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First name: Matt

Last name: Bowers

Organization: National Speleological Society

Title: Director of Business Development

Comments: Forest Supervisor Holly Jewkes

Deschutes National Forest

Deschutes NF -

As you are likely aware, members of the National Speleological Society have enjoyed a strong working relationship with the USFS for many decades. The national MOU we maintain with your agency facilitates our volunteer efforts in cave management and conservation in forests across the country.

I'd like to encourage you to give sincere consideration to the recent comments you have received from our experienced members of the Oregon High Desert Grotto. The cave closures proposed in your plan will do nothing to help preserve and manage these fragile ecosystems or protect them for visitation by future generations.

Regarding specific points, I offer the following for your review;

Eternity and Infinity Caves

In point of fact, the grotto found and explored Eternity and Infinity Caves. They've held primary responsibility to help manage them on your behalf. Adopting their challenge-cost share agreement and management plan seems long overdue.

Wind, Bat, and Skeleton Cave Closure

We fully understand the need for seasonal closures of caves such as Wind, Bat, and Skeleton Cave. Yet, a complete closure of these resources blocks our abilities to help monitor them for your agency and for the nation. At the very least, this seems counterproductive to your duties as responsible stewards of these lands.

Temporary Anchors

Prohibiting temporary anchors appears like a valid desire until you understand the finer details. When used sparingly and properly, these items are vital to the safety of our explorers and cave conservationists. We have no strong opinion on prohibiting permanent anchors - those items do seem to get out of control by occasional rock climbers. Cavers, however, use temporary anchors for their own safety. These anchors are then removed with no residual damage to the cave. Blocking their use is not only pointless, it's dangerous to human life.

Cody Borehole Closure

We do not believe that this closure is needed or properly supported by existing archaeological evidence. Experienced members of the National Speleological Society remain constantly vigilant for sensitive material in caves - both historic and geologic. Unilateral closure of this cave will only keep out the responsible explorers. As you may know, Cody Borehole is the deepest cave in Oregon, and receives extensive visitation far beyond our society. A blanket closure prevents us from helping your agency manage and monitor this resource.

Lee's Cave Seasonal Closure

Our members have observed hibernating bats into May most years. To respect these colonies, we propose extending this closure to May 31st.

Cave Digs and Passage Modification

The National Speleological Society is the largest organization on Earth dedicated to the exploration, study, and

conservation of caves. We are members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and frequently collaborate with all land-management agencies of the federal government. Over the decades, our partnership with the federal government has led to breathtaking discoveries of new species, new microbial ecosystems and extensive new cave systems. Recently, our collaborations with NASA have led to new science that will be used for off-Earth explorations of caves on other planets.

To achieve this level of discovery, sometimes we have to dig.

While cavers agree that oversight of digs on USFS land falls under your jurisdiction, your agency needs to reply to the OHDG's long requests about what such oversight will be, and what processes and criteria you will base your decisions on.

50-Foot Buffer

I defer to the Oregon High Desert Grotto's opinion on this. It's far too vague for codification in your management plan. It appears intended to protect bats from disturbance, yet most of the caves on your forest do not have significant bat use. While it was proposed with good intentions, you need to strike the buffer in entirety and replace it with targeted relocations of roads, trails, and parking areas in specific sensitive spots as funding and time allows.

If I may be of further assistance, or if you wish to arrange additional consultation from cavers across our society, please reach out directly at any time. Our members of the Oregon High Desert Grotto are an outstanding resource for your agency. They are ready, willing, and quite capable of helping the Deschutes National Forest as you responsibly administer the caves on your land.

Sincere regards,

Matt Bowers