

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.