

USDA Forest Service Natural Resource Manager



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Topic: Natural Resource Manager (NRM) Caves and Karst Management Application.

Summary: The goal of the Forest Service's Caves and Karst resource management program is to protect and maintain the biologic, geologic, mineralogical, paleontological, hydrologic, cultural, educational, scientific, and recreational values of Caves and Karst resources. The Forest Service has identified over 2,200 significant caves on National Forest System (NFS) lands, often with the assistance of partners such as the National Speleological Society (NSS) and Cave Research Foundation (CRF). Good relations with our partners are critical in the management of these resources, as NSS and CRF groups provide the Caves and Karst feature data necessary for management. A functional interdisciplinary and spatial NRM application for management of Caves and Karst resources is key to proper management, protection, and stakeholder relations.

The majority of the information that is stored in the application is captured as part of project level National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) and Federal Cave Resources Protection Act (FCRPA) compliance. The application ideally will provide project level analysis and reporting tools to reduce redundant reporting. The data is also used to track target accomplishments and provide real property data to budget and finance. In addition data is used for agency reports provided to Congress, tracks maintenance needs and accomplishments and deferred maintenance reporting, scoping and analysis for future projects, and providing resource information needed for emergency responses such as fire.

In 2012 the NRM Caves and Karst Management Application (CKMA) was updated to incorporate more detailed information and a sophisticated permission system for access by approved cave managers. Call letters were sent from Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources (RHVR) to encourage cave managers on NFS units across the country to enter their significant information into the database. Many forests currently have their own local databases of Caves and Karst resources which are spatial in nature, and few, if any, utilize the CKMA except for reporting significant cave to the WO. A few forests updated their significant cave records in the system, which allowed a faster response during a national significant cave FOIA request in 2013.

Key Points: The cave listing will be periodically updated as additional caves are found and determined significant. A cave is determined significant if it meets any one or more of a set of criteria (Reference: Cave Resources Protection Act {PL100-691} and 36 CFR 290). All significant caves on National Forest System lands are to be entered into the NRM Cave application. Caves and Karst information can be used to direct public use to suitable caves, as an educational tool to reduce impacts, and to increase public awareness and sensitivity to the value of cave resources.

Key Features: The cave application provides a central repository of all Forest Service managed significant caves for quicker reporting and response time; data includes significant criteria, cave biota, completed management plans, and presence of White-Nose Syndrome. Field projects, survey results, and partner reports can be stored in the database and associated with the cave record. With appropriate user roles, the data can be retrieved by forests, regions, and Washington Office personnel.