

NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY NEWS



Vol. 28, No 1, March 2026



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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On the cover: Volcano Cave. Photo by J Dunham.

Left: Trilobite in Onesquetham. Photo by Adriane Hectus.

Back cover: Spider Cave. Photo by Adriane Hectus.



Merlins Fundraising Update

Help Complete the Merlins Preserve!

By J Dunham, NCC Fundraising Chair

Spring is springing, snow is melting, and we are working hard to raise the final quarter of the funds for the expanded Merlins Cave Preserve. Please pitch in if you are able to do so! The expansion will protect more caves and karst from development, guarantee conservation in perpetuity, open potential for further exploration and recreation, and create additional surface trails to showcase a rich-sited schist/marble contact woodland that occurs rarely in the state of New York.

The expanded preserve will double the area to over 70 acres of protected karst, including both the existing Merlins Preserve with its three known caves and line of sinkholes and sinking streams, and the current easement parking lot and access trail, as well as two additional caves and numerous cliffs, ledges, vernal pools, and medium-aged oak forest.

What are the conservation benefits?

The small caves and expanded marble contact are part of a stretch of unusual occurrence of the Stockbridge Marble in New York State, home to multiple unusual spring ephemerals and threatened plant species, as well as providing habitat for hibernating and summer foraging bats and a variety of other wildlife. A line of vernal pools above the marble bench creates breeding habitat for spotted salamanders and other amphibians, which in proximity to the ledges and caves where they can overwinter in soil allows their full lifecycle to be unthreatened by road crossings.

What if we didn't buy this property?

The current owner would very much prefer to give the parcel to us at a reasonable cost, but has already moved away from the area and is obliged to sell it either way. If the NCC were not to purchase the parcel, it would likely become part of a series of housing lots. Development or logging could disrupt surface and subsurface drainage, impact threatened

species, and have spillover impacts on the NCC's current preserve area. Purchasing the property instead ensures we control both the protection of this sensitive habitat and access to the known caves.

What is the potential for additional caves on the new parcel?

While Volcano Cave and Tunnel Hill Cave are both small, the latter represents an intriguing indicator of phreatic passage development. These caves occur in a separate bed of marble that drains away from the other known caves and likely to a year-round spring below the parking area. This represents a different hydrologic cave system with modest but interesting potential for further discovery. Additionally, Dragon Bones Cave (on the current preserve) ends in a fissure moving significant air that is right at the edge of the current parcel, and the passage continues on to the new parcel. Any further discoveries here will be under the newly protected area.



Morgan Ingalls hikes along the preserve trail with the promontory containing Volcano Cave in the background. The expanded preserve will protect a series of marble and schist outcrops along the contact zones from logging and development impacts, maintaining them in their current natural state and protecting the surface and subsurface drainage areas along the majority of the western flank of the ridgeline.



Fissured boulders of the Stockbridge Marble outcrop all along the southern and western edges of the Merlins Preserve expansion. Some areas have rare (in NY) spring ephemerals, and all provide a variety of habitat for porcupines; spotted salamanders, which overwinter underground before migrating up to the vernal pools on the upper edges of the parcel; and, of course, bats, who can easily access the underground spaces and passages that likely run the extent of the contact zone.



This flowstone-coated fissure in Dragon Bones Cave, on the current preserve, moves air year-round and has been dug at floor level some 15ft. At that point, the cave passes out from under the current preserve. The expansion ensures any future discoveries here will be protected both above and below ground.



This fern-and-moss covered entrance is the short but verdant Volcano Cave, a solutionally enhanced fissure that drains into the top of a pyramid-shaped marble knoll. The cave itself is not likely to continue even as a dig project, but it represents a drainage divide on the karst plateau. Only about 150ft to the west, the bed of Stockbridge Marble containing Volcano Cave contacts a thick band of schist, forming an impermeable base under the marble. Only 100ft farther west, a thrust fault marks a second contact zone, and the marble contact bench that runs the entire length of the expanded preserve overlooking the valley. All the caves and sinks on this slightly lower section of the bench drain west, including Dragon Bones, Merlins, and Dome 12 Caves. However, because Volcano Cave is in a separate band of marble faulted atop the schist, it drains to the southeast, back under the trail to the preserve parking area.



