

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News



Vol. 27, No 3, December 2025



The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a nonprofit committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features. To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials. The NCC programs are focused mainly on the preservation of caves and karst. Outreach includes education in schools and local communities, establishment of park spaces on karstlands, and educational messages about the significance of groundwater pollution on this sensitive underground ecosystem. NCC members assist in the exploration, survey, and protection of these natural resources, and manage them so you can explore them yourself.

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IN THIS ISSUE

04

2025: The Year in Review

07

New Neighbors at Bentleys Preserve

09

A Deeper Look at Land Conservation

10

Podcast: Biology and the
Perception of Bats

11

How to Help

12

2025 Year-End Appeal

14

From the Publisher

*On the cover: Bob Hyden in Knox. Photo by Erik Nieman.
Left: Erik Nieman in Ella Armstrong.
Photo by Adriane Hectus.*



2025: The Year in Review

Reflections on 2025

by Leslie Hatfield

WOW 2025, What a Year!

As I reflect on the past year, I feel an overwhelming need to acknowledge all of the volunteers whose work continually positions the NCC to go farther in its pursuit of conservation and preservation of caves and karst and protection of their unique ecosystems. Without the selfless efforts of all involved, the NCC would not be able to provide free public access to over 6.4 miles of cave passageway on our twelve preserves, with their twenty-one caves, on over one hundred beautiful acres.

With your help, we can expand access to over one hundred forty acres with twenty-three caves! Please consider making a [year-end donation](#) toward the expansion of our Merlins Preserve. **Many, many thanks to those of you who have already contributed toward our goal of \$107,000.**

I appreciate all that each of you do, and the part(s) that each of you play to help the NCC to continue our valuable work as stewards of caves and karst.

Thank you for a memorable year and let's start 2026 with the expansion of our Merlins Preserve.

In 2026, I hope to see you at a ribbon-cutting for our expanded Merlins Preserve or perhaps at one of our other preserves!

Thank you,

Leslie Hatfield, President

Be a part of expanding the Magic of  - [Make a donation today!](#)



*Merlins Cave entrance.
Photos by Veronica Sassu Laviero.*



Rico Neumann, Veronica, and Jeff at Merlins.

The NCC's Presence in 2025

by Erik Nieman

Over the course of the year, the NCC attends various events and functions for a multitude of reasons. Some of them are very visible to our members, while some may go entirely unnoticed. Here is a list of places that the NCC has been over the past year.

- 🦇 NCKMS - National Caves & Karst Management Symposium
- 🦇 NYS Land Conservation Conference
- 🦇 NEBWG - Northeast Bat Working Group
- 🦇 OTR - Old Timers Reunion
- 🦇 NSS Winter Conservancy's Roundtable
- 🦇 Massachusetts Lands Conference
- 🦇 NSS Convention - The NCC was awarded the NSS Group Conservation Award
 - Sponsored the Howdy Party drinkware
 - Had a booth on Vendor Row
 - Multiple people within the NCC presented during sessions
- 🦇 Members Appreciation Day
 - Knox Staircase Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
 - Knox Staircase was featured in an article in the Altamont Enterprise (Local Newspaper), as well as in the Northeastern Caver and the NSS News
- 🦇 Annual NCC Barn Dance in Knox, NY
- 🦇 Thom Engel, Chair of Outreach & Education, presented multiple times at Thacher Park
- 🦇 NCRC - National Cave Rescue Commission used our preserves for real-world training for underground rescues
- 🦇 Sponsored CaveSim at Thacher Park - CaveSim is a trailered artificial cave environment for children & adults to learn about conservation-minded caving

Additionally:

- 🦇 John Dunham organized a Forested Karst Land Walk & Talk on the Merlins Preserve
- 🦇 Ben Brown presented at the Adirondack Mountain Club in Rochester, NY
- 🦇 Paul Rubin led a group on a geology walk at the Clarksville Preserve



