

# **A Proposal to Relocate the NSS Office Complex to Horse Cave, Kentucky**

## **Prepared by**

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## **Presented to:**

The Board of Governors of the National Speleological Society, Inc.  
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Location: Richmond, Virginia

## **Executive Summary**

The National Speleological Society, Inc. (herein referred to as the NSS) has expressed a immediate and critical need to expand their national headquarters (herein referred to as the NSS Office Complex). Presently those headquarters reside at an aging facility within a residential neighborhood on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama on one of several small parcels of land associated with Shelta Cave Nature Preserve, owned and managed by the NSS.

This proposal offers an option to relocate the NSS Office Complex to the town of Horse Cave, Kentucky – a community adjacent to Mammoth Cave National Park in south-central Kentucky. Salient points of this proposal include the following:

- 1) Horse Cave, although a small town, has a long history of cave-related activities, particularly through the efforts of the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA).
- 2) Furthermore, Horse Cave is situated along a major interstate corridor (I-65) and is approximately one hour from the Louisville International Airport and 1.5 hours from the Nashville International Airport.
- 3) Recently renovated facilities of appropriate size and requirements are presently available and affordable within downtown Horse Cave.
- 4) Horse Cave is located near the geographic center of the NSS membership.
- 5) The ACCA operates the premier museum on caves in the nation and a successful commercial cave in Horse Cave and has expressed a desire to coordinate efforts with the NSS in expanding their museum, cave tour, writing grants, attracting more visitors, and soliciting volunteers.
- 6) The ACCA is willing to offer museum space to display a portion of the NSS Speleo Museum. Similarly, the ACCA has an interest in properly archiving and making accessible their significant and unique library.

- 7) Near to Horse Cave, Mammoth Cave National Park attracts between 1-1.5 million visitors each year. Cave enthusiasts and NSS members are drawn to the region and regularly participate in conservation and education opportunities.
- 8) Horse Cave houses the national headquarters for the ACCA. Nearby, the Cave Research Foundation owns and operates their national headquarters at the Hamilton Valley Research Station. Moreover a variety of commercial caves, such as Diamond Caverns in nearby Park City, loosely confederate as the National Caves Association.
- 9) Western Kentucky University (WKU), 30 miles distant in the city of Bowling Green, is a major driving force in the region, has a 100 million in endowments, and is the premier school for cave and karst studies in the nation. WKU annually offers a variety of week-long karst field courses at Mammoth Cave National Park.

Included within this proposal are details regarding the town of Horse Cave and two facilities that are immediately available.

- 1) For \$140,000 the NSS can purchase a recently renovated, L-shaped, 11,256 square foot building at 218 E. Main Street with an attached metal warehouse on Cave Street. This building is within one block from the American Cave Museum. An additional \$50,000 may be needed for additional modifications to the facility.
- 2) For \$20-\$25,000 per year, the NSS can lease 1,100 square feet of second floor office space and 1,120 square feet of museum space in the lower level of the ACCA facility on Main Street in Horse Cave. Some renovation will be required by the NSS if the ACCA doesn't complete the job through additional grants. These renovations are estimated to cost approximately \$50,000.

Also included in this proposal are specifics regarding potential long-term co-operative arrangements and construction, existing local and regional infrastructure, and the potential for human capital. Supplemental recruitment packages from both the town of Horse Cave and WKU are included as appendices to this proposal.

## **Statement of Need**

The existing NSS Office Complex on the Shelta Cave Nature Preserve in a residential neighborhood on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama is insufficient to meet the current and future needs of the Society. Space for administrative functions competes with the storage space for educational materials and the NSS library. The NSS Speleo Museum is not present at the current office site. Recent purchases of lots adjacent to the NSS office have increased the size of the Nature Preserve without significantly increasing storage or operational facilities. Aging structures on these recently acquired lots will require significant investment before they are of practical use. The first and seemingly most practical option, expansion or new construction at the Nature Preserve, may be impeded by a combination of zoning limitations and cave management issues.

In response to these concerns, NSS Board of Governors (herein referred to as the BOG) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the spring of 2008 stating their desire to consider options for a future NSS Office Complex. Act 26-796 was created when NSS President Bill Tozer moved; "The NSS will construct or purchase a building to house the NSS Office, Library and Museum on a site to be selected." Furthermore, the BOG, with the support of the Congress of Grottos, concluded that a proposal that combines the NSS administrative functions with the presently under-maintained NSS Library and Speleo Museum is desirable to an option that further separates those NSS functions.