Abutting the expanded Merlins Preserve is a disused railroad tunnel, adjacent to the in-use tunnel and nearly passing under the preserve parking area. The tunnel shows several contacts between the marble and schist, and the types of marble, as well as flowstone from calcite-rich seeps. On its eastern end, a warm perennial spring escapes from the railroad cut wall, trailing green moss even through the winter. This spring is a likely outlet for the smaller drainage basin that runs from Volcano Cave and Tunnel Hill Cave, down under the trail and preserve parking.

How can I donate?

PayPal or Check: for the PayPal link or physical check mailing address, visit our fundraising page at <https://necaveconservancy.org/preserves/merlins/extension/>.

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD): If you are at least 70½ years of age, you can make an “above the line” QCD, which is not counted as part of your normal AGI and apply prior to deciding to itemize or take a standard deduction. The OBB Act last year limited what kinds of donations are deductible going forward, making QCDs a more valuable form of giving compared to 2025 and prior. If you are 73 or older, a QCD can go toward your Required Minimum Distributions without increasing your total tax burden. As always, check whether this is the right option for you with an account or tax preparer.

Donor-Advised Funds: If you hold assets in a Donor-Advised Fund, you can allocate some of that fund to the NCC for specific or general acquisitions. Contact your specific fund sponsor for details of how to apply your donation in that situation.

Employer matching programs through Benevity: If your employer uses the Benevity software to allow employees to donate with an employer match, you can find the NCC through the platform, and even organize a fundraiser to raise funds from other coworkers interested in conservation.

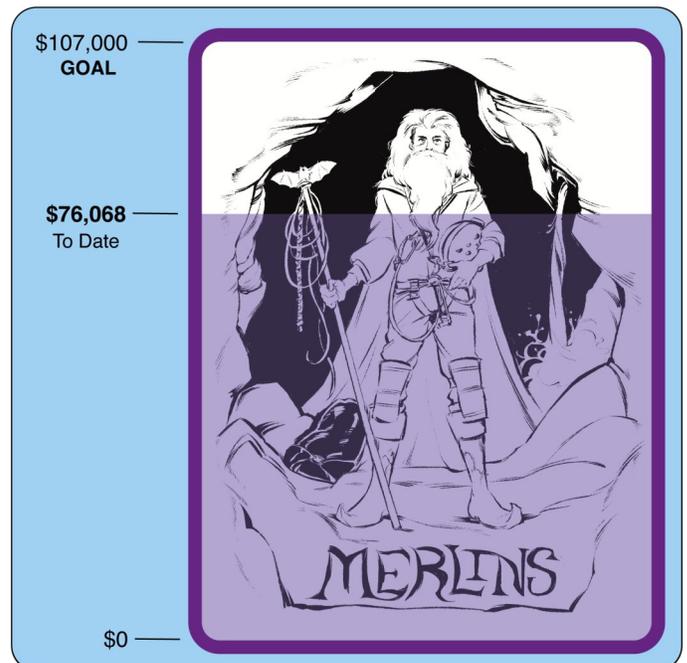
In New York, State Employees Federated Appeal (SEFA): The NCC is registered with SEFA and can accept donations via pledge — see <https://www.sefanys.org/pledge> to give. The NCC’s ID is 50-00390 - (SEFA Federation #850 Capital).

Thank you for helping preserve our karst lands!

Make a donation with this QR code!



Looking out of Tunnel Hill Cave at Morgan Ingalls just outside. This abandoned passage starts in an outcrop a short ways below Volcano Cave and about 150ft west of the trail. The cave has marked solutional features and currently is a crawlway to a back room with some small soda straws and flowstone, but continues visibly into the hill and needs only to be trenched to discover what may lie ahead. Tunnel Hill is a phreatic passage, and indicates potential for more development than current drainage would suggest in the basin below Volcano Cave and above the spring next to the railroad tunnel.





