

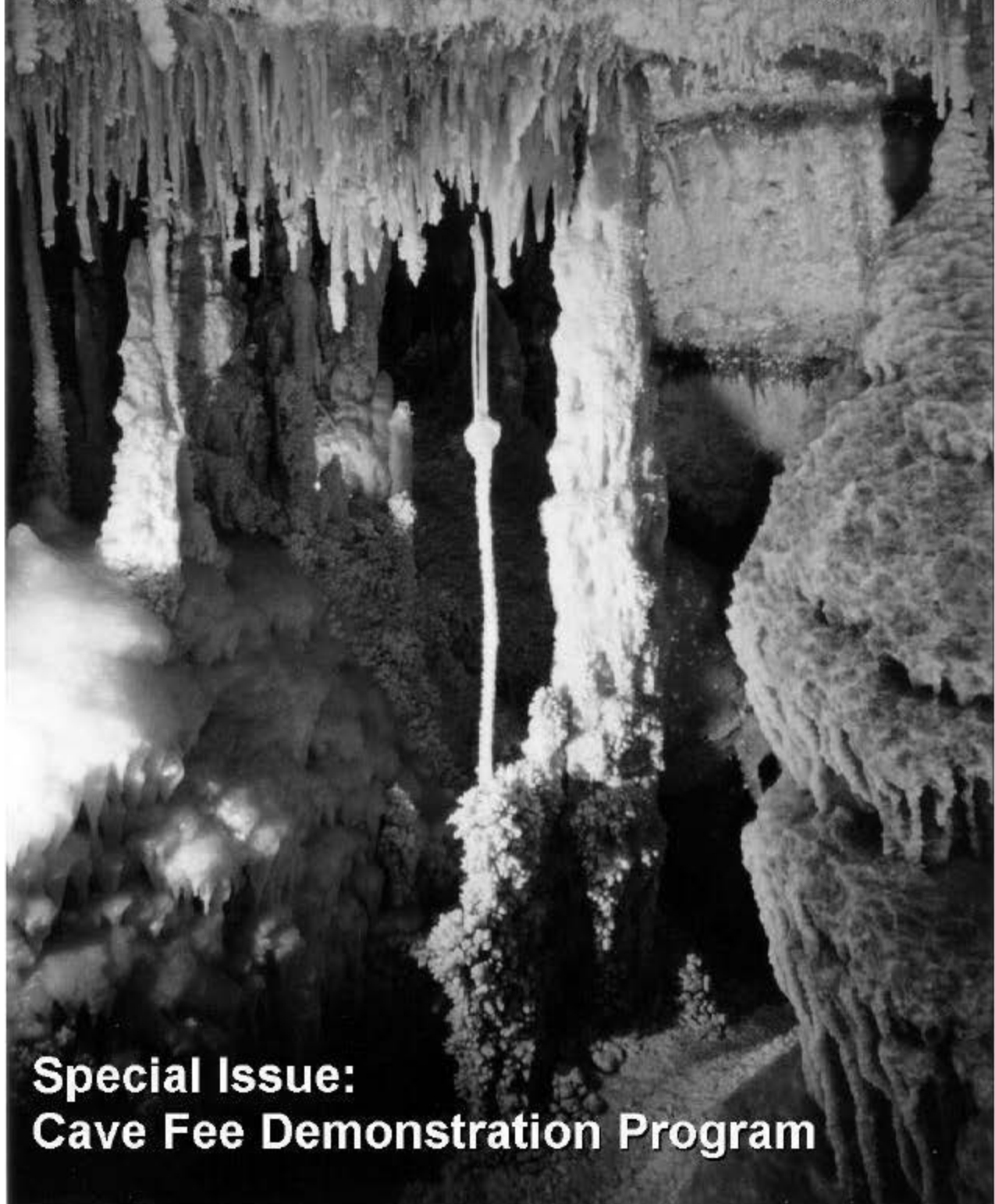
THE MAVERICK BULL

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF THE MAVERICK GROTTO



Volume 10, Issue 6

June 1997



**Special Issue:
Cave Fee Demonstration Program**

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The Maverick Bull is the monthly newsletter of The Maverick Grotto, an internal organization of The National Speleological Society (NSS G-322). The editor invites all individuals and other grottos to submit articles, news, maps, cartoons, art and photographs. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed stamped envelope should accompany it.

Reprinting Articles: Internal organizations of The National Speleological Society may reprint any item (unless copyrights belong to the author as stated in the byline) first appearing in *The Maverick Bull* if proper credit is given and a complete copy of the publication is delivered to the editor at the time of publication. Other organizations should contact the editor of *The Maverick Bull* at the address herein.

Exchanges: The Maverick Grotto will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact the editor.

Complementary Newsletters: The Maverick Grotto will provide complementary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The

Maverick Grotto will provide one free issue to persons interested in becoming members.

Subscription Rates: Subscription rates are \$15.00 per year for non-members and free for members.

Membership Policy: Any individual with interests, beliefs and actions consistent with the purposes of The Maverick Grotto and The National Speleological Society is eligible for membership. Acceptance of new members is based on payment of dues and a mandatory three trip requirement with at least three different grotto members. These three members shall act as sponsors. At least one sponsor must attend the meeting at which the membership vote is taken. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present will be required for acceptance.

