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First name: Annelisa

Last name: Moe

Organization: Southern California Grotto

Title:

Comments: July 23, 2020

Holly Jewkes

Forest Supervisor

Deschutes National Forest

63095 Deschutes Market Road

Bend, OR 97701

Sent via email to: comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes@usda.gov

THE UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE CAVE RESOURCES PROTECTION ORDER FOR THE DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST

To Forest Supervisor Jewkes:

On behalf of the Southern California Grotto of the National Speleological Society, we respectfully submit the following comments concerning the United States Forest Service Cave Resources Protection Order for the Deschutes National Forest (Draft Order). We recognize the need for conservation when it comes to our caves because they provide valuable resources including habitat resources, historical and scientific resources, and recreational resources. Therefore, it is important to have a management plan that allows for accessibility in balance with all conservation effort necessary to ensure responsible caving. We request that the United States Forest Service work collaboratively with the local Oregon High Desert Grotto in the management of the 700+ caves under this Draft Order. Additionally, we support the recommendations of the Oregon High Desert Grotto, as outlined in Attachment 1.

With 10,000 members and 250 grottos (chapters), the National Speleological Society is the largest organization in the world working every day to further the exploration, study, and protection of caves and their environments. For over 70 years, the National Speleological Society has promoted safe and responsible caving practices, effective cave and karst management, speleology, and conservation. Our members are bound together by their love of caves and caving, and their desire to learn about the underground wilderness and protect it for future generations. The Southern California Grotto is a chapter of the National Speleological Society, and was chartered in 1949. We're one of the oldest grottos in the National Speleological Society, and have a long and distinguished history of cave exploration, cave science, and cave conservation throughout California, and in other areas of the US and the world.

Each cave is unique, and is an invaluable scenic and scientific resource. Many caves contain beautiful and unique mineral formations. Some caves contain rare or endangered species of flora and fauna. A few caves contain historic relics or prehistoric bones and artifacts. As such, the National Speleological Society and its 250 local grottos participate in and encourage a variety of conservation activities, including educational programs, cave restoration projects, cave gating and protection, and production of cave maps and inventories in order to assist both government agencies and private landowners in the development of management plans for caves and karst areas.

We recognize that this second version of the Draft Order does include improvements over the original draft. We appreciate the efforts of the United States Forest Service to make these improvements and to protect our very valuable cave resources. However, there are still many improvements that must be made to the Draft Order, as outlined in Attachment 1. Given the knowledge and expertise of the caving community, local grottos are a valuable asset not only for the proper management of local caves, but also for facilitation of exploratory or scientific endeavors, and even to provide educational resources and events to better inform the public of the ecological significance of caves and the importance of caving responsibly. Therefore, we recommend that the United States Forest Service work collaboratively with the National Speleological Society and the local grottos to refine this Draft Order.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the United States Forest Service Cave Resources Protection Order for the Deschutes National Forest. We hope you are able to work collaboratively with the local Oregon High Desert Grotto to responsibly manage the caves of Deschutes National Forest. If you have any questions concerning this comment letter, please contact Jesse Johnson, Chair of the Southern California Grotto.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee

Southern California Grotto

National Speleological Society