

## Conservation & Science Division Highlights:

- Cave Management:
  - The Preserves & Acquisitions Committee instituted a 2nd Preserve Manager All Hands meeting at the request of Managers after the 2025 Convention meeting. This new biannual schedule will improve networking, standardization and information flow.
  - 'Preserve Manager' T-Shirts have been ordered for all the NSS Nature Preserve Managers as recognition for their efforts and our work to improve standard branding across the preserves network. They will be shipped in the next few weeks.
  - The Landowner Relations Network Committee has contacted local media to facilitate local promotion of landowners receiving our NSS Landowner Certificates of Appreciation.
  - The well abandonment project at Shelta Cave is now complete and fence repairs scheduled for March. The team also hosted another Land Trust for Northern Alabama Shelta Cave Day for LTNA members.
  - ATV trespassing issues at the James Gage Nature Preserve have stopped due to the diligence by the Managers and many community partners.
  - The Nature Preserves Committee has implemented a new Surface Only permit for the William J. Stephenson Nature Preserve and will assist the HQ with creating a new permit for NSS HQ Camping to be used by the Office Staff.
  - The NSS defeated approval of a Special Exception Permit for a stormwater management utility adjacent to the Mill Creek Preserve in January 2026. The BoG approved advanced funding for this work from the Litigation to Protect Caves Fund. A Mill Creek Sink Fundraising Campaign launched and was well received by members with \$5553 raised (not including donations sent straight to the Office or via YM). We are monitoring whether the decision of the Planning & Zoning Board will be appealed and will be discussing the potential to place a Conservation Easement on the property with the County.
  - Progress continues on investigation of the potential acquisition of the Royal John Cave Mine in New Mexico and updates were provided to the BoG in closed session at the January 2026 meeting.

- The Cave Conservancy Roundtable held their Winter meeting. Amber Lehmann from the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc., gave an excellent presentation on Fundraising outside of the Caving Community' to ~10 participants from various conservancies. I did not do a great job of publicizing this meeting to membership ahead of time so I will work on improving that for next time.
- Conservation:
  - Val Hildreth-Werker led a Cave Conservation & Restoration webinar for National Caves Association on 2/11 to bring this knowledge to the commercial cave community, with support by Show Caves Liaison Nicole Ridlen.
  - The Conservation Committee is working on development of the April 2026 Conservation NSS News issue.
  - The NCKMS Steering Committee is looking at additional alternatives for the 2027 sponsor. We were working with Mike and Donna Frazier on a Colorado location prior to Mike's untimely death so are looking for backups now.
  - Videography resources have been identified for the Speleothem Repair Conservation Committee Video for the NSS YouTube channel.
  - The Conservation Committee is supporting a tribal Rockshelter conservation assessment in AZ in partnership with Archaeology Southwest, Cave Gators and ACCA.
  - The Conservation Committee and Division Head have finalized a proposal for a Wikicaves/GrottoCenter intern to make modifications to the platform to improve the ability for the US to manage visibility of cave data. This project is included in the FY26-27 budget.
- Cave Science:
  - Applications were accepted for the Cave Science Department Head through February and we will announce internally in the next two weeks. Priorities for this Department will include developing documentation for several of the Department's Committees and increasing our volunteer base significantly.
  - Beginning conversation of American Geoscience Institute's Earth Science Week 2026. We developed a poster as part of support for Earth Science Week 2025's theme of Energy Resources for the Future on 'Lava Tubes' which was shared across 5 platforms (Instagram, Facebook, X / Twitter, LinkedIn and

BlueSky) during Hawai'i Cave Week in January 2026. The [Instagram post](#) received 2101 views, 39 clicks, 103 likes.

- Cave Animal of the Year 2026 is the Slimy Salamander and will be announced in the April NSS News. New Cave Preservation Network bracelets with a salamander on them were designed and are now in stock in the bookstore ahead of the announcement.
- Our IT team intends to help build a template for the new NSS Projects webpage in the next month.
- International Grants awarded 3 grants this period to Abigail Mack for Oaxaca/Chiapas, Kyle Voyles for the Belize Monkey Bay Project, and Shane Fryer for another NSS-Vietnam expedition to Lang Son Geoprovince.
- The Division Head and several volunteers supported the Alabama STEM Festival activities at the Headquarters
- The new Dr. Albert and Ethel Ogden Geosciences Research Fellowship Fund with the NSF has been fully approved and will be promoted internally this Spring. Many thanks to Dr. Odgen for his continued generosity to the NSS and commitment to cave science research.