The RFP issued by the BOG detailed several practical stipulations for a viable proposal. Primary stipulations include:

- A facility with available utilities and a target size of 10,000 to 20,000 square feet, with a minimum of 10,000 square feet dedicated to administrative functions and the library.
- A site that will allow for future expansion if needed.
- A site with interstate highway access, a nearby major airport, and proximal police and fire security.
- A centrally located site in a region with a large pool of active cavers willing to donate time and energy, a nearby major university friendly to the NSS, and a source of human capital to provide staffing for the office.

## **Fiduciary Responsibilities**

Any move from the present NSS Office Complex, even if that move is within Huntsville, will require the NSS to purchase, lease, or receive a donation of land or an existing structure. The effort and expense of a move to a new facility necessitates that the BOG consider a location that best serves the national needs of the membership. If the NSS also desires to increase their public profile through an available museum and/or library, as has been considered, then the BOG must also choose a well-visited location that will generate a significant flux of visitors.

The financial burden incurred during a move of the NSS Office Complex will likely be the single-most critical factor that the BOG should consider. As of April 1, 2008 the net worth of the Headquarters Fund, managed by the National Speleological Foundation

(NSF) and a ready source of money for any potential relocation, was on the order of \$211,000. Estimates by the NSS Secretary-Treasurer, A. Peri Frantz, in her October report to the BOG, predict that the present market downturn may reduce the net worth of NSF investments, such as the Headquarters Fund, by more than 20%. The implication is that the NSS has less near-term resources to draw upon for any NSS Office Complex proposal.

Limited financial resources mean that the NSS membership will closely scrutinize the choice the BOG makes for an NSS Office Complex. Options for a NSS Office Complex that include new construction may prove unaffordable – for example, the BOG has heard at least one proposal to build a new facility for between two and three million dollars. In contrast, an option that includes existing structures, the direction of this proposal, will quite possibly keep relocation and costs down to a more reasonable level – in the ballpark of \$250-300,000. Furthermore, relocation to a low cost-of-living region, as in this proposal, will enhance the potential savings to the NSS.

The last, and most financially affordable option is a “do nothing” scenario. It is our opinion that this scenario would, in time, greatly impact NSS membership services. Furthermore, this option does nothing to increase the visibility of the NSS Library and Speleo Museum, nor does this option resolve the strained coordination between the NSS administrative functions, membership services, and public outreach. We strongly encourage the BOG to only consider this option as a last resort.

### **This Proposal**

We propose that the NSS Office Complex relocate to the town of Horse Cave in south-central Kentucky. We arrive at this deduction from careful consideration of financial resources, the available options, and our vision of future growth for the NSS.

Horse Cave, with an approximate population of 2,300, has a long history of cave-related activities, more recently because of the efforts of the American Cave Conservation Association and American Cave Museum. The American Cave Museum is the premier museum about caves in the United States and draws an estimated 10-12,000 visitors each year. Hidden River Cave underlies downtown, with more than 10 miles of surveyed passage and a hydrologic connection to the 22 miles of surveyed passage in Hicks Cave. The large and scenic entrance to Hidden River Cave is the centerpiece of the 8-acre ACCA facility and is utilized for commercial cave tours and as an educational laboratory.

Horse Cave is situated along a major interstate corridor (I-65), is 72 miles south of Louisville, and 102 miles north of Nashville. Both Louisville and Nashville have international airports (Figure 1). Near to Horse Cave, Mammoth Cave National Park attracts between 1-1.5 million visitors each year – a potential source of membership and volunteers. With the status of world’s longest cave, Mammoth attracts a world experts in karst science and conservation.

An analysis of NSS membership and their zip codes of residence highlight the centralized nature of the south-central Kentucky caving region (Figure 2). Using the Central Feature method within ArcGIS Spatial Analyst, Horse Cave lies near the geographic center of NSS members. Fourteen NSS Grottos, including the large Nashville and Louisville Grottos are within three hours of Horse Cave, and a majority of NSS members live within 500 miles, a one-day drive, of Horse Cave (Figure 3). Nearby, the Cave Research Foundation operates their national headquarters and field house on a 300-acre plot of land in Hamilton Valley. At least seven commercial caves other than Mammoth and Hidden River Cave operate in the region (Figure 4). These and dozens of other commercial caves around the U.S. loosely confederate as the National Caves Association, which is based out of Diamond Caverns in nearby Park City.



