

Ben Tobin, NSS 49350, Kentucky

bwtobin80@gmail.com

NSS Fellow, Current Director, 2020-2023



I stumbled into caving through an internship giving cave tours at Blanchard Springs Caverns in Arkansas. With little prior experience in caves, how my life completely changed that summer came as a shock. My interest started with a personal excitement of caves, but quickly grew as I felt the warmth of what grew into my caving family.

I quickly decided to delve into the world of cave science and studied karst science at Western Kentucky University and became involved with my first Grotto. During graduate school, I was an officer in the Green River Grotto. Since then I have been honored to work as a cave resource specialist at Sequoia - Kings Canyon and Grand Canyon National Parks. Today, I study karst at the Kentucky Geological Survey as a research scientist. In addition, I volunteer as co-chair of the Karst Commission of the International Association of Hydrogeologists.

Caving has afforded me the opportunity to travel all over the country, exploring, mapping, and researching. No matter where I end up, I continually find that the fellowship amongst cavers drives the caving community. While caving communities differ across the country, what holds us together is our common desire to explore and protect the world of wonder beneath our feet.

After serving as a director of the NSS for the last three years, the importance of fellowship among cavers through the NSS couldn't be more clear. As we move into a transition period in the society, I am encouraged by our growing membership and increased enthusiasm amongst our younger members to help grow the society into a place where all cavers are excited to be a part of our family. Now is a time to ensure that energy continues to thrive. Our continued success as an organization hinges on (1) communicating the value of membership to new cavers from many demographics and (2) reinforcing the importance of an NSS membership to new and old members alike.

Cavers that stay engaged with the NSS, including myself, do so because of our connections within our caving family. Retaining members in the future is going to be driven by our ability to help new and old cavers find their community within our larger caver family. As a Director over the last three years, I have worked extensively on strategic planning efforts and through this, it is clear that we are not communicating the

amazing efforts of our volunteers to both members and the general public nor are we doing a good job of making it known what benefits exist to those in the society. If re-elected as a director, I plan to continue to work with our leadership to improve communication both to members and the broader community. With the ultimate goal of making sure all members are aware of the value the NSS brings to their caving family and to continue to grow the NSS in ways to protect caves and promote safe caving.

I believe through listening and engaging with all stakeholders, we will grow a larger consensus and build a strong future of continued exploration, study, and protection of caves through caving.