Preserve Updates

The “Discovery” of Jack Packers Cave

by Kevin Dumont

I’m certainly not the first to comment on the anthropocentric use of the term “discovery.” Perhaps the most illustrative example is the “discovery” of what we now refer to as “America” by any number of explorers from another region of the world, which is not only anthropocentric but also Eurocentric. The landmass, flora, fauna, and people of the Americas had existed for significant spans of time before being “discovered” by emissaries of people from the other side of the planet. The inherent biases revealed by the term and their implications for superiority, dominance, and control are well worth contemplating, but they are not the focus of this article.



“Discovery” is also the term used when cavers gain access to a previously unknown cave or new passage in a known cave; I contend that the term is probably as good as any for this purpose, so I’ll use it for the remainder of the article without further debate and without using quotation marks. Certainly, caves that have been discovered more recently, during the lifetimes of most people reading this, represent actual discovery for humans, meaning they had never been seen or visited by anyone prior to the discovery. When I’ve tried to explain this to non-cavers, I am invariably met with skepticism and questions such as, “OK, but how do you *really* know that no one had ever been there before?” It’s

a reasonable question, and I may have asked it myself before I came to understand how caves are formed and how other local events, most significantly glaciation, affect them, particularly their entrances.

Stories related to the discovery of caves are quite varied. Some lean heavily toward myths and legends, while others relate closely to local history and important figures or landowners. However, for the majority of caves that have been known to exist since before caving became a hobby (sport? interest? obsession?) for a subset of the population, the fact is that we don’t know how or when they were discovered. That doesn’t mean we can’t imagine plausible circumstances by which their discoveries occurred. As an example, let us consider the discovery of Jack Packers Cave in Greene County, New York.

Besides being the only notable known cave in Greene County, Jack Packers is perhaps best known as being in very close proximity to the New York State Thruway. Specifically, it is oriented roughly parallel to the northbound lanes of I-87, just south of the Catskill exit. The main (southern) entrance to the cave is perhaps 100 feet or so east of the Thruway, and the northern entrance is even closer. While exploring most parts of the cave, when a large vehicle passes by on the Thruway, the vibration is very noticeable. When the Thruway was being constructed, it seems likely that the workers may have come across the main entrance and perhaps even ventured into the cave a short distance on their lunch break or after working hours.

Concerning the main entrance, there is no evidence to suggest that it has not existed in its present state since the glaciers last receded from the region more than 10,000 years ago. The entrance is impressive and implies that there may be large chambers awaiting the explorer inside, which turns out to be false; the cave consists mostly of crawlways with generally diminishing dimensions toward the north. Still, it seems reasonable to assume that anyone passing by the area at any time in the last several thousand years would have noticed the entrance and perhaps poked inside to investigate. Visitors may have even lingered awhile in the relatively large passage nearest the entrance. They may have taken shelter in this part of the cave, spent the night, or stayed even longer, though there is no known evidence for any such activity.



If we draw our attention to the late 1800s and to the people of European descent who settled in the area, there is an article that was published in the New York Times on June 28, 1885, with the title “Cave Hunting in Catskill.” There are several distinct caves mentioned in the article, but none with enough detail to say for sure which caves they are. The one clue that Jack Packers Cave may be one of those in the article is the reference to the “Kaaterskill”; the cave is indeed in close proximity to Kaaterskill Creek, and the water seen in the cave almost certainly resurges to flow into the same. However, the piece focuses on the sensational aspects of caves and their exploration with a fair amount of not-unexpected exaggeration (including an account of a man who went into a cave in New York State and emerged, seven months later, from a cave in Illinois).



Despite a lack of explanation or even speculation about how caves are formed, the article does offer some justification for the allure of the underground that will ring true for cavers today, including the opinion that some people, “...will risk life itself for the sake of novelty and discovery.” I think it’s reasonable to assume that this component of human nature has been present as long as our species has existed, at least for some of us. I imagine that Jack Packers Cave, and countless others with open, obvious, and persistent entrances, have been discovered many times over the millennia.

Kevin Dumont and Bill Folsom standing outside Jack Packers. Other photos are of the main entrance. Photos by Kevin Dumont.

