

NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY NEWS



Vol. 28, No 3, October 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.

Officers

President	Vice President	Treasurer	Secretary
Leslie Hatfield president@necaveconservancy.org	Kevin Dumont vicepresident@necaveconservancy.org	Ben Brown treasurer@necaveconservancy.org	Ramon Armen secretary@necaveconservancy.org

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Membership Vacant membership@necaveconservancy.org	Barn Dance Emily Davis & Mike Warner barndance@necaveconservancy.org	Risk Management Mitch Berger riskmanagement@necaveconservancy.org	Stewardship Coordinator Jacob Morris-Siegel preserves@necaveconservancy.org

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Alan Traino Karst Preserve Devon Hedges traino_preserve@necaveconservancy.org	Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve Erik Nieman ella_armstrong@necaveconservancy.org	Onesquethaw Cave Preserve Thom Engel & Johnny Pitt onesquethaw@necaveconservancy.org	Surprise Cave Liaison Bob Simmons surprise@necaveconservancy.org
Bensons Cave Preserve Luke Mazza bensons@necaveconservancy.org	Jack Packers Preserve Kevin Dumont jack_packers@necaveconservancy.org	Salamander Cave Preserve Cara Gentry & Erik Richards salamander@necaveconservancy.org	Thacher Park Liaison Thom Engel thacher@necaveconservancy.org
Bentleys Karst Preserve Devon Hedges bentleys@necaveconservancy.org	Knox Cave Preserve Mitch Berger knox@necaveconservancy.org	Sellecks Karst Preserve Erik Nieman sellecks@necaveconservancy.org	Special Use Thom Engel specialuse@necaveconservancy.org
Clarksville Cave Preserve Mike Chu, Thom Engel, Chuck Porter clarksville@necaveconservancy.org	Merlins Cave Preserve Ramon Armen & Morgan Ingalls merlins@necaveconservancy.org	Spider Cave Preserve Adriane Hectus spider@necaveconservancy.org	

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*Front cover: Colvin Ave in Clarksville Cave. Photo by Erik Nieman.
Left: Flowers at Octagon Barn. Photo by Susie Pietsch.
Back cover: Schobarie Fm - Waterfall Passage in Clarksville Cave.
Photo by Erik Nieman.*



Open Positions

Nominating Committee Seeking Candidates for Vice President and Treasurer of The Northeastern Cave Conservancy (NCC)

At the December 6, 2026 NCC board meeting, the Trustees will elect the NCC Vice President and the NCC Treasurer, each for a two-year term. If you would like to be considered for either of these positions, would like to nominate someone for a position, or would just like more information on the process and requirements, please contact the NCC Nominating Committee at nominating@necaveconservancy.org.

The Nominating Committee asks that nominations be submitted by November 25, 2026; nominations submitted after that date may not receive consideration. The Nominating Committee will present the nominations to the Trustees, who elect the officers. For reference, the general duties and responsibilities of the Officer positions are described below.

Vice President:

The Vice President assumes the duties of the President in the event of his or her absence, incapacity, or resignation, and presides when the Board meets as a Committee of the Whole. Various committees report to the Vice President. A detailed description is at [NCC Vice President description](#).

Treasurer:

The Treasurer is responsible for the safekeeping of organizational funds; maintaining and reporting financial records and statements to the Board of Directors; and filing all financial documents required by local, state, or federal regulations. Various committees report to the Treasurer. A detailed description is at [NCC Treasurer description](#).

Applying for nomination:

Please email a pdf file as an attachment, with your contact info, relevant experience, and what you would bring to the NCC. You will receive a reply confirming receipt.

You may wish to review minutes from previous meetings of the Board at <http://www.necaveconservancy.org/minutes/>.

A summary of the election process and terms can be viewed at [Summary of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy Board of Directors Election Process and Terms](#).