2026 Goals & Resolutions

“ Close on the Merlins Expansion with ALL cash in hand!! Don't forget - everyone! - to support this great expansion opportunity, any amount helps make this happen - \$5, \$10, \$100, \$1,000 - Thank you! Assist with creating a 5-year strategic plan for the NCC. Take a walk in Kazumura Cave. Explore from the Big Room to the Gregory entrance a little more at Clarksville Cave. Get into all of the NCC's caves that do not require vertical skills. Get vertical!! ”

-Leslie Hatfield

“ Finish fundraising and close on the Merlins extension property. Once acquired, mark the new property boundary, plan and clear a new trail, maybe find a new cave! Also, resurvey Knox Cave so we have a nice new survey to go with our new stairs. ”

-Morgan Ingalls

“ Among my goals for the NCC in 2026 are to raise the bar on our publications and improve how we communicate with our members and visitors to our preserves. On a more personal level, 2025 taught me that I need to take more time for myself in 2026. Of course, that means more cave trips! Who wants to join me? ”

-Erik Nieman

“ I would like to finally blaze a trail between the two entrances of Jack Packers to encourage an increase in the number of through trips people take (through trips being relatively rare in our area). I also plan to get my Sellecks project actually underway, now that the initial barrier has been moved. I'd also like to get back to Asia Dome since it's been decades since my last visit. ”

-Kevin Dumont

“ I'd like to keep improving the quality of the NCC Newsletter! I also want to get underground more, especially to NCC caves that I've never been to before. I also want to get back to France in the summer and visit more prehistoric, decorated caves, like Pech Merle or Font-de-Gaume! ”

-Susie Pietsch

HAPPY 2026!



Preserve Updates

New Neighbors at Bentleys Preserve

by Jacob Morris-Siegel

Located high on a hillside south of Berlin, New York is Bentleys Cavern, which has been known since at least the early 1800s. Nearby is Dry Valley Cavern which was dug open by Larry Botto and his crew in 1991. Clay Perry wrote about the history of Bentleys Cavern in his book *Underground Empire*, where he describes the cave being used as a blind for gamblers and thieves between 1845 and 1855. Later the cave was used for the mining of “paint clay.” The discovery and prosecution of these activities brought local notoriety to the cave.

In 2009, the Bentley Family donated a 5.5-acre parcel that contained both caves to the NCC. This donation also included a parking easement and a right-of-way through the Bentleys’ remaining 90 acres. The remaining land of the Bentleys also contains karst features including seven springs, four of which are resurgences for Bentleys Caverns (See NRO Publication #7 Bentleys Cavern published in 1956).

In 2024, The Rensselaer Land Trust, which is now Hudson Taconic Lands (HTL), purchased the 91-acre parcel from the Bentley Family. As most people are probably unfamiliar with HTL, in their own words;

Hudson Taconic Lands was formed through the 2024 merger of two local, grassroots organizations, each with a rich history of conservation and community engagement: the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance and Rensselaer Land Trust. As Hudson Taconic Lands, we honor and celebrate the journeys and achievements that have led to where we are today. We are excitedly planning and growing into the future, guided by the wisdom and experiences of both land trusts and their strong community partnerships and members.

HTL has named the Bentleys’ property The Bentleys Karst Preserve. Now people may be wondering how the new ownership of the land surrounding our preserve will affect our property. If anyone visited the cave this summer, they would have noticed that there is now a new, decently sized parking area below where the old cave parking was located. This parking area is designed to be used for anyone visiting the properties there, be it caver or hiker. HTL has also installed a new kiosk that they are sharing with the NCC so both organizations’ information will be available in one location. In the future, HTL is hoping to have hiking trails on their preserve. They are planning on working with the NCC to tie any new trails in with our caves’ trail, as well as finding ways to showcase other karst features on their preserve. Hopefully, this project will lead to a long, fruitful partnership between the NCC and HTL on this and other projects in the future.