Meetings: Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 E. Lancaster, Fort Worth. It is located less than one mile west of Loop 820 and next to K-Mart. The time is 7:00 p.m., and the food is good.

Carbide: Grotto carbide is available at the meeting if prior arrangements are made. Carbide is free for the asking. Contact Russell Hill at 220-

7108 or Butch Fralia at 346-2039 for more information.

Library: Support your Grotto Library. Russell Hill will be accepting books and magazines on cave-related topics, copies of homemade cave videos, etc. for our library. We wish to thank Russell for his efforts each month to bring and set up the Grotto Library.

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This month's cover photo was taken in Caverns of Sonora by Shanon Seals

Other Credits

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Visit Our Web Site

The *Maverick Bull* is available as a World Wide Web site at: <http://users.why.net/caver/bull/>

Minutes for the May Meeting

Maverick Grotto May 13, 1997

The May meeting began at approximately 7 p.m. The business portion of the meeting was called to order shortly after 7:30 by Grotto Chairman John Langevin.

Visitors

Wayne Peblinski from Ft. Worth
Chris and Steve Yarborough from Galveston

Announcements

Spring party went well.
Dave Milhollin announced a cave diving class at the end of May in

Cozumel as well as a bus trip to Panama City.

Officers' Reports

None.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Chad Fenner proposed, at the request of Dave Milhollin, that the grotto develop some brochures to hand out when someone requests information. A couple of ideas were proposed including a tri-fold 8.5x11 style as well as an insert for the

current NSS brochure. Chad volunteered to work up the ideas.

The idea of setting up a beginner trip was introduced

Trip Reports

John Langevin took some explorers to Arkansas.

Butch Fralia wants to return to his potential dig site with the necessary tools to open it up.

The meeting closed and was followed by this month's program, which was a video on Belize Caves.

Editor's Ramblings

Happy June!

A couple of weeks ago, I received a letter from the National Forest Service, introducing their "Cave Fee Demonstration Program." I had heard rumors that the program was under consideration and had even noted some debate over the subject in the caving electronic media.

Since I didn't have a lot of material this month, it seemed a good idea to publish the letter, along with its attachments.

As I researched the topic a bit, I found quite a bit of material on the subject, from the original USFS proposal to the official NSS response.

Since the Lincoln National Forest is

one of the favorite caving spots for many North Texas cavers, it seemed this issue needed to be addressed in full. I didn't print everything I found, but I think I covered all the bases.

Now I may get blasted for this, but, I personally am not as opposed to the idea of permit fees as the NSS line is. Don't get me wrong, Dave Jagnow made several good points that need to be addressed, and I like the alternate proposal a lot, AND I have grown quite comfortable with the idea of permits for free. On the other hand, I don't believe that it is the government's responsibility to cover the costs of my hobby, and I recognize that our government has to cut its budget somewhere. I also see

other friends who have to pay a fee for their fishing and hunting licenses, for their camping sites, and even their boat permits. Why should my hobby be free?

But don't just take my line. And don't just take the government line and don't even take the NSS line. Read all the sides and points and counterpoints and make up your own mind. I've tried to cover all sides to be fair about it.

That's what makes our society great.

Good Caving.

CF

June Meeting

This month's meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 10 at Smokey's Ribs, 5300 E. Lancaster, at 7 p.m.

This month's program was not available at press time. I'm sure something will come together, and

that it will be interesting. Join us for good food and good cave talk.

Grotto Web Site Changes

The URL for the grotto website has changed. Note that I didn't say moved. I stayed the same, but my Internet Service Provider changed how personal web site are accessed. The new URL is:
<http://users.why.net/caver/bull>

The following stories consist of the United States Forest Service's proposal to initiate a Cave Fee Demonstration Program, followed by a response from Dave Jagnow, NSS Conservation Chairman, a call to action by the NSS Ad Hoc Cave Fees Committee, and a counter-proposal by "the cavers of the Southwest." Finally, I have reprinted the USFS package recently mailed out to recent cave permit holders. Much of this has been either sent to me, posted as open letters to all cavers, submitted to Cavers Digest, or can be found on the NSS Cave Conservation and Management Section Web Site at:

<http://www.wingedseed.com/samara/nssccms/>

Southwest Cave Fee Demonstration Project

JANUARY 29, 1997

Paper prepared by USFS in Southern New Mexico

SHARED VISION

To provide a high quality experience in world class wild caves by developing a world class wild cave management program of excellence, wherein unique cave ecosystems are protected and owner public opportunities are accommodated. This program of excellence will be achieved by innovative methods of collaborative stewardship, research, education, interpretation, restoration and protection to enhance our unique, sensitive cave ecosystems.

CURRENT STATUS

The current ability to manage the cave resource is unacceptable. The lack of budget resources (financial) will result in the degradation of the unique sensitive cave ecosystems. Access and recreation opportunities could be diminished.