CAVE SAFELY, CAVE SOFTLY





Beyond the Northeast

Cave Management Volunteers – In Hawai'i!

by Leslie Hatfield

This past January, while attending Hawai'i Cave Week 2026, hosted by the Hawai'i Grotto, several NCC members spent a morning volunteering at two Cave Conservancy of Hawai'i (CCH) properties in Ocean View, Hawai'i. The CCH, not unlike the NCC and many cave conservancies across the United States, is a 100% volunteer organization that focuses on land acquisition, public awareness, education, and landowner relationships. CCH now protects 19 properties with 141 acres, all part of the Kīpuka Kanohina Cave System, located on the west coast of the island of Hawai'i, in the desert of Ka'u. The Kīpuka Kanohina Cave System is one of the longest lava tubes in the world.

As part of routine preserve management, volunteer workdays focus on removal of invasive species, as well as removal of trash and debris that have been illegally dumped in the pukas (POO-kahs). In Hawai'i, puka refers to hole, opening, or entrance, and is the term used for sinkholes, where the ceiling has collapsed into the lava tube.

Volunteers truly are the heart and soul of many nonprofit land trusts, and with this dedicated workforce driving these organizations, acres and acres of land are being cared for and conserved for generations to enjoy.

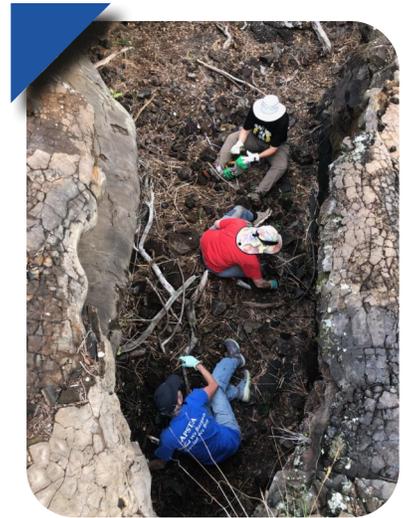
To all volunteers helping nonprofits thrive — a very heartfelt THANK YOU!



NCC members Sue Brown, Ben Brown, Leslie Hatfield, Ellen Schwartz, and Emily Davis pause for a group photo with other Hawai'i volunteers in front of Kazamura. Photo by Leslie Hatfield & Sue Brown.



Inside Maelstrom Cave.



Hats are a must for a work day in the Ka'u desert, even in a puka! NCC members Ellen Schwartz, Emily Davis, and Leslie Hatfield removing invasive species from the floor of a puka.



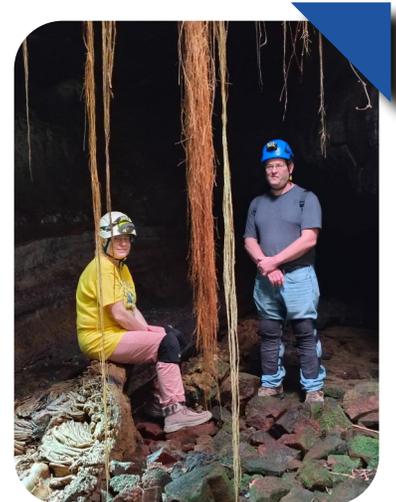
NCC members Emily Davis and Mike Warner (also CCH Vice President) with several CCH members removing invasive species from a puka.



NCC volunteers Ben & Sue Brown loaded a truck with illegally dumped debris from a very steep puka.



Stone Steps Cave.



Ben and Sue Brown inside Kazamura.

All photos by Leslie Hatfield.



NCC Updates

Introducing our new Webmaster by Scott Conway



Scott started caving in 2020 and quickly got involved in various projects in the Adirondack and Schoharie regions, including digging and surveying various parts of the Burroughs Cave Complex over a period of multiple years. He has been on the Board of the Niagara Frontier Grotto since 2024, and presently serves as Chair. He lives in Buffalo, NY, where he works as a cybersecurity engineer with a current role as a penetration tester.

