

# The Cave Conservationist

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## *The Cave Conservation and Management Section of the NSS*

### **Committee Passes Domenici's Ft. Stanton Cave Bill, Cavers Improve Access to " Snowy River " Passage**

**Press Release: The Office of Senator Pete V. Domenici**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today gained committee approval for his bill to add federal protection to the rare Snowy River passage at Fort Stanton Cave in southern New Mexico—a passage believed to be the longest continuous calcite formation in the world.

Domenici's Fort Stanton-Snowy River National Cave Conservation Area Act (S.260) was approved Wednesday by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and is now ready for consideration by the full Senate. S.260 is cosponsored by Senator Jeff Bingaman.

"The Snowy River is so exceptional and unique that we need to ensure that federal protection is in place to ensure its preservation for scientific research and educational purposes," Domenici said. "Cave experts remain excited by this discovery and are already working on the best and safest way to access the Snowy River passage for the scientific community to conduct research in the cave."

"Snowy River is truly unique, and through this conservation plan it will be protected. I'm glad we were able to move this bill quickly through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and I hope we gain full Senate approval in the coming weeks," said Bingaman, chairman of the Senate Energy Committee.

The Domenici bill creates a Fort Stanton-Snowy River National Cave Conservation Area to

protect, secure and conserve the natural and unique features of the Snowy River Passage and the Fort Stanton Cave in Lincoln County. S.260 authorizes the Bureau of Land Management to develop a map and legal description of Fort Stanton Cave, and to develop a comprehensive, long-term management plan for the cave area.

The Snowy River is a continuous calcite formation that extends more than two miles in the Fort Stanton Cave. Exploration of this cave dates back to at least the 1850s, but the Snowy River passage was only discovered in 2001, and kept secret until Domenici announced its discovery in 2005.

The BLM recently reported to Domenici progress on developing a new route into the Snowy River passage, a project undertaken after the original passage was deemed unsafe. The original passage was permanently closed and research suspended. However, new research proposals are being received from New Mexico Tech, the National Cave and Karst Research Institute and other cave experts.

The continued scientific research and discoveries in the cave may yield valuable information on the hydrology, geology and microbiology in the region. For instance, investigations of the Snowy River formation may provide information on past water chemistry, weather trends, and flood and drought cycles.



**Cave Conservation and Management Section of the National Speleological Society**



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**Cave Conservation and Management Section Contacts**

**CHAIRMAN**

Rod Horrocks  
2201 Wilson Avenue  
Hot Springs, SD 57747  
PH: 605-745-4933  
E-Mail: [rod\\_horrocks@nps.org](mailto:rod_horrocks@nps.org)

**VICE CHAIRMAN**

John M. Wilson  
9504 Lakewater Court  
Richmond, VA 23299  
PH: 804-740-0339  
E-Mail: [wilsonjml@msn.com](mailto:wilsonjml@msn.com)

**SECRETARY**

John LaMar Cole  
1196 Millcreek Dr.  
Lexington, KY 40517  
PH: 859-245-3383  
E-Mail: [koshkacaver@insightbb.com](mailto:koshkacaver@insightbb.com)

**TREASURER**

Eugene Vale  
46 Cedar Drive  
Pacific MO 63069-3414  
PH: 636-271-8380  
E-Mail: [eugenevale@socket.net](mailto:eugenevale@socket.net)

**THE CAVE CONSERVATIONIST EDITOR**

Lynn Roebuck  
94 Magnolia Lane  
Normandy, TN 37360  
PH: 931-455-8658  
E-Mail: [pretzlgirl@charter.net](mailto:pretzlgirl@charter.net)

**HONORARY CHAIRMAN**

Robert R. Stitt  
4823 Panther Lake Rd  
Snohomish, WA 98290  
PH: 360-563-9767  
E-Mail: [rstitt@wingedseed.com](mailto:rstitt@wingedseed.com)

**NSS CONSERVATION DIVISION**

**CO-CHAIRS**

Val Hildreth-Werker & Jim Werker  
P.O. Box 207  
Hillsboro, NM 88042  
PH: 505-895-5050  
E-Mail: [werks@zianet.com](mailto:werks@zianet.com)

**DIRECTORS AT LARGE**

John Hoffelt  
208 Cheatham Avenue  
Smyrna, TN 37167  
PH: 615-459-6594  
E-Mail: [mossyguy@comcast.net](mailto:mossyguy@comcast.net)