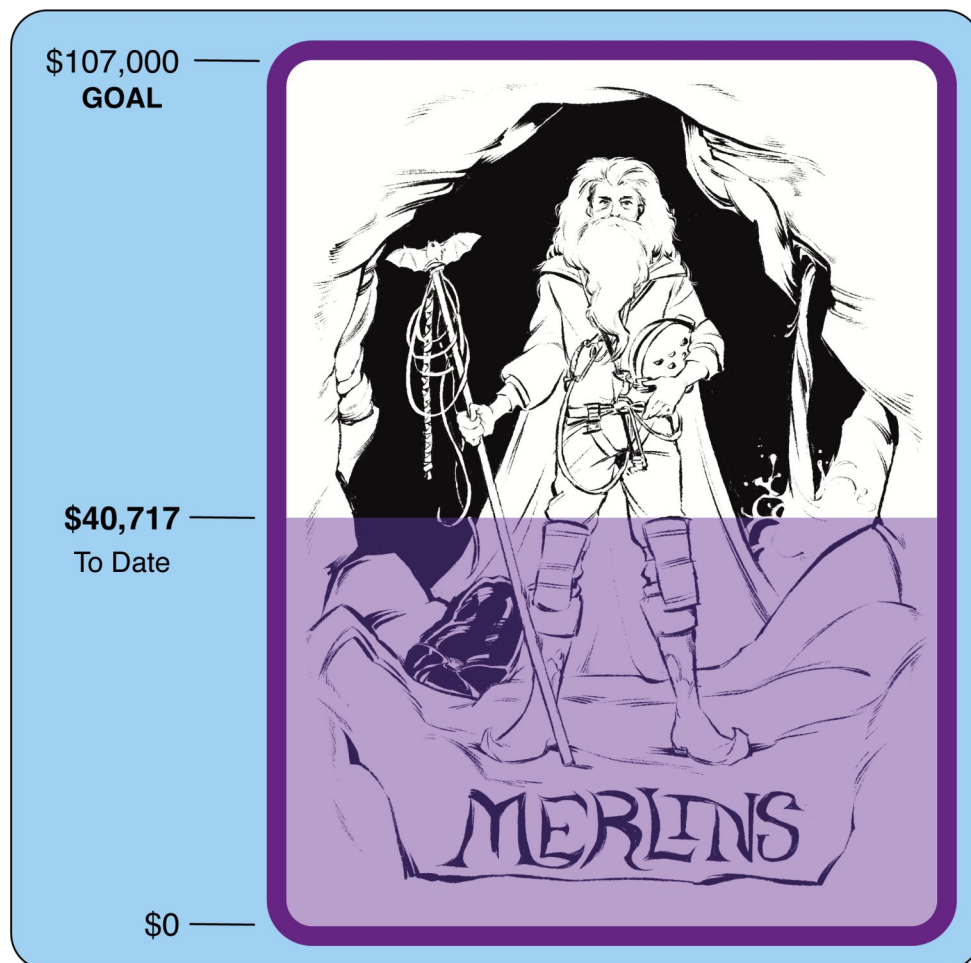


*New parking area and kiosk frame at Bentleys Karst Preserve.
Photo by Erik Nieman.*

Merlins Cave Preserve is **expanding!**

The time is **now** to assist the NCC in protecting **two small caves** and **an additional 35 acres** at our Merlins Cave Preserve. We are a third of the way to our fundraising goal of \$107,000.

Be a part of the Merlins expansion by donating today!



Expand the magic...
Click or scan the QR code!





Beyond the NCC

A Deeper Look at Land Conservation

by Erik Nieman

Often, when we think of land conservation, especially in the world of caves, we zero in on the main objective, saving the cave. The surface property often becomes a second thought, far less interesting than the wonders we find underground. Some people do see beyond that and enjoy taking walks on the surface, maybe by hunting for mushrooms or enjoying wildflowers found in the forests of cave preserves.