FEE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Agency cave managers of the Southwest Region, USDA Forest Service, held a meeting January 29,

1997 in Alamogordo, NM., to address the current proposal for a Fee Demonstration Project on the Lincoln National Forest. This meeting was designed as a strategy session to provide opportunity to review various options for implementing the cave fee demonstration project. Since the initial proposal was approved as one of the 50 Forest Service projects, opportunities to implement the project on a different scale was a viable alternative that needed discussion.

In attendance were: Brent Botts, Jeff Saari, Buddy Stewart (Southwest Regional Office) Johnny Wilson, Mike Baca, Ransom Turner, Richard Carlson, Merle Glenn (Lincoln N.F.) Pat Spoerl, Jeanne Wade, Jerry Trout (Coronado N.F.) Paul Happel (BLM).

Initial discussion created general guidelines the group felt would be necessary for the fee demonstration project, regardless of the specific implementation process that is developed.

1. Protection of all unique, sensitive cave ecosystems.
2. Economic viability.
3. Enhance volunteer collaborative stewardship and customer service.
4. Fulfill the mission of cave ecosystem management direction.
5. Protect the integrity of scientific cave research opportunities.

Within the above guidelines, a cave fee demonstration program would benefit the management of cave resources in a number of ways:

1. Fees would be returned directly to the local unit of the fee demonstration project. A minimum of 80% of the money would be available for enhancement, protection, restoration, and management of these caves. An additional 15% may be retained to offset the administrative cost of collecting the money.

2. There is no existing funding for cave management in the Forest Service. Most funds for cave resources currently come from

Recreation Management. This project would provide a separate funding for just the management of caves.

3. The Forest Service has made a commitment to Congress to carry out a cave fee demonstration project. By using the guidelines presented earlier, we have the opportunity to enhance the importance of this valuable resource.

4. This is a demonstration project that gives us the chance to explore new and innovative ways to fund cave management and we should take advantage of the opportunity.

5. Only the caves that we identify as part of the demonstration project will be available to receive the benefits of any fees collected. By involving other Forest Service units, we have the opportunity to select specific caves that may be better suited to a certain fee opportunity i.e.: horizontal caves, or gated caves.

6. Volunteer efforts are essential to Forest Service cave management and will continue to be of fundamental importance to the program.

Work that provides for restoration, mapping, monitoring, etc. of caves will be subject to a fee waiver.

Various alternatives for the cave fee demonstration program were discussed:

1. Permit Fees (Single, Group, Annual, Semi-Annual, etc.)
2. Guided Tours (Forest Service, Volunteer, Contracted)
3. Donations
4. Memorandums and Agreements
5. Non-Profit Associations
6. Adopt-A-Project or other volunteer programs.

After the benefits of each of these alternatives were discussed, the group decided that all of these tools could be used within the SW Cave Fee Demo Project. It would be left to each National Forest to decide which cave to include in the program and which alternative or alternatives would be best to use for certain caves.

The Lincoln National Forest and Coronado National Forest agreed to

brief the grottos in their area before the end of February. Comments from these meetings would be used to shape the overall SW Fee Demonstration Project. On March 13, 1997, the agency group will meet again to determine the specific caves to include in the program, appropriate fees and other aspects of project participation. A business plan describing the operation of the project and proposed use of fees will then be developed and shared with the caving community.

Response by Dave Jagnow, NSS Conservation Chairman

RE: USFS Cave Fee Demo

Dear Mr. Wilson:

In anticipation of your meeting in Alamogordo, NM, on Wednesday, January 29, 1997 to discuss the Cave Fee Demo proposal, I would like to take this opportunity to express my concerns. I wrote a similar letter to John L. Conner, Lincoln National Forest District Ranger, on November 8, 1995, and will enclose a copy of that letter for your review.

On behalf of the National Speleological Society I want to express our strong opposition to the Forest Service charging cave entry fees anywhere in the country. We are sympathetic with the declining budgets of our Federal Agencies that manage our cave resources, but suggest there are other means of accomplishing the tasks at hand.

Thank you for hosting the public meeting in Carlsbad on September 9, 1995, to receive input from the caving community. I heard very favorable reports that our alternative suggestions were well received by the Forest Service. I hope you truly heard at that meeting that the cavers are opposed to the cave user fees as proposed — that is why we suggested several alternatives.

REASONS FOR OPPOSITION:

The primary reasons for our opposition are: 1) The collection of cave entry fees is often not cost effective. 2) The Forest Service increases their liability. 3) Cave entry fees tend to alienate the cavers rather than encourage volunteerism.

Concerning cost effectiveness, I'm sure you can come up with a program that is much more cost effective than the original program proposed by the BLM that stood to lose \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year. We would certainly like to see 100% of the monies collected going directly to cave management.

Concerning liability, the comment recorded at the public meeting was that "We don't know if there is increased liability." I have about 27 pages of letters and court cases that indicate that exposure to liability does increase by charging cave entry fees. I would be happy to provide you copies of the findings of the National Speleological Society concerning charging cave fees. Please consider this increase in liability very seriously. The BLM (Las Cruces District) is currently facing a \$3 million lawsuit over the accidental death of Leland Smith in Caballo Cave on February 5, 1994. The funding alternatives we discussed on September 9, 1995, do not increase your liability.

