



I suspect you are well aware the NSS has a membership issue. Our numbers have fallen considerably. Our early pioneers are moving on to the great cave in the sky and new cavers are not taking their places. We need to encourage unaffiliated cavers to join, as well as retain the members we have. We need to promote membership benefits, beyond the publications, benefits for the sport cavers, as well as the project cavers.

Too long we have conducted our activities in a shroud of secrecy and now we are paying the price. One result is the NSS is not the priority to cavers that it should be. When the cost of membership is compared to the price of a case of beer and a pizza, we have a problem.

Another result is, we do not have a public image. The NSS needs to be recognized as a resource that the general public can access for information, expertise and advice. A go to place when they find a cave or sinkhole on their property to when their environment is being tagged for pipelines and other infrastructure development. This could spotlight the organization in a manner that would give us access to conservation minded individuals, people who might be willing to financially support us.

We also need to improve our image with Government agencies, develop greater credibility and be recognized as a professional entity that can advise them, for example, regarding cave closure policy. Blanket closure of caves is an easy management process, but it only tends to keep organized cavers out and exposes caves to damage and disturbance by uninformed individuals.

The Society needs to develop effective public outreach programs. There is a need to educate the public about caves, cave sciences, conservation and the impact we all have on, not only what we see on the surface, but what is going on below and how that can return to them via their water system. Groups and organizations are always looking for programs to show their members. Why not engage them in cave and karst conservation? These efforts would not need to tie up cavers to show them, a simple down-loadable file that can be shown at schools or at meetings. It only takes putting them on lists that teachers, and other folks, use to find programs for their meetings. Local chapters of the Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club would be a prime place to start.

It's going to continue to require a lot of creativity and thinking outside the box to maintain member services and support expeditions, projects and scientific research. The need exists to pursue grants and other funding outside of our membership base.

If you choose to elect me to the BOG I will look for ways we can economize while not sacrificing member services, find alternate funding to reduce the financial burden on the membership and endeavor to provide more education and to the non-caving public.