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	We have made great strides on this since implementation of the permit system and the May NSS News Preserves Special Issue. Several additional photos, cave maps and articles have been collected and stored on our google drive this year. During Convention in NY, we had the opportunity to collect information and maps for their Preserves.	More Preserve Managers are starting to post Preserve related information on the Google drive.
e	Deliver May 2025 issue on NSS Preserves with editors of the News	2.a Complete	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	Huge kudos to the Preserves Committee, the NSS News staff and our Preserve Managers for ensuring that the May 2025 issue was a huge success and well received.	We printed a new hundred extra copies of this issue and left the year on the spine so it is evergreen. We continue to get compliments on the issue and have sent several out to landowners and partners to generate goodwill and promote the Nature Preserves program. Please let us know if you would like to see your name on it.
f	Develop and improve cave management guidance for Preserve Managers as needed (e.g. for Rigging, Survey, Special Use Permits, etc.).	3.c.1 Ongoing	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	We have developed guidance on when Special Use Permits are required at our Preserves (e.g. survey, cave modification) and shared this with managers; it is now in use. We also met with	
g	Evaluate new acquisitions and develop needed documentation for Board approval as the need arises.	3.b Ongoing	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	Several acquisition projects are under review or in process as described at the Convention BoG meeting including projects in New Mexico, Alabama and the Tennessee Familiar's Preserve project. Full details on these projects will be included in the extended report which will be submitted before the next BoG meeting.	Work on the Utah project reported at Convention was halted as the state decided not to sell the cave parcels; however, they agreed to work with the Timpanogos Grotto to investigate the possibility of creating a joint management and access plan. The Preserves Committee is working with Timpanogos to determine the placement of the segment of the Conservation Easement as the
h	Review requests for matching funding for Cave Acquisition Grants by external parties (e.g. conservancies).	3.b Ongoing	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	The Black Hills Cave & Karst Conservancy (BHCNC) was awarded a \$5000 grant toward the purchase of a parcel adjacent to our existing NSS Dahm Springs Nature Preserve. No additional applications have been submitted yet this year.	
i	Implement process to recognize cave landowners through gratis digital NSS News subscription in YM and revamp notification letters.	1.c.3 Ongoing	Landowner Relations Network Committee	The Landowner designation is now setup in YM and can be selected by new and renewing members. New designees (self reported) are reviewed by the Landowner Relations Network Committee (LRNC) to ensure they actually own a cave.	
j	Develop website content for LRNC on good landowner relations, cave management techniques, landowner recognition programs.	2.a Delayed	Landowner Relations Network Committee	Initial content development has begun and a mock up will be reviewed by the LRNC once draft is complete.	This project was delayed as have been several of our webpage projects so far. Emily P. Davis is taking the lead on the WordPress design and initial content for the LRNC. This project will receive more focus in the second half of this year.
k	Continue to monitor landowner relations through a network of local liaisons. Report activity and successes to the BOG.	1.c.3 Quarterly	Landowner Relations Network Committee	The LRNC continues to monitor and foster positive landowner relations. This quarter, the LRNC assisted with communicating with a landowner having issues with a local grotto as well as responding to several inquiries from landowners who either want to have their cave explored or neighbors reporting caves under threat.	Promoting cave conservation ethics and ensuring long term access to private caves is the responsibility of all NSS cavers. We encourage all Grottos to foster good relationships with their local landowners and contact the LRNC should they have issues or need support.
l	Share best practice with Conservancy partners. Implement regular meetings with Conservancy partners and a newsletter if warranted.	3.a Ongoing	Cave Conservancies Committee	The Black Hills Cave & Karst Conservancy (BHCNC) was awarded a \$5000 grant toward the purchase of a parcel adjacent to our existing NSS Dahm Springs Nature Preserve. No additional applications have been submitted yet this year.	
m	Develop Conservancy pages on caves.org that link to Cave Conservancy Partner pages, to promote awareness of these partners with membership.	2.a Delayed	Cave Conservancies Committee	The Conservancy Committee has planned to develop a landing page with a indicative map and links to our Conservancy members.	This project was delayed as have been several of our webpage projects so far. Emily P. Davis is taking the lead on the WordPress design for this page. This project will receive more focus in the second half of this year as time permits.