Norm Berg
NCC Nominating Committee Chair
nominating@necaveconservancy.org
Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC)
<http://www.necaveconservancy.org>

Additional Volunteer Opportunities

The following positions are also open. If you are interested in learning more about any of these, please contact Norm Berg at nominating@necaveconservancy.org.



Membership Chair



Nominating Chair



Board Trustee



Bentleys Cave Preserve Manager

Ever wonder what an NCC Preserve Manager or Co-Manager is responsible for and does for the preserve and cave over the course of the year? We have a virtual meeting planned for anybody potentially looking to become a preserve manager or co-manager. Join us!

Meeting information:

NCC Prospective Preserve Managers Info Meeting

Wednesday, November 18 · 7:00 – 8:00pm

Time zone: America/New_York

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/uzn-sisd-ehs>

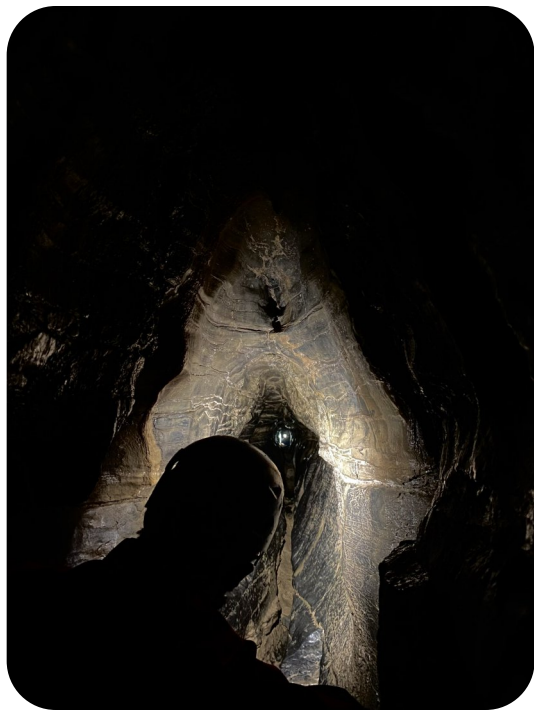
Or dial: (US) +1 530-739-1472 PIN: 609 797 330#

More phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/uzn-sisd-ehs?pin=3890044319975>

Volunteer Value by Vince Kappler

The volunteer effort reported by members as of September 19th is: 642 hours on task with an additional 35.5 hours driving 2316 miles for total value of \$25,04.00. Additional hours were received after the report was submitted and will be included in the next reporting cycle.

The VV reporting form on the website is back in service. The IT team rebuilt the email system and the VV link is working well. Members preferring to send data directly can still use my personal email vincekappler@gmail.com. All submissions received will be acknowledged by return email.



*Erik Nieman in the Knox Gunbarrel.
Photo by Adriane Hectus.*



NCC Barn Dance. Photo by Erik Nieman.



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?



NCC Updates

2026 Friends and Neighbors Day - August 1st

by Leslie Hatfield

The inaugural Friends and Neighbors Day has come and gone! After a brief discussion at the March Board meeting, the decision was made to expand the Member Appreciation Day to include non-member donors, volunteers, and NCC neighbors. This expansion allows the NCC membership, who are indeed friends of the NCC, to spend the day and share stories with some of our donors and neighbors. What a great way to celebrate our membership while also acknowledging the integral roles that our donors, volunteers, and neighbors play in the NCC.

This year's event was held at the newly expanded Merlins Preserve, where approximately 40 people enjoyed grilled burgers, hot dogs, and a variety of salads on a beautifully sunny August afternoon. Emily Davis and Eat Dirt Catering once again hit the mark with a delicious variety of foods, including a fabulous Chu farm blueberry cobbler.