Perhaps my greatest fear is that cave fees will alienate the cavers rather than encourage volunteerism. Therefore, I encourage you to discuss in detail what you hope to accomplish by the funds collected from cave entry fees. Instead of alienating the cavers, I encourage you to work closely with this conservation-minded group. We are eager and willing to spend hundreds of man-hours each year to survey, photograph, restore and protect our fragile cave resources. Now is the time to encourage volunteerism. There are federal funds available for just such programs -- funds that do not come out of your budget. The Forest Service does not have enough employees to accomplish all

that should be done to protect our caves. The way to accomplish your goals is to work closely with the dozens of cavers who would love to assist you in meeting those goals.

SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES:

The following are some of the suggestions mentioned at the USFS Scoping meeting held in Carlsbad on September 9, 1995:

- 1) Submit project plans to Southwest Region Grottos that are willing to do the specific project. (Jim Werker has done this with Jerry Trout in Arizona, and sometimes matching funds are available from the Feds.)
- 2) Reward volunteers. Publicly recognize the services of volunteers and access federal volunteer funds to help pay for gas and other trip expenses. Such funds would not come out of that district's budget.
- 3) Adopt the program established by Jerry Trout in Coronado National Forest in Arizona. Cavers pay a deposit of \$30 to obtain the key to the cave lock. When they return the key, they have the option of 1) having the Forest Service destroy their check, or 2) they can contribute the money 100% toward cave management. Ninety percent of the cavers have been donating these funds, which are used 100% to maintain the cave resources.
- 4) Adopt a Project/ Adopt a Cave — Grottos could volunteer to police certain caves or caving areas (like all the caves on Pink Ridge), being responsible for maintaining the gates, laying out trails, repairing broken speleothems, restoring muddied areas, and they may want to actually "lead" trips into the caves they monitor.

CONCLUSIONS: Several years ago, the Forest Service lost a lot of volunteers over a simple matter of charging a fee for camping at a goat roast. Please don't make this mistake again to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars of contributed time and materials to protect and manage our

caves. Our caves are too precious to make this mistake again.

- 1) I request that the Forest Service perform a cost analysis of whatever program you decide to use. Any program must be cost effective.
- 2) I request that the Forest Service obtain a written opinion from your solicitors concerning changes to your liability by charging cave fees.
- 3) I would also like to know if you annually write a summary of the Forest Volunteer Programs. I have in front of me a copy of the (BLM) FY 1996 Cave Program Summary that annually states the name of the volunteer (or organization), FY 96 Hours (worked as a volunteer), BLM Benefit (in \$), BLM Cost (in \$), and Activities (brief description of all activities). I assume you compile a similar comparison of all volunteer groups that work in the Forest. It is interesting to note that in 1995, the BLM Cave program had \$112,575 of value from the volunteers. And during 1996, when the BLM was considering charging cave fees, the value dropped to \$48,491 -- a 57% drop in volunteer value from cavers!

It is also important to note that in the BLM Roswell District, cavers volunteer more than twice as much time and value as the nearest other volunteer groups (including Range, Recreation, Wilderness, Wildlife, Law Enforcement, Minerals, Administration, and Raps). Cavers are a dedicated group. I encourage you to utilize our abilities, rather than alienating this group by charging cave fees.

Cave Softly, and Leave No Trace!
Dave Jagnow, NSS #8177 NSS
Conservation Chairman

NSS Ad Hoc Cave Fees Committee Call to Action

May 1997

To: All Cavers
From: The NSS Ad Hoc Cave Fees
Committee

Urgent. We need help from cavers across the nation. The USDA Forest Service has proposed fees for caves in New Mexico and Arizona. If implemented, fee strategies will soon be proposed for caves on other federal lands throughout the country.

Cavers and others who appreciate no-fee access to America's backcountry and wilderness should respond to the cave fee demo with complete opposition. Time is short. Distribute enclosed petitions and send letters now. Letters should emphasize NO FEES. "Maybe" will become a vote of yes and support in government tally systems; thus, say NO and courteously ask questions.

Volume of response through Congress is essential. Everyone has two US Senators and a US Representative in the House. They want your vote and votes from people you know. Stacks of letters about caves can impact the outcome of cave fees. Work the system. It is worth our effort.

Caves on the Lincoln National Forest of New Mexico and caves on the Coronado National Forest of Arizona are targeted as fee sites in a USDA Forest Service Recreational Fee Demonstration Project. Cave fee demos are scheduled to start during the summer of 1997. Write Congressional Inquiries and send copies to personnel in the Forest Service. Letters sent before June 13 will have immediate impact.

Information on the following pages is intended to:

Suggest format and questions for your letters to Congress.

List addresses.

Clearly state why we are opposed to

cave fees.

Provide background on cave fee issues and the Cave Fee Demo Project.

Describe our Alternative Proposal: Volunteer Service and Donation Demo Project.

