

Interagency Cooperation at the Highest Level: A Review of the Draft Interagency Agreement for Cave and Karst Resources Management in the Federal Government

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Abstract

The purpose of this agreement is to achieve more effective and efficient management of caves through cooperative action by Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service, and the Department of Agriculture, USDA Forest Service. The agreement identifies areas of mutual concern and establishes avenues for cooperation in the management, research, protection and conservation of cave resources.

For several years a number of the Federal agencies have been working together on cave resources management without the benefit of a national agreement. There have been local agreements addressing the cooperative management of cave resources but no formal agreement at the national level. A draft agreement is now circulating in the Washington Offices of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Geological Survey, the National Park Service, and the USDA Forest Service. The purpose of this agreement is to achieve more effective and efficient management of caves through cooperative action. The agreement identifies areas of mutual concern and establishes avenues for cooperation in the management, research, protection, and conservation of cave resources. With a national agreement, the cooperating agencies should find it easier and quicker to pull together national level resources for projects of mutual concern. Basically, it should cut through some red tape.

Cooperative action is needed based on the following mutual situations:

- The passage of the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988 require federal agencies to secure, protect, and preserve significant caves on Federal lands. Further, the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act urges agencies to foster increased cooperation and exchange of information.
- A large number and diversity of caves and karst lands are managed by the four agencies.
- The Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the USDA Forest Service have similar visitor use patterns in the caves they manage and recognize the need for consistent management of cave and karst resources.
- Increasing visitor and land use pressures are expected to continue and are accelerating the deterioration of cave and karst environments such as the disruption of biological, archeological, paleontological, cultural, recreational, and other speleological values.
- Similar issues associated with safety and resource protection being faced by the agencies could be more effectively solved through interagency collaboration and coordination.
- Combined capabilities are more effective than individual agency efforts.
- The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 661667e) and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 15311543) are administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and all other Federal agencies must insure that activities they carry out related to the management of their cave resources meet the requirements of this legislation. Effective fulfillment of these re-

sponsibilities will be facilitated by this cooperative effort. Fulfillment of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service obligations under the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd668ee) will be facilitated by the knowledge and experience that will be provided through this Agreement.

- The U.S. Geological Survey has the capability to support the research needs of the scientific programs involved with cave and karst resources management.

All agencies involved in this agreement will agree to cooperate in the following aspects of cave and karst management and resource protection:

- **Environmental Education**—Agencies will cooperate in the development and production of mutually beneficial environmental education materials such as brochures, pamphlets, programs, videos, and the Leave No Trace program.
- **Training**—Agencies will cooperate in the development, offering, and teaching of training courses and seminars related to cave and karst resources management and other aspects of speleology including biology, geology, hydrology, mineralogy, paleontology, and cave search and rescue and the cooperative hosting of the National Cave Management Symposiums.
- **Information Pooling and Transfer**—Agencies will share information concerning cave and karst resources management, current issues, problems, and solutions.
- **Research**—Agencies will, when appropriate, develop and coordinate research needs and projects.
- **Regional Agreements**—Agencies will enter into additional regional and local agreements for specific programmatic involvement and cooperation.
- **Publications**—Publications (including distribution to the world wide web) documenting cooperative efforts may be prepared by any agency, or jointly, provided that all parties involved have an opportunity to review manuscripts prior to publication. To the extent possible, decisions involving authorship and review of reports will be addressed during the preparation work plans or work agreements. Should differences of viewpoint occur, an effort will be made to reconcile them. However, this shall not prohibit any agency from publishing the data provided it assumes sole responsibility and gives appropriate credit to the other agency(ies). All parties agree that sharing credit is mutually beneficial, and will make every effort to assure that appropriate credit, including the use of official agency visual identifiers, is given for work performed under this agreement.
- **Freedom of Information Act**—Agencies will share information resulting from significant issues arising from Freedom of Information Act requests.

Once the Interagency Cave and Karst Resources Management Agreement has been signed it should facilitate other states and regions to develop their own, more specific, agreements.