Many attendees explored the trails on the now 71+ acre preserve which take you up the hill past the two newest caves in the NCC's portfolio, Tunnel Hill Cave and Volcano Cave, eventually to loop past the entrances to Dragon Bones and Merlins, and then back down again. John Dunham offered a version of their "Forested Karst Land Walk and Talk" guided hike, where participants were able to hear about the historical uses of the property for charcoal production as well as getting an introduction to the geology of the preserve. Thank you to John for giving a condensed version of their talk! Future plans at the preserve include an expansion of the trail system to form a figure eight, as well as removal of the gate at the parking area, and hopefully with some grant funding, a slight expansion of the parking area.

As with past Member Appreciation Days, continuing the tradition to the new Friends and Neighbors Day, both the Good Neighbor Award and the NCC Meritorious Service Award were presented.

This year's Meritorious Service Award was presented to NCC Life Member and volunteer extraordinaire, Norm Berg. For the past 10 years, Norm has served as the Chair of the Nominations Committee, overseeing the yearly elections to seat trustees on the Board. Norm assisted with soliciting and encouraging nominees for Trustee, as well as being responsible for sending out the ballots and counting and reporting on the results. Norm has been the wizard behind the curtain for many years, and his work has been much appreciated by everyone on the Board. This award has been earned and is well deserved.

Unfortunately the timing did not work for the recipients of our next category of award, the Good Neighbor Award, and due to conflicting events, none of the awardees were able to attend.



Norm Berg.



*Martha Burke-Hennessy and Michael Belknap at the closing.
Photo by Leslie Hatfield.*

The first award went to the previous owners of the Merlins property, Martha Hennessey-Burke and Michael Belknap. The original 35-acre parcel containing Merlins Cave was purchased from Mike and Martha in 2011. After deciding to divest their property in Columbia County, which they have owned since 1971, they reached out to the NCC to see if the organization was interested in purchasing additional land near the Merlins Preserve. Working with Acquisitions Chair, Bob Simmons, the NCC settled on a ~35-acre parcel that would contain our existing parking area and access trail. Michael and Martha offered the additional property to the NCC at below market value. The NCC is grateful to Michael and Martha for working with the NCC on both purchases and are thankful they were such good neighbors!

The second recipient, John Gullen, was awarded the Good Neighbor Award a week later. John and his family live on land adjacent to the Merlins Preserve and often walk the preserve and sometimes even go into the caves. As a New York State Forest Ranger, John recognized the need and has played an active role in ensuring that NYS Forest Rangers are trained in cave rescue. In the spring of 2026, John was central to the rescue of the caver who was stuck in the Bear Trap for roughly eight hours. The NCC is very fortunate and thankful to have someone of John's caliber and knowledge base as a good neighbor!



*Leslie Hatfield and John Gullen.
Photo by Hannah Gullen.*

Seasonal Closures



With permits where required, all of the NCC preserves are open year-round. However, most of the caves on the preserves are closed.

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.

Caves at the following 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 2026 New York Land Conservation Conference Session Evaluations Have Been Received!

by Leslie Hatfield

Notes from the Underground scored a 4.8 out of 5.0
(5 = Excellent; 3 = Average; 1 = below average)

Here's what our land conservation peers had to say about Notes from the Underground:

- Very interesting background on geology and caves, and great success stories in collaboration, especially for a volunteer organization.
- Y'all are awesome! I love hearing from passionate folks – thank you for your volunteer work!
- The various partner's/presenter's material was well organized and presented thoughtfully. Engaging and new content at NYLCC!
- Absolutely fascinating! I had not considered this form of conservation.
- Interesting session; I enjoyed learning about the unique approach to cave conservation!
- Excellent!
- Good lessons in collaboration.
- Very informative not only about caves but about partnership work, collaboration, and reaching out to learn from others.
- Really grateful for cave specialists! Engaging- great to have more conversation a bit earlier in the presentation.
- Very interesting presentation. Many thanks for your great work and collaboration.
- Unique session – Great presenters.

Kudos and congrats to our presenters on a job well done! And a quick reminder – the NCC was the only all-volunteer land trust chosen to present at this year's conference!

Thank you to the NCC's Thom Engel, Cara Gentry, and Bob Simmons, and a special thank you to Annie Jacobs from our partners at Hudson Taconic Lands.