Figure 1: Location of Horse Cave, Kentucky and map of the Nashville-Louisville I-65 corridor.

There are two facilities in Horse Cave that are immediately available to the NSS:

#### Purchase of Branstetter Hardware Building

Less than one block distant from the ACCA, the Branstetter Hardware Building, located at 218 Main Street, is an L-shaped, one story, 11,256 square foot structure with a glass store front (Figure 5, Appendix A). The front 7,500 square feet of this

building has been recently renovated, is in excellent condition, as has been on the market for approximately four years. The attached metal warehouse that opens on Cave Street is included with the sale. Estimated asking price is \$140,000. Dave Foster is working on a lease-to-own deal with the landowner.

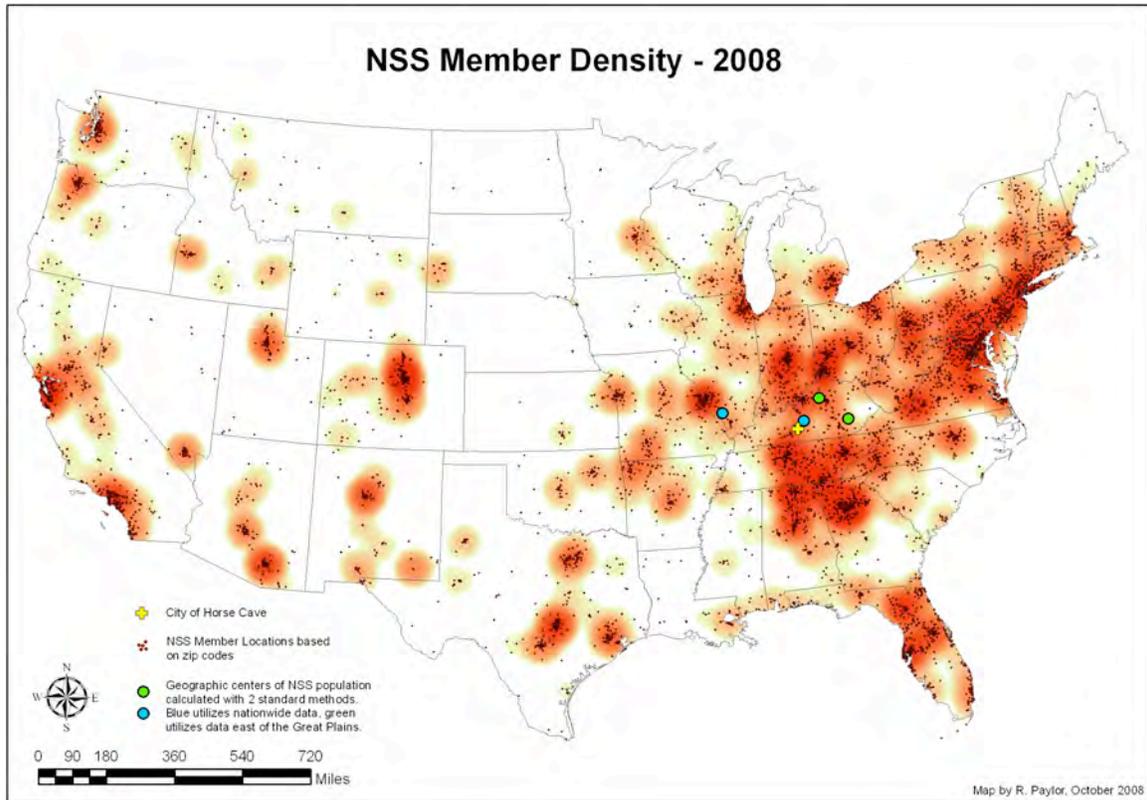


Figure 2: Population distribution of the NSS membership, geographic population centers of NSS membership, and the location of Horse Cave, Kentucky. Centroids calculated using the Central Feature and Mean Center methods of ArcGIS Spatial Analyst.

Minor renovations to the interior of the Branstetter Building will increase the functionality of the facility. The estimated expenses of these renovations are \$50,000. For example, partitions in the front of the building could provide a visible bookstore, permanent gallery, and retail space. The remaining space can be further split between administrative office and the NSS library. The 3,756 square feet in the back of the building and in the warehouse could be easily used for storage.