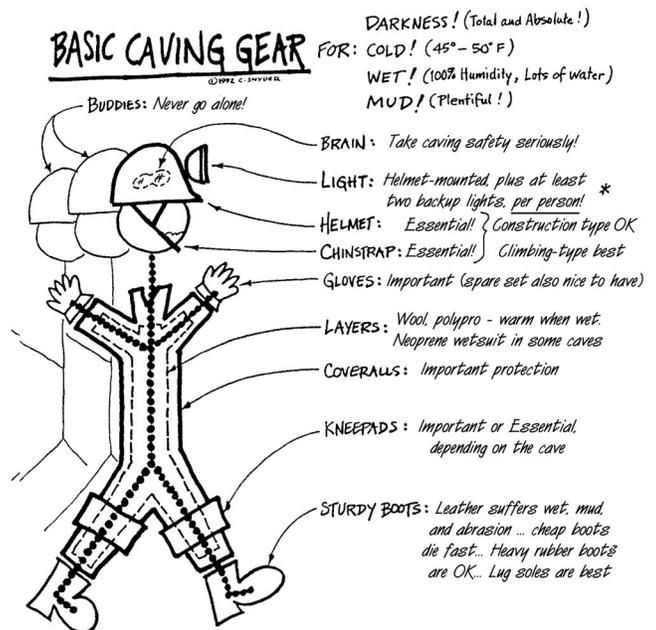
Cave Season Reminders

Permits are required at Bensons, Knox, Onesquethaw, and Merlins. Additionally, all trips to Merlins Cave require a trained cave steward. Please contact the relevant Preserve Manager **at least 48 hours** before your planned trip.

Some NCC preserves are open year-round: Alan Traino Karst Preserve (Slingerlands Hellhole, Georges Surprise), Sellecks Karst Preserve (Sellecks, 575, Levys, Natural Stone Bridge), and Spider Cave Preserve.

Knox opens May 15 or when the sinkhole is clear of ice, whichever is later.

All other caves open May 1.



The Northeast Bat Working Group

by Jacob Morris-Siegel

In January, the Northeast Bat Working Group, or NEBWG, held its annual meeting in Saratoga Springs, New York. This meeting is attended by folks from all around the Northeast that, in one form or another, work with bats. However, the NEBWG's version of the Northeast is more encompassing than the caving one, as it includes 12 states going as far south as Virginia.

The primary feature of the conference is the presentations. The first day was updates from all of the state and federal agencies. The second day featured talks on urban bats, wind energy and mining (effects and monitoring), radiotelemetry, and offshore bats, which was then followed by a social gathering and poster session. The final day's talks were on bat monitoring and conservation.

In addition to the presentations and posters, there were also almost 30 conference sponsors who had tables set up around the site. These sponsors were mostly consulting firms and companies that make bat monitoring and tracking technology, but also included Speleobooks and The Northeastern Cave Conservancy.

The NCC has been a long-time sponsor of NEBWG, and this year, Morgan Ingalls and I were representing the NCC. While we both had other responsibilities for our workplaces - Moonrise Ecological Services for Morgan and MassWildlife for me - between us, the NCC table was almost always staffed. We answered a lot of questions and gave away a lot of swag. One of the interesting things was that out of the 220 people at the conference, there were almost no cavers. We felt us being there was helping in sharing the message to the scientists and researchers that cavers are responsible and care about the caves and bats as much as any of them.

Next year's conference will be a combined national conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, then in 2028 it will be back to a usual regional NEBWG meeting and will be hosted in Rhode Island.



*Left: Morgan Ingalls and Jacob Morris-Siegel.
Above: NY state bat working group gathering in circle of chairs.
Photos by Mike Warner.*

Volunteer Value

by Vince Kappler

During 2025, members reported 2,088 hours working on projects, which surpassed the record set in 2024 (Knox entrance stairway project). Most of the new record is credited for work to promote and prepare NCC preserves for the NSS convention. When we add in the hours driven and total driving mileage for this past year, the 2025 NCC total Volunteer Value is \$93,923.00. In addition, members reported spending \$145 in unreimbursed expenses working on projects.

The NCC has tracked VV since January of 2006, and over the past twenty years, we have documented a total of **\$995,569.00** in support of the NCC Mission.

