



Greg Rollins

A Diverse Resource

Caves and karst systems form as water dissolves bedrock such as limestone and marble. “Karst” is a term used to describe a type of landscape typified by subsurface hydrologic flow, sinkholes (dolines), sinking streams, caves, and springs.

Approximately 531,815 square kilometers (205,335 square miles) of bedrock known to host caves and karst systems occur on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Caves and karst areas occur in over 100 national forests and grasslands, and the Forest Service has identified over 2,200 significant caves to date, often with the assistance of partners such as the National Speleological Society and Cave Research Foundation.

The goal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, National Cave and Karst Program is to protect and maintain the biologic, geologic, mineralogic, paleontologic, hydrologic, cultural, educational, scientific, and recreational values of caves and karst resources.

Partners

National Speleological Society
<http://www.caves.org>

Cave Research Foundation
<http://www.cave-research.org>

National Cave and Karst Research Institute
<http://nckri.org>

Bat Conservation International
<http://www.batcon.org>

The National Caves Association
<http://www.cavern.com>

For More Information

Visit the National Cave and Karst Program Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/geology/cavekarst.html>.



Dave Bunnell

A beautiful vista inside Blanchard Springs Caverns.



United States Department of Agriculture

National Cave and Karst Program

on National Forest System Lands

Peter Jones



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Multiple Resources, Multiple Uses

Caves and karst systems are important geologic resources that require special management because they support critical groundwater systems and unique biologic communities.

Approximately 20 to 25 percent of the world's population depends on water from these systems, which exemplifies the critical importance of these resources.

The biological diversity in these subsurface ecosystems includes threatened and endangered species on all scales, from Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalis*) to the Ozark Cavefish (*Amblyopsis rosae*).

Caves are also repositories for a wealth of information useful for studying climate, human history, paleontology, and mineralogy.

Caving is a recognized recreational activity on NFS lands, with groups in many areas organized to provide education and opportunities for those interested in climbing, squeezing, and crawling through the underground. Leave No Trace guidebooks, as well as cave safety and ethics information, are available from the Forest Service and its partners.



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Caves are sensitive resources and are vulnerable to stressors such as climate change, groundwater contamination, and human activity that can result in local and regional impacts to and destruction of caves.

Such activities include infrastructure development, mining, quarrying, visitation of recreational caves, and alteration of cave entrances by enlarging, gating, and filling with waste. These types of human activities may be limited on NFS lands when there is potential for adverse effects to caves or cave systems.

Caves open for visitation on NFS lands:

Blanchard Springs
USDA Forest Service
Ozark-St. Francis National Forest
NF 54 Forest Rd 1110-A
Fifty-Six, AR 72533
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/osfnf>

Boulder Cave Trail
USDA Forest Service
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/okawen/home>

El Capitan
USDA Forest Service
Tongass National Forest
648 Mission Street
Ketchikan, AK 99901
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/index.shtml>

Wonderland
USDA Forest Service
Black Hills National Forest
1019 N. 5th Street
Custer, SD 57730
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/blackhills/home>