#### Lease of renovated space in the ACCA facility

The ACCA has recently acquired, through grants, the remaining building on the block that contains the American Cave Museum (Figure 6). Much of this building has been renovated; however, additional work is needed to finish the upstairs. The ACCA plans to move their museum lobby and gift shop to the first floor of this building. A new staircase from this lobby will lead to administrative space upstairs (see Appendix B for building floor plans). The estimated cost to complete

the remaining renovations is \$50,000. Some of these renovations may be paid for by grants acquired in the future by the ACCA.

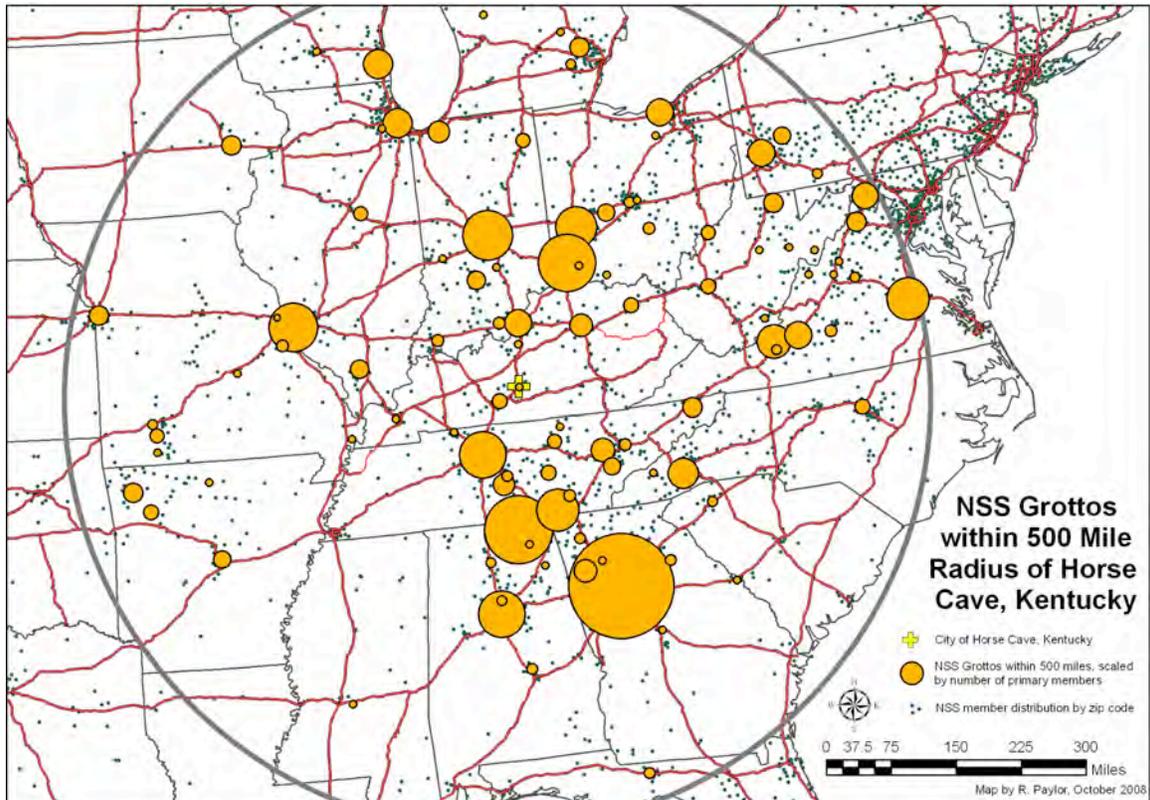


Figure 3: NSS Grottos within a one-day drive of Horse Cave.

In this option, the NSS would lease two large office spaces that total 1,100 square feet on the second floor for \$20-25,000 per year, and share 1,120 square feet of museum space in the lowest level with an extension of the American Cave Museum. The ACCA has agreed to share use of existing classroom space, restrooms, meeting rooms, kitchen, and copy room with NSS staff ([Appendix B](#)).