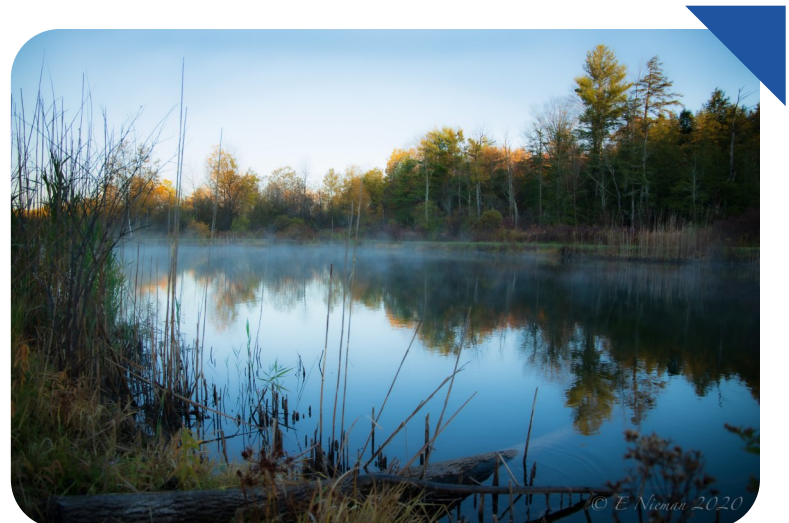
However, there is so much more going on in those trees, underbrush, or long grasses. When we purchase a plot of land with the intention of saving it, we are saving not only the caves, the trees, wildflowers, and mushrooms, but also the homes and habitats for countless other living creatures. This is no secret, of course, but sometimes overlooked. The following link will lead you to a video created by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation that takes viewers on a tour of land preserves in the Hudson Valley and takes a deeper look at what is being conserved when we set aside land like this. Among the presenters in the video are Carl Herzog, Wildlife Biologist, and Jim Bonesteel, Executive Director for Hudson Taconic Lands, our new neighbor at the Bentleys Karst Preserve in Berlin, NY. For those who are unaware of who Carl Herzog is, he conducted many bat surveys in NCC caves during his time with the NYSDEC, and is a knowledgeable, well-respected biologist in the community.

Enjoy the video, and thank you for supporting the NCC in conserving not only the caves, but all the life and wonder above them as well!

Link to video:

The Nature of Nature: Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_2LiaAzZUs



Photos by Erik Nieman.

Podcast: Biology and Perception of Bats

by Susan Hayhurst

Celebrate and learn about bats in a new podcast episode:

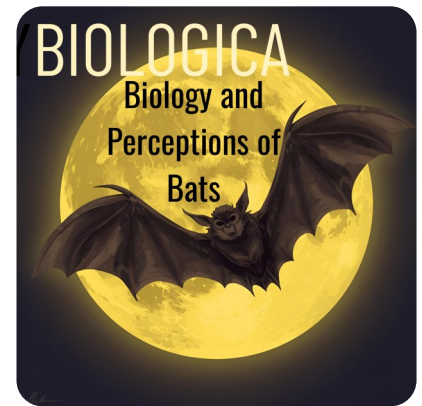
Cave and bat enthusiasts from the Northeastern Cave Conservancy can delve into cutting-edge bat research and conservation in this bat-themed podcast episode. In fact, a long-term member of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy is interviewed as part of the episode!

<https://susanhayhurst.podbean.com/e/biology-and-perceptions-of-bats/>

Find out about bats' cute, sweet side (plus cutting-edge echolocation research) in the recent Biologica podcast episode: Biology and Perception of Bats. Discover just how bats manage to fly out of caves in the thousands without hitting each other. Also, challenge stereotypical perceptions of bats as scary, and celebrate bats with music and stories.

*Interview with Dr. Aya Goldshtein about bat echolocation, the importance of bats, and more.