FY 25-26 Conservation & Science Operational Plan C

Status Color Legend & Toggle

Not Started	In Progress			Custom 3	Custom 4
ON	ON			ON	ON

Activity	Strategic Goal Addressed	Status	Assigned to	Update	Challenges / Opportunities	Estimated Cost	YTD Actual Cost	DEPARTMENT	Comments	
<b>EXPENSES</b>										
a	Implement the Nature Preserve online permit system. Complete implementation with remaining preserves in 2025.	3.c.1	In Progress	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	Complete with 681 permits approved and 4345 visitors since start of system use in 2024. Additional statistics on permits to date shared with Annette.	System is fully in use by all preserves. We continue to modify information in the system as needed. Preserve Managers have asked for creation of an annual permit for frequent visitors, but we will continue to	\$0	\$0.00	Cave Management	+ \$2500 budgeted for Division discretionary (YTD spent \$0)
b	Ensure Cave Rescue Plans and Management Plans are in place for all Nature Preserves.	3.c.1	In Progress	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	Reviewed this request with the Preserves Managers at 2025 Convention and February 2026 meeting.	Some Nature Preserves are still working on Management Plans and Rescue Plans. The Preserves Committee continues to update Plans as needed and work with Managers on all outstanding plans section by	\$28,600	\$14,497.45	Cave Management	+ \$3800 legal fees for Mills Creek Sink
e	Deliver May 2025 issue on NSS Preserves with editors of the News	2.a	In Progress	Nature Preserves & Acquisitions Committee	Complete.	Well received and inventory is being used as a promotional material for the Nature Preserve program with landowners and partners.	\$0	\$0.00	Cave Management	
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	New Special Use Permit requirements and Permit System FAQ completed and shared with all Preserve Managers.	The Committee continues to remind Managers to submit Preserves Science Research requests for all research taking place on an NSS Preserve - compliance is improving.	\$0	\$0.00	Cave Management	
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	Office has assisted us with ensuring that all Landowners have the correct LO code in YM.	We continue to send Landowner Certificates of Appreciation to all NSS member landowners.	\$740	\$327.03	Cave Management	
j	Develop website content for LRNC on good landowner relations, cave management techniques, landowner recognition programs.	2.a	Ongoing	Landowner Relations Network Committee	Delayed.	Content is being developed now and will work with new Website design volunteers to load onto caves.org as soon as practicable, attempting to complete by end of FY. This page is #2 on our Division webpage priority	\$600	\$0.00	Cave Management	NSS Convention fees - paid out of 2025 Convention budget
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	Continuing to connect landowners to cavers, grottos and LRNC teammates.	The HQ Office and Board have been super this year about sending online and local requests to the LRNC.	\$0	\$0.00	Cave Management	
l	Share best practice with Conservancy partners. Implement regular meetings with Conservancy partners and a newsletter if warranted.	3.a	In Progress	Cave Conservancies Committee	Two Conservancy Roundtables completed this year - at the June Convention with a presentation by NSS Group Conservation Awardee Northeastern Cave Conservancy	No newsletter requested but we share resources and presentations to our Conservancy Committee listserv as needed.	200	\$0.00	Cave Management	
m	Develop Conservancy pages on caves.org that link to Cave Conservancy Partner pages, to promote awareness of these partners with membership.	2.a	Ongoing	Cave Conservancies Committee	Delayed.	We do not have a template landing page where we will add a map of US Conservancies and links to their webpage yet, but this page is #4 on the Division priority list.	\$0	\$0.00	Cave Management	
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	2.c, 4.b	Ongoing	Preserves Science Subcommittee	The Preserves Science Subcommittee has contacted all known research leads/PIOs to ensure they have completed the Preserves Research Permit approval form and submitted	We will continue to socialize this requirement with Preserve Managers in the coming year.	\$1,000	\$0.00	Cave Management	
aa	Collaborate with Preserves Science Subcommittee on standard research data and opportunities on NSS Preserves	2.c, 4.b	Not Started	Cave Science Committee	Delayed.	Team members on the Cave Science Committee have been busy with other priorities and have not connected yet with the Preserves Science Subcommittee. We expect this engagement to restart with appointment	\$0.00	\$0.00	Cave Science	
ac	Assist with development of modular videos on Conservation & Repair topics. Act as Editor of the Conservation issue of the NSS News.	2.a	In Progress	Conservation Committee	Started but progress is slow. First topics will be introduction to Speleothem Repair and Minimum Impact Guidelines	The Conservation Committee has been found resources to assist with this work, but videography has not yet commenced. Will kick this task to FY 26-27 if need be.	\$2,000.00	\$94.38	Conservation	
ad	Develop SOPs for common conservation and repair techniques.	2.a	Not Started	Conservation Committee	Delayed.	Work has not started on this task due to competing priorities, mainly reactive response and management of incoming Conservation requests to this team. Need a volunteer to assist!	\$65.00	\$0.00	Conservation	
aj	Refresh and publicize online form for tracking Volunteer Value	3.a, 3.c.2, 2.b	In Progress	Volunteer Value Committee	Delayed.	The online form has been created, but the Conservation Committee has not finished final review and promoted to membership.	\$0.00	\$0.00	Conservation	
<b>INCOME</b>										
t	Develop supplemental funding protocol for Intl Exploration Grants w/ CCF	4.a	Complete	International Exploration	Completed.		\$0	\$5,550.00	Cave Science	
	Preserve donations						-	-		