Act now. In order to succeed in refuting the concept of cave fees on federal lands. We must all clearly state NO FEES, voice opposition, and ask questions. Cavers in the Southwest are offering an ALTERNATIVE to the collection of cave fees. An NSS Conservation Task Force is trying to work with Forest Service officials to implement a demo plan based on volunteer contributions of expertise, skill, time, supplies, and labor to support cave management on forest lands. This alternative proposal offered by cavers includes monetary support through donations.

The not-for-profit Task Force is willing to actively pursue donations and grants from individuals, foundations, corporations, and agencies to support and enhance the conservation goals of USDA Forest Service cave management. If the alternative proposal is adopted, one hundred percent of donated funds will go directly to cave conservation.

It is not in the best interest of the USDA Forest Service, the federal government, the public, or the future of America's non-renewable resources to charge fees for wild caves on federal lands.

Please take a few minutes to write Congress. We have made it easy for you; read further for a sample letter and questions. Feel free to use anything written here to quickly compose your own congressional inquiry. Thanks; your letter will help.

Request additional facts, background, and new information from werks@worldnet.att.net

More info also on NSS Conservation and Management Web Site or Rob Stitt's Home Page

**CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY
LETTERS**

Here is a simple strategy for a successful letter to your US Senators and Representatives.

Ask questions to make your letter a Congressional Inquiry, more than a statement of opposition.

Make your letter count by saying NO to fees, not maybe.

Feel free to copy and use anything in this document.

1. First, state the issue and clearly identify that you are opposed to cave fees.
2. Emphasize that caves should NOT be managed as recreational resources.
3. Ask specific questions. Ask for statistics and documentation.
4. Request that they answer your questions.

Piles of letters on government desks will demand attention. Copy to several Congressional and Forest Service names because correspondence can get lost.

Copies of letters and petitions will be kept on file for upcoming cave negotiations. E-mail copies to: werks@worldnet.att.net

Snail mail copies to: CAVES, PO Box 1018, Tijeras, NM 87059

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Senator _____: OR Dear Representative _____:

I OPPOSE the USDA Forest Service plan to implement cave fees. Caves are uniquely fragile and non-renewable when compared to renewable surface resources.

Caves should not be managed as recreational resources.

A new management category should be developed for caves. New federal management codes should emphasize the irreplaceable resources within most caves.

Caves offer a wealth of scientific resources. Scientists are currently seeking a cure for cancer using rare microbes that are found only in cave pools. Caves are easily damaged and often harbor non-renewable features. Caves often provide habitat for threatened and endangered species. Caves provide tangible laboratories for geologists and hydrologists. Cultural remains are

preserved in caves. If carefully managed, cave ecosystems will reveal future answers for science and human health.

The USDA Forest Service has proposed a recreational cave fee demonstration project. If fees are charged, federal business and marketing plans will require undeveloped caves to be advertised as sources for recreational revenue. Instead, recreation seekers should be directed to the many commercial caves that are equipped for the ever-increasing traffic and liability created by recreational visitors. Federal agencies should not promote visits to non-renewable cave resources and should not market Adventure Tours in fragile environments. Fees will not serve to protect caves, but rather, will invite increased impact and increased liability to the federal government.

Wild caves, gated and ungated, on federal lands should be managed as unique, non-renewable resources. Caves should not be exploited, overused, or destroyed for the sake of recreational revenue.

Your prompt reply is requested. The public comment period has not been well-defined to us. As your constituent, I appreciate your attention in this matter of conserving America's irreplaceable cave resources.

Address
City, State, ZIP CODE
e-mail

Alternative Proposal: Volunteer Service and Donation Demo

The cavers of the Southwest propose to form a non-profit South Western Cave Conservation Task Force (SWCCTF). This Conservation Task Force (CTF) has already been approved, in concept, by the NSS Conservation Chairman.

- A. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of the SWCCTF is to assist the USFS Southwestern Region (Region 3) in planning and reaching mutual cave management goals by providing (coordinating) qualified volunteers, additional monetary contributions (100% toward cave resources), and supplies to better manage all caves on Forest lands, especially at this time of dwindling federal budgets.
- B. **EXPERTISE:** In a cooperative effort as outlined in the national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the National Speleological Society (NSS) and the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Service), the SWCCTF agrees to provide caver volunteers having knowledge and skills that can help the Service carry out its mission. That expertise includes, but is not limited to, development of cave management plans, inventory of cave resources, installation and maintenance of cave gates and signs, monitoring of visitor use, conducting information and education programs, providing surveying and cartographic assistance, providing administrative support for cave resource programs, conducting cave cleanup and restoration programs, conducting research on caves and cave resources, and development of cave search and rescue plans.
- C. **AGREEMENT:** The SWCCTF and Service will mutually develop some form of working agreement for use at the regional level. These possibilities include volunteer agreements, special use permits, MOU, Participating Agreements, or combinations of the above. SWCCTF has already worked up a draft MOU for possible discussion.
- D. **NON-PROFIT STATUS:** All NSS CTFs qualify for Section 501c(3) non-profit status under the NSS non-profit umbrella. An alternative is to set up a "designated fund" within the

NSS, which could accept tax-deductible contributions on behalf of the SWCCTF. Whichever way we proceed, SWCCTF can receive tax-deductible contributions that can go 100% to the cave resources, since our "staff" is entirely volunteers.

