

Lincoln National Forest
Public Meeting 9-2011

Thank you for your interest in Lincoln National Forest (LNF). We invite your comments as we revise the Cave Program. Our program will become a unison of cavers, government rules, and protection for bats with your help. Please email your comments to Jason Walz jawalz@fs.fed.us

Lincoln National Forest is open to limited recreational use with a cave permit. This is only possible within strict guidance from the 'Decontamination Procedures for Use on National Forest System Lands' paper issued July 21, 2010. Found here: <http://www.caves.org/region/swr/links.html>

Page 1 "Forest Service personnel are expected to work with grottos... and the general public to identify when and where cave entry should be allowed by the public. When official entry is necessary or allowable, ensure decontamination protocols are understood and followed."

- Lincoln National Forest has identified recreational use as an allowable cave entry with thorough decontamination.

Page 4 "In some situations in the west where caves are concentrated in a small area, Regions or Forests may identify logical decontamination areas that allow decontamination between cave clusters that are likely to be used by the same group of bats."

- Lincoln National Forest has identified one cave cluster located within Guadalupe Ranger District. The boundaries are HWY 137 and the southeast border of the USFS.
- Lincoln National Forest is emphasizing thorough decontamination before arriving, clean caving during a visit, and thorough decontamination when you leave the area.

White Nose Syndrome (WNS)

How can Lincoln National Forest prove that people are following decontamination procedures before they arrive to enter caves?

Forest Service Comments

- This is a popular question that many people express cannot be done
- Idea: To require a signature on a WNS Agreement that clearly states the requirements and responsibilities of decontamination procedures
- Idea: To collect photo documentation of cavers completing decontamination procedures in a catalog.
- Idea: Sediment residue should be targeted. Cave gear that is obviously dirty contains sediment mixed with spores, microbes, etc. This sediment mixture is a real way of transference but has not been proven for WNS yet.
- Idea: LNF should question WNS compliance with the same vigilance they question new applicants for vertical experience.

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- Willing to sign WNS Agreement
- Photo documentation may not be needed or useful
- The biggest threat is from cavers from the east. WNS information should be mailed out and signatures received before a cave permit is issued.
- Trip leaders should be responsible for enforcing decontamination rules
- LNF should speak to every person before issuing cave permit
- Add check box to the permit acknowledging WNS compliance

Targeted Cave Closure

Forest Service Comments

- Lincoln National Forest is following the WNS Interagency Response Plan for NM. <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/pdf/NMInteragencyResponsePlan110511.pdf>
- All caves with more than 30 bats are closed to recreational use.
- Bat caves will remain closed until there is a revision to the Interagency Response Plan or there is a change in guidance from the USFS.
- Currently, Black, Little Beauty, Red Lake, Hell Below, Pink Panther, and Pink Dragon are open to recreational cave permit. Hell Below, Pink Panther and Pink Dragon require a Trip Leader.
- Idea: Lincoln National Forest is considering opening more recreational caves depending on significant bat use and other criteria. Three Fingers and Virgin have a route that is being considered.

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- Discussion about where a WNS sign should be placed to help enforce the closure of Cottonwood Cave. The cave entrance has a standard sign explaining the all caves within Lincoln National Forest are closed without a cave permit.
 - Should sign be placed at the entrance, half way down the trail or at the trailhead?
 - A trailhead sign may cause an attractant to Forest users who know nothing about the cave.
 - How can LNF enforce closure?
- Opening more recreational use caves is a good idea

Trip Leader Policy

Lincoln National Forest would like to improve its Trip Leader Policy to provide more safety for cave resources, safety for the public and provide easy-access caving at the same time.

Forest Service Comments

- Idea: Considering instituting a 3-level Trip Leader Policy: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced.
- Idea: A Basic Trip Leader could qualify after a successful cave trip with another LNF Trip Leader of any type. Shift more caves to require a Basic Trip Leader and fewer caves to require no Trip Leader.
- Idea: Have a sign-off sheet for Trip Leader status where the Trip Leader Trainer shares responsibility for training and offenses.
- Lincoln National Forest is looking for qualified cavers who would like to obtain Trip Leader status.

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- Will current Trip Leaders be grandfathered in?
- Finding the cave is part of being a Trip Leader
- Trip Leaders should not be required to lead people they do not know and/or do not feel comfortable leading into a cave

Keys

How can Lincoln National Forest ensure that all keys to cave gates are returned?

Forest Service Comments

- All keys, permits and steplogs should be returned to the Queen lockbox before leaving the Forest boundary.

- Idea: There should be some penalty for not following the key return policy and the lock should be changed quickly.

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- Combination locks should be used for popular recreational use caves. The combo could be included with the permit eliminating the need for a key. The combinations should be changed regularly
- The USFS should consider collecting a deposit for keys
- A lanyard should be included with key

Volunteer Opportunities

There are numerous volunteer opportunities at Lincoln National Forest. Contact Jason Walz jawalz@fs.fed.us with your volunteer project ideas

Volunteer Projects

- Hiking: Carry a GPS unit and map little known trails or track where you are ridgewalking.
- Cave survey and inventory: There are several caves that need surveying by an experienced group.
- Idea: Cave Watch – a schedule of when cavers are going to be in the Guadalupe Ranger District area to help protect caves through educating the public. Everyone should be careful not to put themselves in harm's way to confront someone doing something wrong.
- Organized Groups
 - National Speleological Society (NSS)
 - NSS – Southwest Region: www.caves.org/region/swr
 - NSS – High Guads Restoration Project: www.hgrp.org
 - NSS – Pecos Valley Grotto: Pat Seiser, President
cavewench@windstream.net

Other Topics

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- Do away with the Ridge Walking Permit
- Use the Cave Discovery Permit, which allows access to unknown caves with no brass-cap on the entrance.
- Some known caves within USFS lands do not have a brass-cap on the entrance.
- Trip report should be included with recreational permit
- Trip report should be required before future permits are issued