n	Continue to demonstrate the scientific relevance of NSS Preserves. Monitors preserve science requests from researchers and catalog the findings once researchers have completed a study. Works to work with host sponsors of 2025 and 2027 NCKMS to organize and promote the event	2.c, 4.b Ongoing	Preserves Science Subcommittee	We continue to remind our Preserve Managers via email to submit all research requests to our Preserves Science Subcommittee for approval so we can track progress and collect data and publications afterwards This Subcommittee is reviewing all known projects and soliciting any project updates now.	In the past, several research projects were approved without knowledge of the Preserves Committee or sent to the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) unknowingly, but this is improving. The RAC has agreed to pass all Research Project updates to the Preserves Science Subcommittee as needed.
o		3.a, 3.c In Progress	NCKMS Committee	Ely, NV 2025 NCKMS Registration is LIVE so go register now at https://ely2025.nckms.org/ ! The NSS is sponsoring the event this year by providing promotion in NSS News and member emails; we received three registrations in return which have been given to Committee Chairs in our Division and one to an NSS Preserve Manager.	
p	Award Research Grants (Stone, Small Grants, Young Scientist, Moorehouse)	4.a Ongoing	Research Advisory Committee	Several grant requests have been received this year. The Stone Grant was awarded to Emma Hughes on "Reconstructing Past Sea Level in the Caribbean Sea using Cave Deposits. Additionally small research grants were awarded to Vanderwolf (Environmental reservoirs of Pseudogymnoscus in Canada), Broughton (Mineralogy of microbial deposits in Dark Hole Cave, Alaska) and incubating a membership of cave floor plate research.	
q	NSS Projects Refresh: Create webpage on caves.org, Develop Criteria for Approval, Notify Projects that they need to report annually	4.b In Progress	Research Advisory Committee	The RAC is in the process of notifying all existing projects that they will need to provide annual reports which will be uploaded to caves.org on the new NSS Project page. They also approved a new NSS Project, the Philippines-American Joint Speleological Project.	Once all the NSS Project updates are received we will load them up to a new webpage.
r	Award US Exploration (Sara Corrie) Grants	4.a Ongoing	US Exploration	Several grants have been awarded in this FY including ones to Lee Florea for exploration in Washington; Alex Cantrell for Keystone River Cave, TN; VPI Cave for Williams Cave, VA; Teancum Hadden in Nielsens Well, UT; and to Paul Slayback for Project Alliance.	The Committee would like to request the ability to give a maximum grant of 1000 as currently the max amount we can give is \$1000. The Division Head sees no issue with this as long as the budget for the year is not exceeded. We will review whether BoG approval is required to make this change or not.
s	Award International Exploration Grants	4.a Ongoing	International Exploration	Several grants were awarded this period and full details will be reported in the longer Division report. Current awards include grants to Laura Demarest for the Agoson del Sur Philippines expedition; Dustin Kisner for Stermes, Crete; Tommy Kleckner for continued Exploration in Kucka Korita, Montenegro; Abigail Mack for Cueva Sin Fin, Coahuila, Mexico; and Phillip for Peletothia, Ohio Cave, Ohio, Venezuela; and	
t	Develop supplemental funding protocol for Intl Exploration Grants w/ CCF	4.a Complete	International Exploration	The first supplemental grant has been received.	Special thanks to the Cave Conservancy Foundation (CCF) for supplemental grant support for NSS International Grants. For this grant cycle, the CCF has sent a check for \$5550 to the NSS, making the total funding available and awarded at \$9850.
u	Maintain GIS license to store scientific tabular data, location data, and cave maps submitted to the NSS by partners.	3.c.1 Ongoing	Geospatial Committee	No requests to use this resource at this time. Relicensing for next year will be considered at budgeting time.	