- E. GOALS: The SWCCTF plans to work in close cooperation with the Service to establish mutually agreeable annual and long-term goals of work that needs to be accomplished to manage and enhance the cave resources. Upon establishing those goals, the SWCCTF will organize volunteer labor (expertise), monetary contributions, and supplies in a cooperative effort to help accomplish those cave management goals. Our focus should be to accomplish the tasks described in the annual and long-term goals, NOT on a monetary value. In the process, SWCCTF intends to monitor and provide a detailed accounting of personnel, in-cave hours, travel hours, total hours, mileage of each vehicle, personal expenses (meals, cave food, batteries, supplies, etc.), project expenses (film, processing, cartographic supplies, etc.), administrative time (report writing and map drafting), administrative expenses (copying reports, mailing cost, etc.). SWCCTF will provide an estimated valuation of the volunteer projects in Service caves. With the full cooperation of both organizations, we believe we can provide many times the fee value in the form of volunteer value for both New Mexico and Arizona caves annually.
- F. MANAGEMENT TEAM: The SWCCTF will be managed by majority vote of representatives from each grotto or caving organization within New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and Colorado, that is actively caving and providing volunteer services on the Service lands of New Mexico and Arizona. Other

representatives may be included on the management team by majority vote. SWCCTF meetings will be open to the public, and cavers shall be encouraged to join the organization through an annual dues contribution.

- G. CONTACT PERSON: Good, two-way communications and consultation are essential in partnerships. Actions by either party which affect cave resource management will follow this principle. SWCCTF and the Service shall each appoint a specific contact person to promote better communications.
- H. ANNUAL REPORT: SWCCTF shall publish an annual report that showcases all contributions, supplies, and volunteer projects in progress or accomplished the preceding year. Each project will provide an end-of-the-year status report, and summarize contributions (as outlined above). The Annual Report will contain photographs of many of the projects and volunteers, and will be published jointly as a cooperative effort between SWCCTF and the Service.
- I. FUND-RAISING: SWCCTF intends to solicit funds from foundations, agencies, and organizations that currently do not fund federal/state projects. Thus, we intend to tap new sources of revenue for cave management. The SWCCTF shall also accept any available federal funding to further the purposes of this Agreement.
- J. WEB SITE: SWCCTF will maintain a web site that provides the history and purpose of the CTF. The web site will also serve as the primary information point for current and future project proposals and agency or volunteer contact information.
- K. SEARCH & RESCUE: SWCCTF and the Service will jointly develop search & rescue plans for each significant Service cave.
- L. DURATION: By developing a spirit of cooperation through the

national MOU and the SWCCTF, we trust that this Volunteer Service Project will endure much longer than three years. The cooperative efforts of the SWCCTF and the Service should provide training for future generations of cave volunteers and cave scientists. It is hoped that this CTF and the Service will work together to implement a national prototype for cooperative resource management in answer to congressional mandates, presidential requests for volunteers, and federal budget resolutions.

(Editors note: The referenced web site has been set up at: <http://www.caver.net/swcctf/swcctf.htm>)

(Editors note: The remainder of this piece is a letter, along with several attachments, sent by the USFS to me. I assume I was sent a copy because I have requested permits from the Lincoln National Forest in the past. It does, in part, respond to some of the questions posed in the previous 3 stories. -CF)

USFS Letter

May 4, 1997

Dear Friends of the Forest Service:

National Forest caves are very special places. I feel the best way to ensure a healthy, protected future for our caves is for us to work together. We now have a chance to test a program that further opens the door for collaborative stewardship. Congress has given us a remarkable opportunity to contribute to the care of our National Forest caves through a new recreation fee demonstration program; instituted and directed by legislation in 1996.

The Lincoln and Coronado National Forests were recently given approval to test this program by establishing a user fee system for cave entry permits on these two Forests. Your help is needed to determine the

feasibility and the benefits that can come from participating in the fee demonstration program at the caves. Unlike current fees, which are returned to the U.S. Treasury, 95 percent of the funds collected through this program will be kept, and invested in maintenance, protection, interpretation and visitor education for these world class caves.

Public comment on the Cave Fee Demonstration Program will be accepted through June 13, 1997. Please address your comments to Johnny Wilson, Recreation Staff Officer at 1101 New York Avenue, Alamogordo, NM 88310-6992, or E-mail to fswa/s=J.Wilson/oul=RO3fO8A@mhs.attmail.com: x400. More detailed information about the Cave Fee Demonstration Program is enclosed for your review. Please let us know if you would like a copy of the Business Plan when it is completed.

In addition to the care and keeping of the Lincoln and Coronado caves, there are reasons why we should consider participation in the demonstration fee program for other areas of the Forests. Our visitors are witnessing a slow deterioration in Forest conditions. They see roads and trails in need of maintenance, signs riddled with bullet holes and graffiti, and trash in our streams. They are concerned that our staff has been reduced to the point that we can no longer prevent vandalism to our unique natural wonders, offer the quality service our customers have come to expect, nor keep up with the growing demand for recreational activities. I share these concerns and have a sense of dread when I realize we cannot meet these needs within our current budgets. There is no more money in Washington DC to send to the Lincoln and Coronado National Forests.