In 2006, INDEPENDENT SECTOR (IS) <https://independentsector.org/research/value-of-volunteer-time/> found VV was worth just over \$10.00 per hour in our regional area. For the latest year available (2024), IS determined that the national rate is \$34.79 and our regional rate is \$36.81. I will calculate NCC's VV at \$35.00 per hour for 2026 just to be on the conservative side. That is an increase of \$1.00 per hour over our 2025 rate.

The IRS has increased the business mileage rate to \$.725 for 2026. The rate was \$.445 when we started our VV program. Note that this is not the rate that can be deducted from your personal taxes. The NCC adopted the use of the prevailing IRS business rate when it modeled its VV program after the original NSS-USFS VV (1998) agreement, which permitted the use of the business rate instead of the charitable donation rate.

The VV reporting form on the website has been discontinued. 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. I also try to send a reminder email to officers and committee chairs to submit VV data so I can compile my report for each board meeting. All submissions received are acknowledged by return email.

VV reported to date (3/8/26) for 2026 is:

36 hours

Total value of \$1,260.00

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?



Open Positions

Trustees

The Nominating Committee of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) invites applications for Trustee of the NCC Board of Directors. This spring, three of the nine Trustee seats will need to be filled. Trustees are elected by voting-eligible members of the NCC by email ballot during the last half of May, and those elected begin their term at the June Board meeting.

The Board of Directors, which consists of the Officers and Trustees, sets policy for the NCC. The Board meets quarterly, generally for half a day, with frequent communications, mostly via email, between meetings.

Candidates must be a current member of the NCC. No specific prior experience is required; however, experience in land conservation and stewardship, business, finance, law, fundraising, or community outreach is always helpful.

A summary of the election process and requirements is at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ss-IJ4LfCXbCuopMyMYE6h0kJcYIPcaiEum-MxnSyDo/edit?usp=sharing>. You may wish to review the minutes from previous meetings of the Board: <http://www.necaveconservancy.org/minutes/>. The NCC newsletters are found here: <https://necaveconservancy.org/newsletters/>.

If you would like to be considered as a Trustee candidate, please send a bio/platform to nominating@necaveconservancy.org before 11pm ET May 13 for inclusion with our electronic ballots. You'll receive an email acknowledging receipt. If you know of anyone who would make a good Trustee, please ask them to consider becoming a candidate. If you have questions about the process, or would like to see sample bios/platforms, please contact Norm Berg, Nominating Committee Chair, at nominating@necaveconservancy.org, call 860-621-2080 (leave a message), or contact any NCC Board member.

Norm Berg — NCC Nominating Committee Chair

Membership Chair

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

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.



Upcoming Events

Spring NRO 2026

May 15th to 17th

The Northeastern Regional Organization (NRO) will be holding its spring event at Thompson's Lake Campground – Thacher State Park in East Berne, NY. The Central Connecticut Grotto and the Northeastern Cave Conservancy will be hosting this weekend of caving, camping, and other fun activities. The location is near where last year's NSS Convention was held and there will be led trips to many of the same caves. For more information, please contact info@ctcavers.org.

This NRO has been designated as a fundraiser for the NCC's Merlins Preserve Land Acquisition Project. This means that the portion of registration going to the hosting organizations, as well as profits from the Eat Dirt Catering meals, will be directed to this project. Most importantly, YOU can also help directly by making an additional contribution when you register. Just pick your voluntary donation level and help support this significant project in our region.

Registration is now open! <https://necaveconservancy.regfox.com/spring-2026-nro>. Please pre-register, purchase meals, t-shirts, and guidebooks, and make a donation to the NCC if you can afford to.



NCC & Friends' Day

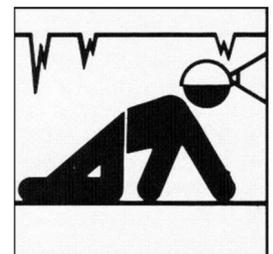
August 1st, 2026

Save the date for the NCC & Friends' Day, formerly Members' Appreciation Day!

Celebrate Cave and Karst Conservation

Saturday, August 1st

11 a.m. - 3 p.m.





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.

Photos by Adriane Hectus.