*Interview with a member of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy about the connection between responsible caving and bat research and conservation.



Greater mouse-tailed bat (Rhinopoma microphyllum)
Photo by Jens Rydell; shared by the interviewed researcher.



How to Help

Join the
NCC!

Annual membership levels:

Regular \$20
 Regular + 1 Family \$25
 Regular + 2 Family \$30
 Regular + 3 Family \$35
 Benefactor \$50
 Institutional \$100
 Life Membership \$400
 Family Life Membership \$125

All checks made payable and sent to:

Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.
 P.O. Box 254
 Schoharie, N.Y. 12157
www.necaveconservancy.org



Giving to the NCC at Work

Many employers offer the opportunity to have donations deducted directly from your paycheck. Some even offer a corporate match of employee donations.

The NCC can be found on multiple corporate giving platforms. For businesses in the private sector, Benevity is commonly used. For New York State employees, donations can be directed to the NCC through the United Way campaign. Check to see if your employer offers directed donations and especially if they offer matching. It's a great way to support the NCC!

If you find your employer offers a directed donation option where the NCC doesn't appear, please reach out to treasurer@necaveconservancy.org to see if we can get us added.



The Northeastern Cave Conservancy News is published quarterly by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. The Northeastern Cave Conservancy promotes the study and preservation of speleologically significant properties in the northeastern United States. The Newsletter editor accepts submissions via editor@necaveconservancy.org.

2025 Year-End Appeal

Are you interested in making a year end donation to support the work of the NCC? Please consider making a contribution toward the expansion of our Merlins Preserve. Our fundraising goal is to reach our target of \$107,000 which would enable the NCC to close on the additional 35 acre parcel at the start of the new year. What a great way to ring in 2026!

We embarked on this acquisition when the investment waters were a bit calmer, however, in these uncertain times land conservation is more important than ever. With this addition, the NCC would own the parking area and all of the land around our access trail. The gate by the road will be removed to allow for easier access for hiking, snowshoeing, and of course caving.

What: Merlins Preserve Expansion - Target \$80,000 to reach our \$107,000 goal.

Why: Protect two caves and expand Merlins to 71+ forested acres.

How: There are several ways to donate!

Donate via check: Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc.

Mail to: Northeastern Cave Conservancy
PO Box 254
Schoharie, NY 12157

Memo line: Merlins



*Merlins Preserve.
Photo by Leslie Hatfield.*

Via Credit or Debit Card: [Click here to donate now!](#)

Benevity: Does your employer participate in a matching gift program through a platform such as [Benevity](#)? The NCC would love to receive the added bonus of an employer matched gift.

Are you a NYS State Employee? Donate through the [NY State Employees Federated Appeal](#).

Give Directly from an IRA: (Taken from Merrill - Smart Ways to Give)

If you're age 70½ or older, you can donate to a qualified charity directly from a traditional IRA — or in limited circumstances, a Roth IRA, SIMPLE IRA or SEP IRA — without being subject to income tax on that distribution. The maximum amount you can donate — as much as \$108,000 in 2025 — is indexed each year for inflation.

If you're age 73 or older, donating money directly from your IRA to a qualified charity can count toward your annual required minimum distribution (RMD) and generally is not included in your taxable income.

— Kevin O'Neil, managing director, Investment Solutions Group



For further guidance with this type of donation, please consult with your financial advisor. For more information, reach out to Ben at treasurer@necaveconservancy.org.

Help the NCC start 2026 with the expansion of our Merlins Preserve!

Volunteer Opportunities



The NCC is seeking volunteers for the roles of **Fundraising Chair** and **Membership Chair**. For more information, contact Leslie at l.hatfield@necaveconservancy.org.

The **Fundraising Chair** will coordinate annual fundraising events, manage donor communications, maintain records of fundraising activities, and seek out sources of grant funding. The Fundraising Chair will report regularly to the Treasurer and collaborate with other committees to align fundraising goals with organizational priorities.