There are several long-term options in Horse Cave for facility expansion, new construction, and co-operative arrangements with the ACCA. Some of those options include:

- 1) Construct of a new wing of the American Cave Museum on Cave Street to permanently house the NSS Speleo Museum and focus on the history of the NSS and cave exploration in the U.S. A 1,440-square-foot building footprint is available that overlooks the sinkhole entrance to Hidden River Cave ([Figure 7](#)). The NSS could construct a one-story, two-story, or three-story exhibit space with up to 4,320 square feet of exhibit area. This wing would be accessible from the lobby and the lowest level so that a patron would walk through the NSS wing either at the start or end of the loop through the American Cave Museum. Estimated Cost - \$250,000 - \$1,000,000.

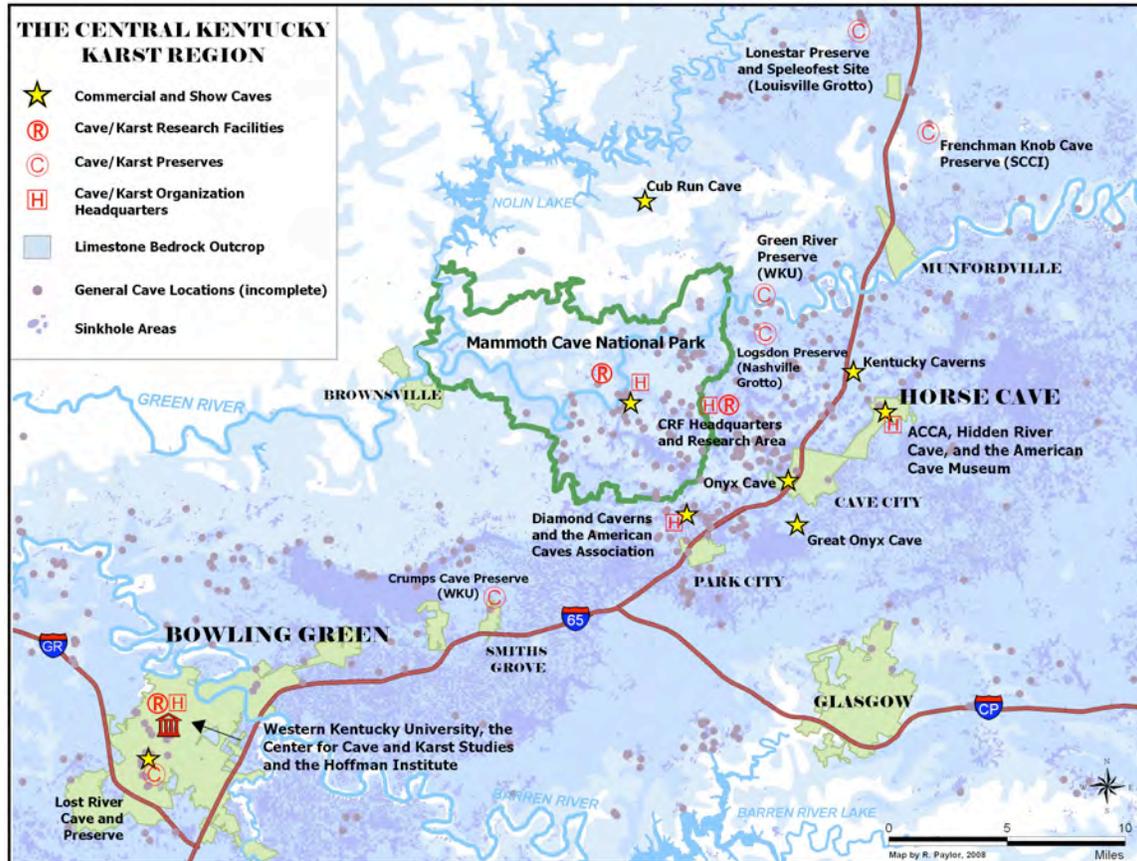


Figure 4: Map of commercial caves, organization headquarters, cave preserves, and research facilities in the Horse Cave region.

- 2) Work with ACCA to create a bunkhouse for visiting cavers, scout groups and school groups. There are approximately 8 acres of ACCA-leased land in Horse Cave that surround the entrance to Hidden River Cave where such a structure could be built (Figure 8). Estimated Cost - \$30,000 - \$50,000.
  
- 3) Work with the ACCA to purchase and renovate the Veetch Building on the corner of Cave Street and Main (Figure 5). This building would need extensive renovation but will likely become available in the next 5 to 10 years. This would provide an additional 7,000 square feet of office and educational space, which should cover the long-term needs of both the ACCA and the NSS for the foreseeable future. The building could probably be purchased in the \$100,000 range. Renovation costs would range from \$200,000 to \$400,000 depending upon whether or not federal or state grants were involved. The ACCA has considerable experience in acquiring and managing public grants of this nature.