Brian Roebuck  
94 Magnolia Lane  
Normandy, TN 37360  
PH: 931-455-8658  
E-Mail: [solow@charter.net](mailto:solow@charter.net)

Jessica Snider  
3833 Montgomery NE # 534  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
PH: 505-550-5388  
E-Mail: [sniderj@unm.edu](mailto:sniderj@unm.edu)

James Wilbanks  
PO Box 34  
Rising Fawn, GA 30738  
PH: 706-462-2316  
E-Mail: [jimgail69@earthlink.net](mailto:jimgail69@earthlink.net)

J. Judson Wynne  
2255 North Gemini Drive  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
PH: 928-556-7466, x238  
E-Mail: [jut.wynne@nau.edu](mailto:jut.wynne@nau.edu)



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## 2007 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium

The National Cave and Karst Management Symposium will be held in St. Louis, Missouri, October 8-12, 2007. This is the first call for papers. For additional information visit the web site at <http://www.nckms2007.org/call.html>

By April 1, 2007, please submit a title and abstract of your paper or poster to [Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov). Submit now for a better chance of getting on the schedule. This also will help us decide how to formulate the sessions.

Abstracts are limited to 250 words. Our theme is "Cave and Karst Conservation in the Ozarks", so expect to hear papers from Illinois to Oklahoma, but any paper or poster about cave and karst management, use or study is invited. There is always a national and international flavor to this symposium. However, your paper might not be accepted if you delay, the abstract is poorly written, or the subject is uninformative. Digital presentations are expected, but please avoid excessive use of graphs and tables, or any that are difficult to read on a typical projection screen. We do want the latest, cutting-edge information, so a revised title and abstract may be sent to me by the final deadline of Sept. 1.

This year we will require written manuscripts one month after the Symposium. We want your participation and newest technical presentation, but we want your manuscript too. I will edit the Proceedings with Tom Rea's assistance, and they will be published a few months later. The 2005 Proceedings just came out!

For more information contact: Bill Elliott, NCKMS Chair Missouri Department of Conservation, Resource Science Division, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65109 Phone: 573-552-4115 E-Mail: [Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:Bill.Elliott@mdc.mo.gov)

## Cave & Karst Conservancy Fundraising Blitz 2007

Announcing a Conservancy Fundraising Blitz and what better time than with the delivery of the annual Conservation Issue of the *NSS News*. Beginning March 1, and running thru March 15, donors can show their support of Cave and Karst Conservancies by sending a tax deductible donation to the Conservancy of their choice.

The goal of this fundraising effort, aside from the obvious benefit of raising money for conservancies, is to heighten awareness of and show support for the Conservancies.

The Cave & Karst Conservancy Fundraising Blitz is being hosted by the U.S. Cavers Forum. <http://caversforum.org>

## Cave Conservation & Restoration Book

The new book, *Cave Conservation and Restoration*, edited by Val Hildreth-Werker and Jim C. Werker is on the market! It is available to NSS members through the NSS Bookstore. <http://www.NSSBookstore.org>

## The Cave Conservationist

*The Cave Conservationist* is only as good as the contributions cavers make to the newsletter.

You can help the Section have a top of the line newsletter by sending your cave restoration, cave clean up, cave management or conservation projects to the Editor. See page 7 of this issue for information on how to submit your articles, news, and photos.

## **Changing the Cave Environment – Beneficial or Detrimental?**

**Brian Roebuck**

Over the years various groups usually involved with protecting cave species and cave resources have raised the idea of changing the cave environment for various purposes. This idea appears to be both a beneficial tactic to help cave species or preserve fragile cave resources as well as possibly being a negative influence on cave life and resources.

The major benefits in preserving cave environments can be seen in caves where air flow, temperature, water flow, humidity, and nutrient load can be controlled to assist or preserve cave resources. For example speleothems can be negatively impacted by changes to air flow, humidity, and temperature in caves that get opened or modified for human egress. In these cases the modified passage is often gated or shielded to provide the same almost constant environment that nature intended. Similarly certain species need specific temperature, humidity, and nutrient loads in order to thrive in a cave. When these get out of balance especially due to man's influence they should be returned to a more natural state in order that the species continue to thrive. Another set of cave resources that can be affected by environmental changes are the historic and pre-historic materials, art, and artifacts often found in caves. These precious cave resources need to be preserved as they have for hundreds or thousands of years. Changes to cave environments can dry out mud glyphs, rot fibers and materials, damage petroglyphs, or cause other damage to such irreplaceable cave resources. Again every effort should be made to keep the cave environment controlled and unchanged to preserve our heritage.