The **Membership Chair** recruits and retains members, manages membership records, ensures timely renewals, and promotes long-term commitments. The Membership Chair also organizes the Member Appreciation Day and encourages participation in NCC activities.

Volunteer Value by Vince Kappler

The VV reporting form on the website has been retired. In its place is a reminder to send an email with your data to me at volunteervalue@necaveconservancy.org or my personal email vkappler@ptd.net. All submissions received will be acknowledged by return email.

VV value reported to date (11/11/25) for 2025 is:

2,599 hours on task
21,319 miles traveled
Total value of \$112,688.00



Many thanks to Leslie and Erik for their detailed VV reports separating out time/miles spent on fulfilling their committee responsibilities. Data reporting has improved this cycle, however, most of the increase is attributed to organizational work including meetings and committee work.

Northeast cavers have a 50+ year history of working to understand and preserve karst features in the region. More recently, the NCC has taken the lead in the protection, exploration, scientific investigation, conservation, and preservation of cave and karst resources in our area. Besides owning several properties, the NCC manages property for other agencies, has made presentations to local governments concerning land use, contributed to environmental impact studies, and advised local property owners on living with their karst properties. All of this work has and continues to be done by volunteers. By assigning dollar values to our volunteer work and adding up the sums, we can create the documentation that can be used for cave management proposals and karst protection battles. This documentation will also add support for any applications the NCC may make for federal, state, or private grants. The documentation may also be of value when used to calculate charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

What
is
Volunteer
Value?

From the Publisher

by Erik Nieman

Hello! My name is Erik Nieman. Many of you already know me from cave trips, NRO, or other places we cavers find ourselves, but I thought I would take this opportunity to introduce myself, and maybe share a thing or two about me you may not know. As people are elected to Board or committee positions, Susie, our Newsletter editor, will try to get an introduction bio from them. Here is mine!

At the December Board Meeting of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, the Board elected me as your new Publications Chair, after serving a little over a year in the interim position. You may wonder, or at least find somewhat interesting, how I ended up in that role, and what sort of background I have to fill the organization's needs in that capacity.

The Publications Chair is responsible for the creation of a wide variety of documents and signage for the NCC, as well as overseeing the creation of other publications such as the newsletter and website. We have some talented people in the Newsletter and Website positions, so my only interaction there is to ensure everything conforms to our branding. Ideally, the Publications Chair should have some experience with graphic design, editing, publishing, and the associated software to accomplish those. So, how did I obtain that background?

Back in the earlier days of the internet, I became a web designer and web developer. In those days, if you needed a graphic element for a website, you had to make it yourself or hire somebody else. In order to be an effective web designer, I learned graphic design and the very rudimentary software available back then to create it. This also entailed learning the web programming languages of the day, but those are of little help now, except for a tweak here or there for an HTML email.

That brings us to the languages. I grew up bilingual. German and English are my native languages. I have lived in Germany, Switzerland, and the USA at various points in my life. In addition to speaking German (as well as Badisch, the local dialect where I called home) and English, I have been a lifelong student of linguistics and additional world languages. Most of them are Germanic, but there are a few Latin-based, one Slavic, one Celtic, and one Koreanic language. Suffice it to say, my bookshelf at home is not filled with novels and the like, but rather with books on linguistics and a sizeable pile of dictionaries in other languages with one or two for English as well.

I live in East Berne, NY. Mere minutes from Clarksville Cave, as well as Knox and Ella Armstrong Caves.

I also enjoy photography. I am often underground, dragging my camera gear along to find some new angle I haven't seen photographed yet.

Land and cave conservation is something very near and dear to me. If I am not underground with my camera, chances are pretty good that I am doing something to further the conservation efforts.

If you have any suggestions or ideas for the Publications Committee, or content for the Newsletter, please drop us a line!

Erik Nieman
Publisher, Publications Chair
Northeastern Cave Conservancy