*Figure 5: The Branstetter Hardware Building in the background (with the blue store sign). The Veetch Building is in the foreground.*

- 4) Work with the ACCA to create a separate Museum Board with NSS representation to operate the Museum and help complete its unfinished goals. Some of these include: developing the cave tour to Sunset Dome (one of the largest cave rooms in the nation); developing a riding tour into the cave from the museum; completing unfinished exhibit areas such as exhibits on cave art, paleontology, geology, and a more extensive exhibit on Floyd Collins; developing outdoor exhibits and trails around the museum center; and building an endowment. The ACCA is currently working to raise an additional \$3 - \$5 million to complete these tasks and endow the facility.

The ACCA has already raised and invested more than \$4 million at the Horse Cave site. They are open to working out an arrangement whereby the NSS could develop equity, and representation on the Museum's management board based on its level of long-term support for the facility. They envision a strong Museum management board with representatives from the NSS, ACCA, and key community leaders who can help strengthen our regional fundraising ties.

- 5) Work with the ACCA to develop educational activities and member's amenities at the Museum to ensure that visitation by the general public and school groups continues to increase and that NSS members routinely plan trips to the facility. They envision working with Mammoth Cave National Park and CRF to set up a regular series of cave trips to some of the area's big cave systems; developing a kids caving camp (similar to the Huntsville Space Center's Space Camp) and

putting on workshops regularly on cave restoration, surveying and other areas of interest.



*Figure 6: The American Cave Museum. Entrance sinkhole to Hidden River Cave is in the background. Existing ACCA museum and administrative offices are in the mid-ground. Recent storefront acquisition for future expansion is in the foreground.*

## **Existing Infrastructure**

### **A) Horse Cave**

Centralization, volunteer potential, and significant visitor traffic are appealing benefits to relocating to Horse Cave. These assets are greatly supplemented by increased police and fire security in a downtown location, and community redevelopment organizations that seek businesses that will invest capital into downtown.

Police security is maintained by the Horse Cave Police Department, located in downtown. Patrol within downtown, including lock-check service, is sustained nightly, and courtesy notes are left on doors for business owners.

The Horse Cave Volunteer Fire Department is located in downtown at 107 McCubbin Avenue behind Rite Aid Pharmacy. The department currently has 23 active members and provides 24-hour coverage for fire, medical, search and rescue, and other emergencies. They also give mutual aid to Munfordville, Cave City, Hardyville, Hiseville, and North Metcalfe volunteer fire departments.



*Figure 7: Building footprint for expansion of the existing ACCA facility. Entrance to Hidden River Cave is in the sinkhole in the background.*

The town of Horse Cave operates an active downtown revitalization program along Main Street, titled “Vision Horse Cave.” This non-profit organization operates under the following principles:

1. ORGANIZATION: building partnerships to create a consistent revitalization program and develop effective management and leadership of the downtown;
2. PROMOTION: re-establishing downtown as a compelling place for shoppers, investors, and visitors;
3. DESIGN: enhancing the visual quality of downtown by concentrating on design in all elements of the downtown environment
4. ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING: strengthening the existing economic assets of the business district while diversifying its economic base.

The NSS would clearly fit within this scheme and would be a welcome asset to the community. Corporate recruitment packages for Hart County and Horse Cave are included with this bid. These materials provide considerable detail of the economics and demographics of the region.

#### B) Western Kentucky University

Thirty miles distant from Horse Cave, in the city of Bowling Green, Western Kentucky University (WKU) has a long-standing tradition of community leadership, public outreach, and capital investment. WKU, with 20,000 students, is proud to be “A leading American university with an international reach.” Furthermore, WKU is world-renowned as a leader in cave and karst research, housing the Center for Cave and Karst Studies, the

Hoffman Environmental Research Institute, and the Crawford Hydrology Laboratory. The Center for Cave and Karst Studies, in particular, has managed a series of highly successful karst field courses at Mammoth Cave.

Over the past 10 years, WKU has built an incredible reputation for quality education and almost \$100 million in endowments. The university has been very supportive of organizations that bring research and education programs to south-central Kentucky. WKU has also been a strong advocate for community service. A university vision portfolio is included as part of this bid package.