You can help decide where we could benefit the most from other demonstration fee programs and where to invest revenue from the fees. I am personally committed to working with you to make this

program effective and will address issues that arise during implementation. We will be asking members of the public to monitor the success of the program and to suggest areas for improvement.

Asking you to pay to use your National Forests is a new way of doing business that may be difficult to accept. However, it may be more difficult to accept the alternative of allowing your Forests to continue to decline. When you pay a demonstration recreation fee, I hope you will see it as an investment in the kind of Forests you would like to have for your children.

Working together we can achieve positive, successful results to the changes, opportunities, and challenges of Forest management. As a step toward this goal, I urge you to study and comment on the proposed fee demonstration program for the caves on the Lincoln and Coronado National Forests.

Sincerely;

Jose M. Martinez
Forest Supervisor

Attachment 1

Fact Sheet on the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program

WHAT is the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program?

It is a trial program based on legislation (PL 104-134) passed by the U.S. Congress in 1996. Congress has given direction and authority to federal land management agencies, including the USDA Forest Service, to test the feasibility of cost recovery using a recreational user fees program.

WHY did Congress initiate this pilot fee program?

The demand for outdoor recreational activities on federal lands is increasing while

management dollars are declining. Revenues from user fees will help cover costs for the management and maintenance of recreation sites as well as habitat improvement projects.

HOW is a recreation site chosen to be a pilot fee area?

All recreation sites where fee demonstrations are initiated go through an extensive proposal and approval process which includes seeking public comment and encouraging public involvement.

HOW will the fees be used?

The Recreational Fee Demonstration Program legislation authorizes 80% of the money to be used to administer, protect, operate and maintain the site where it is collected. The remaining twenty percent is available for use at other Forest Service fee demo program locations.

WHO will pay the fees?

Those who recreate at the designated/approved demonstration sites will pay the fees, (An example of the adage, "Pay where you play.") Charging user fees does not affect, nor change the Forest Service volunteer and special uses programs.

WHY would I want to pay a fee?

Because of these fees, recreation sites will be better maintained; the public will have a higher quality visitor experience, and the viability of the natural resources will be secured.

HOW is the demonstration fee different than fees I have paid in the past to use an improved recreation site?

Congress gave the federal agencies a chance to try out a totally new fee system that is not based, nor limited by, the amount of improvements at a recreation site, i. e.: water, tables, restrooms, parking. The approval to charge demonstration fees is based on opportunities for improving services, establishing new partnerships, and providing care and maintenance of either an "improved" or "unimproved" site such as a cave. Another advantage is the revenue from demonstration fees is used at the site where it is generated, rather than

going back to a general fund for redistribution.

WHEN will the Fee Demonstration Program end?

The authority to collect fees under this legislation will end on September 30, 1998. Funds remaining in established accounts will be available through September 30, 2001.

Attachment 2

Lincoln and Coronado National Forests Proposal

WHAT is the background for the Lincoln and Coronado NF proposal?

In response to the congressional direction to test user fees, the Lincoln National Forest in southeast New Mexico and the Coronado National Forest in southeast Arizona, submitted joint proposals to institute user fees for unimproved caves. The two forests have been working together on communication, business, and implementation plans that will establish and maintain consistency for a cave fee demonstration program.

WHERE has the Lincoln National Forest proposed testing user fees?

The Lincoln National Forest proposed two possible fee demonstration sites; Sitting Bull Falls Picnic Area and the Lincoln Caves. The Lincoln Caves proposal was approved for study and is presently being analyzed to determine its potential as a successful fee demonstration area.

Attachment 3

Forests Share Visions and Goals

for Fee Demonstration Program

HOW do the Lincoln and Coronado National Forests define their "shared vision" of a Cave Fee Demo program?

The goal of this fee proposal is to provide a high-quality experience in world class caving by developing a world class cave management program of excellence, wherein unique cave ecosystems are protected and public opportunities are accommodated. The program of excellence will be achieved by innovative methods of collaborative programming, stewardship, research, education, interpretation, restoration and protection to enhance our unique and sensitive cave ecosystems.

Examples of accomplishments are: a permit system, a management plan for each cave, photo-monitoring, chemical and microbial analyses, guided tours, gates, school programs, restoration, mapping, protection of the scientific research opportunities, project planning and support for volunteer projects, cave trails, and the potential opening of some of the currently "closed" caves.

HOW much money will the Forests make from their Cave Fee Demo program?

The Cave Fee Demo Program is not intended to be a profit-making venture, rather it is a cost recovery program. Fee revenues could help pay for costs directly related to protection, enhancement, operation, and maintenance of the caves and their nonrenewable resources. The Forest Service estimates that a budget of \$500,000 per year is needed for a *World Class Wild Cave Management Program of Excellence*. Estimated costs include two professional cave staff, and six, year-round cave technicians. In addition to personnel, it also accounts for materials, supplies, vehicles, equipment, volunteer stipends, law enforcement, and administration of

the permit system. The *Cave Fee Demo Business Plan* will be used to determine whether this cost recovery could be attained, and how it would be done. The Business Plan will be based on a fair market analysis of fees being charged for similar activities. All fee demo programs can apply for monies kept in a regional five percent fund used for special projects. This regional fund is likely to amount to \$250,000 or more per year.