Consider then man made changes to cave environments as a tactic to influence nature. This is where the organizations considering such actions must be very careful in the scope and application of such techniques. One example

would be to lower the average winter cave temperature as an experiment to create a better hibernaculum for an endangered species of bat. Various methods could be employed to affect this depending on the nature of the cave and the desired drop in cave temperature. While this may be great for the bats other things to consider when doing this are effects to other cave adapted species, effects on speleothem growth, effects on nutrient load, effects on historic or pre-historic materials, and even the effects on cave use for recreational cavers. There may well be more resources or cave uses that could be affected by doing such an action. Such a modification to a cave environment should be studied in detail on a cave by cave basis before serious consideration is made for doing this to any cave.

Cave managers have taken great efforts to protect sensitive caves from changes in the cave environment by installing hatches at entrances, limiting materials used in the cave, limiting visitation, cleaning the caves, restricting where cavers can travel, and a host of other measures designed to preserve delicate cave environments. Most of these measures are well documented and can be implemented by other cavers or groups to protect the cave environments they are concerned with. The same information can be studied to help identify what might change if one were interested in modifying the environment of a cave.

The concept of making changes to cave environments must be done in a way that eliminates or minimizes the impact to all other cave resources. It should not be the case that one resource is benefited at the expense of all others. Similarly the protection and preservation of all sensitive cave resources can be enhanced through proper attention to keeping the cave wilderness intact and in balance as nature intended it to be.

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# The Cave Conservationist

*The Cave Conservationist* © 2007 is the official publication of the Cave Conservation and Management Section of the National Speleological Society. The contents of the newsletter rely on contributions made by section members and others who are interested in cave conservation, cave restoration and cave management. Newsletter contributions should be submitted to the Editor, Lynn Roebuck [pretzlgirl@charter.net](mailto:pretzlgirl@charter.net) as an E-Mail attachment formatted to MS Word with "Cave Conservationist" placed in the subject line. The Editor reserves the right to edit any and all submissions for length, clarity, style and/ or content. Digital photo contributions for the newsletter may be emailed as an attachment to the Editor. Articles and unsigned materials may be attributed to the Editor. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Cave Conservation and Management Section, NSS or the Editor. Permission is granted to NSS publications to reprint articles published in *The Cave Conservationist* providing credit is given to the Author and Editor, *The Cave Conservationist* except where a copyright accompanies a specific item. Others who want to reprint material should contact the Editor. Future Newsletter Deadlines: February issue: January 15; May issue: April 15; August issue: July 15; November issue: October 15.

## Membership in the Conservation and Management Section

The Conservation and Management Section is open to all members of the National Speleological Society as well as those interested in cave conservation and management. Members receive the newsletter *The Cave Conservationist* and are entitled to vote at the annual meeting. Annual membership dues: \$5.00/ year to receive *The Cave Conservationist* electronically and \$10.00/year to receive *The Cave Conservationist* by regular mail. A section membership application can be found in select issues or on our website <http://www.caves.org/section/ccms> Membership dues may be sent to the Treasurer, Eugene Vale [eugenevale@socket.net](mailto:eugenevale@socket.net) Newsletter printing or postal distribution information may be obtained from Robert Hoke [bob@hoke.net](mailto:bob@hoke.net) The Section presents two annual awards to a NSS Grotto and a NSS Group that have made significant contributions towards conservation or management of cave or karst resources. For more information concerning The Cave Conservation and Management Section of the NSS please visit our website. <http://www.caves.org/section/ccms>



### Cave Conservation and Management Section of the National Speleological Society Membership Form



NSS #	Date you joined the Conservation & Management Section	Membership Paid Until (Office use only)	Membership Category (Office use only)

  

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- Check one:
- I wish to receive the *Cave Conservationist* electronically via email -- \$ 5.00 dues.
  - I wish to receive the *Cave Conservationist* on paper via regular mail -- \$ 10.00 dues.

Checks should be made payable to Cave Conservation and Management Section and sent with this form to:  
**Eugene Vale**  
**46 Cedar Drive**  
**Pacific, Missouri 63069 -3414**



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THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT SECTION OF  
THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

C/O Treasurer, Eugene Vale  
46 Cedar Drive  
Pacific MO 63069-3414



**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

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