Thom Engel, Bob Simmons, Leslie Hatfield, Cara Gentry, and Annie Jacobs. Photo by Annie Jacobs.



Leslie Hatfield, Thom Engel, Cara Gentry, Annie Jacobs, and Bob Simmons. Photo by Drake McDonough.

NCC Barn Dance

by Kevin Dumont

On September 12, about 85 people gathered at the Octagon Barn in Knox for our (nearly) annual Barn Dance, marking the 16th celebration of this beloved NCC fundraising tradition. Paul Rosenberg once again kept the crowd moving with his lively calling, humor, storytelling and historical anecdotes, accompanied by the wonderful music of Tamarack. During intermission, the ever-popular bucket raffle gave dancers a chance to catch their breath and perhaps go home with a prize. The Octagon Barn again provided a beautiful setting for an evening of music, dancing, and good company. We extend our special thanks to the owners of the Octagon Barn, Amy Lauterbach Pokorny and Russ Pokorny, for their continued generosity and hospitality.



Photos by Erik Nieman.



Preserve Updates

Salamander Cave Preserve

by Cara Gentry



Salamander Cave Preserve is located in Kingston New York where there is a rich history of mining for limestone. The cave entrance is found in the wall of an old limestone quarry that was operated by the Kingston Lime and Cement Company and abandoned in the late 1800s. There is speculation as to whether the cave was discovered during the quarrying activities, or if there was an entrance prior to quarrying activities that was destroyed in the process of harvesting limestone. An old map from the 1890s shows the quarry. Inside the cave, the date 1864 along with initials can be found carved in the wall, providing the earliest documented exploration of the interior.

More recently, the property was owned by Dennis and Valerie Connors. Dennis, a prominent sculpture artist in Kingston, had approached myself and my partner, Erik Richards, to ask if we knew who might be interested in owning the cave as he and his wife were considering downsizing their land holdings and wanted to make sure the cave and lands were protected from development. He knew we frequented the cave and were involved with caving organizations. The wheels were set in motion, and discussions began with the NCC.

Unfortunately, Dennis passed away before the land was transferred, however the family continued with the donation as it was the wish of both Dennis and his wife Valerie. Recently, Valerie explained that years ago before they owned the property, she and Dennis used to walk through the woods with the family and dogs where they would see deer, raccoons, coyotes, wild turkeys, and other wildlife. Then a farm in the neighborhood was sold and developed as an apartment complex. Concerned the woods they enjoyed would also become developed, they purchased the cave property to keep it as it was, with their children and others spending hours exploring and playing in the woods as well as the cave.

When they made the decision to donate the cave property, they felt it was the right thing to do as not only would the land remain undeveloped, but it would be ecologically protected by the conservancy and enjoyed by the public.

We thank the Connors for their donation and stewardship of the land all these years. Trail projects are in the works as part of a collaboration with the adjacent landowner, the Kingston Land Trust, so keep an eye out for volunteering opportunities. The cave itself is managed as a park and go caving. A changing area was constructed in 2025 near the entrance to the cave with the help of volunteers. Please keep in mind that the cave is closed for the protection of bats beginning on October 1st and ending May 1st.



Photos by Cara Gentry.



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

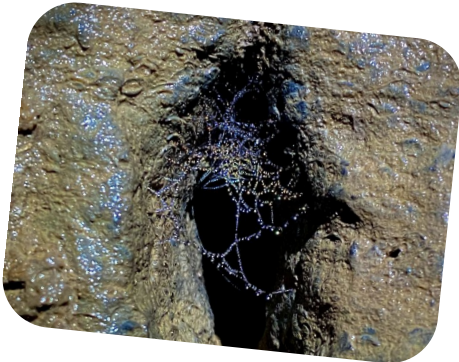


Giving to the NCC at Work

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.

*Flower photos by Susie Pietsch.
 Spider web in Knox Cave by Adriane Hectus.*