WHEN can the assessment of fees begin on an approved site?

Before actual fee collections can begin, several steps must be taken. The Forest Service must consistently meet the principles of the Act and demonstrate a useful and documented test of its capabilities to generate and wisely use recreation fees.

To achieve this, the Forest Service established a series of requirements to be completed prior to granting final approval for fee project implementation.

1. Prepare of a Local Communication Plan
2. Assess the community position toward the project
3. Develop a Business Plan Framework
4. Identify agency unit, county, state, and congressional districts.
5. Establish a treasury account to receive and disburse collections.

Attachment 4

Public Input/Public Information

WHAT has been done so far to inform and coordinate with the public?

Public involvement on this Fee Demo proposal began in New Mexico in late 1995 and in mid-1996 in Arizona. There has been a series of meetings with local National Speleological Society (NSS) Grottos, and coordination has taken place with other agencies, newspapers, radio, local chambers of commerce,

and congressional delegates.

This document is the first detailed information that has gone out to the general public. It constitutes a request and an opportunity to submit comments on the proposal for Forest Service consideration. The Fee Demo Business Plan is still undergoing study and preparation. When completed, the draft will be available for review and comment at Lincoln National Forest offices and by mail upon request.

WHO has commented since the preliminary public involvement and what was the Forest Service response?

The following is input received from grottos and NSS members and the response from the Forest Service

1) Are caving recreationalists being singled out?

Response: *There are over 100 Fee Demo Programs underway nationwide covering a broad spectrum of recreation uses.*

2) Caves should not be categorized as recreational resources.

Response: *The Federal Cave Resource Protection Act provides that caves are to be protected for their scientific, education, or recreational purposes for the perpetual use, enjoyment and benefit of all people.*

3) When caves become profitable, management plans will be dropped and cave resources will be destroyed.

Response: *The Forest Service must comply with the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, and all other laws and regulations that apply to the protection of non-renewable resources.*

4) Cave fees will open the door to millions of dollars in liability lawsuits.

Response: *Charging a fee will change the status of a permit holder and the Forest Service's legal duty to the holder, but will not automatically*

increase liability. The Forest Service has requested a legal opinion on this matter from the Office of General Counsel.

5) Since many cavers are against paying fees, some of them have stated that they will boycott the use of fee caves and will discontinue volunteer work. Therefore, cave fees will cause volunteer efforts to decrease and government agency costs to increase.

Response: *The Forest Service's desire is to use the Fee Demo to create and support more volunteer projects. The Agency will continue to place high value on its past and future relationships with volunteers. The Forest Service is giving consideration to Proposed Alternatives submitted by the NSS Cave Fees Ad Hoc Committee.*

6) Would vandalism and illegal entries increase as a result of fees?

Response: *Studies show that implementing a fee generally leads to a decrease in vandalism at recreation sites.*

7) Will collecting money increase the permit issuance problem?

Response: *Since permits issuance procedures are already in place, the cost and time to collect the fee is minor. The Forest Service has procedures in place for safekeeping and handling of receipts.*

8) Would requiring a fee jeopardize the honor system?

Response: *This could be a problem at caves with no gates. However, Fee Demo receipts can be used to purchase needed gates for the caves.*

9) A pilot program may work in one place, but not in another.

Response: *That is true; thus, one purpose of the demonstration program is to find out what works and what does not.*

10) A cost analysis should be considered to determine the real value of any fee program.

Response: *That is the purpose for*

requiring that a business plan be prepared and approved before implementing a proposed Fee Demo.

11) Generated funds from Fee Demo may be offset in the Agency's budget.

Response: *Congress has agreed not to offset the revenue generated from the Fee Demo program during the three-year trial period.*

12) People may not inform the Forest Service about locations of newly discovered caves.

Response: *Historically, keeping cave locations secret from land managers has led to cave destruction. The protection of the cave resource is the number one consideration.*

13) Why does this Fee Demo NOT require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

Response: *The decision of whether or not to implement fees is exempt from the requirement for an EIS.*

Answer to Last Month's Brain Teaser

The key to solving the teaser is to realize that the 10-minute guy and the 5-minute guy can NOT come through in separate trips. That would chew up 15 of your 17 minutes. However, you also cannot have either of them make a return trip, so, how do you do that? Well . . .

Trip 1: 1- and 2-minute guys go over, 1-minute guy comes back (3 mins.)

Trip 2: 5 and 10 go over, 2 comes back (15 minutes)

Trip 3: 1 and 2 go over, no one comes back (17 minutes).

Calendar of Events

June 23-27, 1997, NSS Convention, Sullivan Missouri. Contact Pam Saberton, (314) 772-6956

August 3-7, 1998, NSS Convention, Sewanee Tennessee. Contact William Shrewsbury, (423) 886-3296

July 12-16, 1999, NSS Convention, Twin Falls Idaho. Contact David W Kenser (208) 939-0979

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