

**Interim Cave Access Program  
Letter of Understanding  
Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and  
Indiana Karst Conservancy (IKC)**

The temporary cave closure established by Information Bulletin #25 (Caves and Karst Resource Management on Properties Owned or Leased by IDNR) will continue for an undetermined time as research and information continues to be gathered regarding the relationship between bats, white-nosed syndrome (WNS), and humans. However, providing access to caves with limited potential impact on bats is a shared goal between IDNR and IKC so that both cavers and youth groups may experience this important form of outdoor recreation and exploration. It is with that shared goal in mind that limited access to specific caves will be facilitated through this Interim Cave Access Program Letter of Understanding.

The intent of this Interim Access Program is to allow responsible and appropriately trained cavers and youth groups access to a limited number of caves with the understanding that cavers and groups are aware of, comprehend, and will utilize USFWS decontamination procedures to limit the transmission of WNS from cave to cave in Indiana or to caves outside the State.

The scope of this Interim Access Program is limited to make it administratively and logistically viable from the agency's perspective and so that the decontamination procedures can be monitored for compliance and self-enforced by the participating individuals and groups. As such, the program will be administered by IKC, and access will be limited to Donaldson/Bronson (Shawnee) and Upper Twin caves at Spring Mill State Park and Endless and River caves at Cave River Valley Natural Area. Access to Donaldson/Bronson Cave will be available year-round. Access to Endless and River Caves will be restricted to May 1 – August 31 to protect hibernating Indiana bats. Access to Upper Twin Cave under DNR property will be limited to November 1 – May 15 to prevent interference with Spring Mill's Twin Cave Tours.

These caves were selected to have appeal to organized cavers recreationally and targeted for trips organized by caving groups such as National Speleological Society grottos or their members. This will promote peer influence for compliance and also serve as an educational tool to promote and encourage the proper decontamination best practices to novice trip participants led by experienced cavers (e.g., an experienced trip leader might organize a trip for Scouts who would learn proper decontamination techniques and also gain an appreciation for compliance to protect our bat species).

In general, cavers and groups interested in entering one of the aforementioned caves will contact the designated IKC-appointed Cave Access Coordinator for Spring Mill/Cave River Valley to complete required permits, complete online decontamination training, and obtain important safety and policy information regarding cave access specific for each cave. The designated Cave



Access Coordinator will regularly communicate with the IDNR property manager at Spring Mill State Park. The Cave Access Coordinator will regularly monitor compliance with the permitting process, and the IDNR property manager will monitor the permitting process and administer the property access portion of the arrangement. IKC will also periodically provide presentations about decontamination procedures for the general public at Spring Mill State Park in partnership with the park's interpretive naturalist. Specific responsibilities of both IKC and IDNR are identified below.

### **Responsibilities of IKC**

- Appoint the Cave Access Coordinator for Spring Mill and Cave River Valley.
- Develop, post, and maintain an online decontamination training module that requires trip leaders and participants to complete and print evidence of completion to submit with a trip request.
- Develop appropriate trip documentation to issue to cavers and cave groups in cooperation with Spring Mill State Park staff.
- Produce a rule sheet for each cave, including but not limited to, specific cave access hours, parking, gate/key access where needed, property check-in procedures, gate fee payment, and emergency contacts.
- Establish a minimum and maximum lead time on permit requests and notifications.
- Develop an identification placard for placement in permitted cavers' vehicles.
- Develop a database to track applications and approved trips.
- Maintain a webpage devoted to the Interim Cave Access Program that identifies caves available, explains the permit process, hosts the decontamination training module, and provides property rules, and contact information for the Cave Access Coordinator.
- Develop an emergency response plan for use when permits are issued.
- Communicate with cavers and trip leaders who request access to determine and evaluate their affiliation, experience, and other factors prior to issuing a permit.
- Ensure that all trip participants complete the online WNS contamination training at least once per calendar year. Participants must sign and submit acknowledgement form for every trip.
- Coordinate each trip with trip leader, collect signed WNS acknowledgement, approve trip, organize documentation "packet" for each trip, and submit electronically to the property staff point-of-contact per agreed upon procedures.
- Arrange trips only within the identified dates as follows:
  - Donaldson/Bronson Cave: Year Round
  - Upper Twin Caves: November 1 – May 15
  - River Cave: May 1 – August 31
  - Endless Cave: May 1 – August 31
- Maintain communication with Indiana Conservation Officers regarding upcoming trips as necessary.
- Provide occasional random checks of groups to monitor compliance with decontamination procedures.



- Provide utilization reports to the IDNR property manager on an annual basis or as requested.
- Present at least two programs annually for visitors at Spring Mill State Park about caving and the decontamination process.


**Responsibilities of IDNR**


- Appoint a designated property staff point of contact for the Cave Access Coordinator.
- Assist with, review, and approve development and implementation/use of the cave permit process and form(s), decontamination training module, cave rule sheets, and any other associated materials.
- Monitor compliance with decontamination training module and cave rules, including occasional random checks of groups to monitor compliance with decontamination procedures.
- Promote Interim Cave Access Program on IDNR website with links to IKC website for detailed information.
- Invite and coordinate presentations by IKC to general park visitors about caving and the decontamination process.
- Administer park entry, gate fees, and cave access as required and agreed upon for each permitted group.

Issues in program structure and compliance will be addressed through mutual discussion, and alterations may be made by mutual consent. The Letter of Understanding may be terminated by the IDNR or by the IKC for any reason the IDNR or the IKC determines that such termination is in its best interest. Termination of the Letter of Understanding by either organization shall be established by delivery of a Termination Notice at least fifteen (15) days prior to the termination effective date.

**Term**

This letter of understanding will be effective for two years from the date of signature by both IDNR and IKC. Reviews and evaluation for continued use, revisions, caves included or discontinuation will occur at the end of year one of the agreement and just prior to the end of the term.

  
 DNR Title: Deputy Director  
 Date: 2/2/22

  
 IKC Title: President  
 Date: February 16, 2022