v	Identify and respond to emerging issues relating to biological threats or concerns (e.g. WNS).	2.a, 2.c, Ongoing	Biological Response Committee	No specific issues identified by the Committee this quarter.	
w	Communicate with NSS Members, agencies, and public about issues/threats via caves.org, official letters, BOG reporting, participation in stakeholder committees.	2.a, 2.c, Ongoing	Biological Response Committee	The Committee is meeting regularly and has received a couple notices on delisting of endangered caves species from the Government Liaison Committee. The team will give significant support on the WNS policy review this upcoming quarter.	
x	Refresh the NSS WNS Policy and review with BoG	2.a, 2.c, In Progress	Biological Response Committee	The initial draft of the new WNS policy has been developed and has been shared with several internal and external experts for review.	
y	Develop content and education materials around the CAOTY annually.	2.a Complete	Cave Animal of the Year	The Cave Animal of the Year was selected (2025=Cave Shrimp) and has been communicated in NSS News and online. Promotional stickers were also made and distributed at Convention and ICS in Brazil.	
z	Develop new Science pages on caves.org	2.a, 2.c, In Progress	Cave Science Committee	This small committee has the goal of developing science subpage content on caves.org in conjunction with the major NSS Sections (e.g. Geology, Biology). Work on the biology piece is waiting to be loaded on caves.org.	We now only have one member of this committee, so we need more competent and energetic volunteers for this committee.
aa	Collaborate with Preserves Science Subcommittee on standard research data and opportunities on NSS Preserves	2.c, 4.b Not Started	Cave Science Committee	The committee plans to meet with the Preserves Science Subcommittee on this once their website work is complete.	We now only have one member of this committee, so we need more competent and energetic volunteers for this committee.
ab	Continue to review vandalism reports submitted to the VDC and respond as needed.	2.e Ongoing	Vandalism Deterrence Commission	No vandalism reports received this period.	
ac	Assist with development of modular videos on Conservation & Repair topics. Act as Editor of the Conservation issue of the NSS News.	2.a Not Started	Conservation Committee	The team is still considering development of PPT or videos relating to specific repair techniques.	Our team has not put together a plan to deliver it at this time, but will before end of year.
ad	Develop SOPs for common conservation and repair techniques.	2.a Not Started	Conservation Committee	The Cave Conservation & Restoration tome has extensively documented repair techniques and is available in PDF on caves.org.	We are still considering the necessity and use of additional short form SOPs. Digital format (e.g. the videos already mentioned) may be a more effective means of sharing this information. Still under review at this time.
ae	Revise Minimum Impact Caving guidance as needed.	2.a Delayed	Conservation Committee	No revisions at this time. We also hope to host an NSS Webinar on the guidelines this year or next.	We still need to get the Spanish version translation of the Minimum Impact Caving loaded on caves.org
af	Encourage, involve, document, and network conservation outreach, issues, projects, and progress.	3.a Ongoing	Conservation Committee	Val Hildreth-Werker led the Conservation & Cave Management sessions at Convention and also gave a workshop at ICS in Brazil. The team also receives regular inquiries about speleoethem repair and cave conservation which are responded to upon receipt.	Please let our team know if you hear of any conservation projects needing support!
ag	Review proposals for Save-the Caves grants as received.	4.a Ongoing	Conservation Grants Committee	A grant was given to MCKC for regating of Pleasant Valley Cave, MO in February of this year. No additional grant applications have been received at this time.	
ah	Continue to collate information on regional Conservation activity and solicit reporting on Regional Conservation Activity.	3.a Quarterly	NSS Regional Section Representatives	We continue to collect reporting quarterly. A more detailed report on Regional Conservation activities will be provided to the BoG prior to their next meeting.	
ai	Continue to collate information on regional Conservation activity and solicit reporting from NSS Conservation Task Forces.	3.a Quarterly	NSS Conservation Task Force Representatives	We continue to collect reporting quarterly. A more detailed report on NSS Conservation Task Force activities will be provided to the BoG prior to their next meeting.	
aj	Refresh and publicize online form for tracking Volunteer Value	3.a, 3.c, In Progress	Volunteer Value Committee	The Volunteer Value database has been developed but is still under review with the Conservation Committee. At this point, we plan to promote it once the format and use are finalized.	