*Figure 8: Site of a recently removed house on the ACCA-leased property in Horse Cave. The ACCA anticipates constructing a bunkhouse for visiting cavers and students at this facility.*

### C) Nearby Institutes, Centers, and Research Programs

American Cave Conservation Association – 501(C)(3) – National association dedicated to the protection of caves, karstlands, and groundwater. The ACCA operates the American Cave Museum and Karst Center, an educational center that includes Hidden River Cave in Horse Cave, Kentucky.

Cave Research Foundation – 501(c)(3) – Promotes exploration and documentation of caves and karst areas to initiate and support cave and karst research, to aid in cave conservation and protection, and to assist with the interpretation of caves and karst to the public.

Center for Cave and Karst Studies – WKU-ARTP – Promotes research and exploration

and education in all aspects of cave and karst studies with an emphasis on solving environmental and engineering problems associated with karst. The center operates a highly successful series of week-long classes on a range of cave and karst topics at Mammoth Cave. The center also operates a learning center at Lost River Cave in Bowling Green.

Crawford Hydrology Lab – WKU-ARTP – The methods that Crawford Hydrology Laboratory have developed are the result of 25 years of scientific research and practical field experience. Regulators from 8 states, the US EPA and the USGS, as well as consultants from many Environmental Consulting Firms, use Crawford-based laboratory procedures when working in areas of carbonate bedrock.

Hoffman Environmental Research Institute – WKU-ARTP – The Hoffman Institute is an international consortium of scientists and students dedicated to leadership in the development of innovative basic and applied research programs aimed at understanding the dynamics of human-landscape-atmospheric interactions.

Mammoth Cave International Center for Science and Learning – NPS-MCNP – The MCICSL is a cooperative venture of Mammoth Cave National Park and Western Kentucky University. It is a part of the network of 17 Research Learning Centers within the National Park Service. The overall goal of these centers is to expand and facilitate science, research, science-based decision making, and learning in the parks and surrounding areas.

National Caves Association – 501(c)(3) – Organization of publically and privately owned caves and caverns developed for public visitation, and used as educational and recreational resources to teach cave appreciation and protection to the traveling public.

#### D) Nearby Field Facilities

Crumps Cave – (WKU Owned) A 2-acre site that includes the entrance to a cave with cultural resources dating to the Woodland Period.

Diamond Caverns – (Private Ownership) A commercial cave adjacent to Mammoth Cave National Park with a long-standing relationship with WKU and cave research. Diamond Caverns is the national headquarters for the National Caves Association.

Frenchman's Knob Cave Preserve – (Owned by the Southeast Cave Conservancy) A 27.5 acre parcel of land acquired to protect a hibernaculum for endangered Indiana Bats.

Green River Biological Preserve – (WKU Owned) A 1,200-acre riparian corridor along the Green River just upstream of Mammoth Cave National Park. Site is situated on sinkhole plain topography and includes several springs.

Hamilton Valley Research Station – (Owned by the Cave Research Foundation) A 300-acre karst landscape adjacent to Mammoth Cave National Park that includes several

caves and the headquarters of the Cave Research Foundation. The headquarters includes a meeting room facility and bunkhouses for visiting researchers.

Hidden River Cave – (Owned by the American Cave Conservation Association) An eight-acre parcel of land in downtown Horse Cave, KY that includes the entrance to the 22-mile-long Hidden River Cave and the American Cave Museum. The American Cave Conservation Association manages both the cave entrance and the museum.

Lone Star Preserve – A 67-acre caving preserve purchased and developed by the Louisville Grotto, which serves as the annual facility for Speleofest. The site contains primitive camping areas throughout the shaded preserve.

Lost River Cave and Valley – (WKU Owned, Managed by Friends of Lost River, Inc.) A 68-acre natural corridor within a series of connected sinkholes and blue holes that includes the entrance to the Lost River Cave System, an extensive underground river that underlies portions of Bowling Green, KY.

Mammoth Cave National Park – (National Park Service) An UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve that includes 66,000 acres of incredible karst landscapes and hundreds of caves, including Mammoth Cave - the longest-known cave on the planet, with more than 365 miles of surveyed passage.

WKU Agriculture Complex – (WKU Owned) A 780-acre research farm located on the sinkhole plain south of Bowling Green, KY.

## **Human Capital**

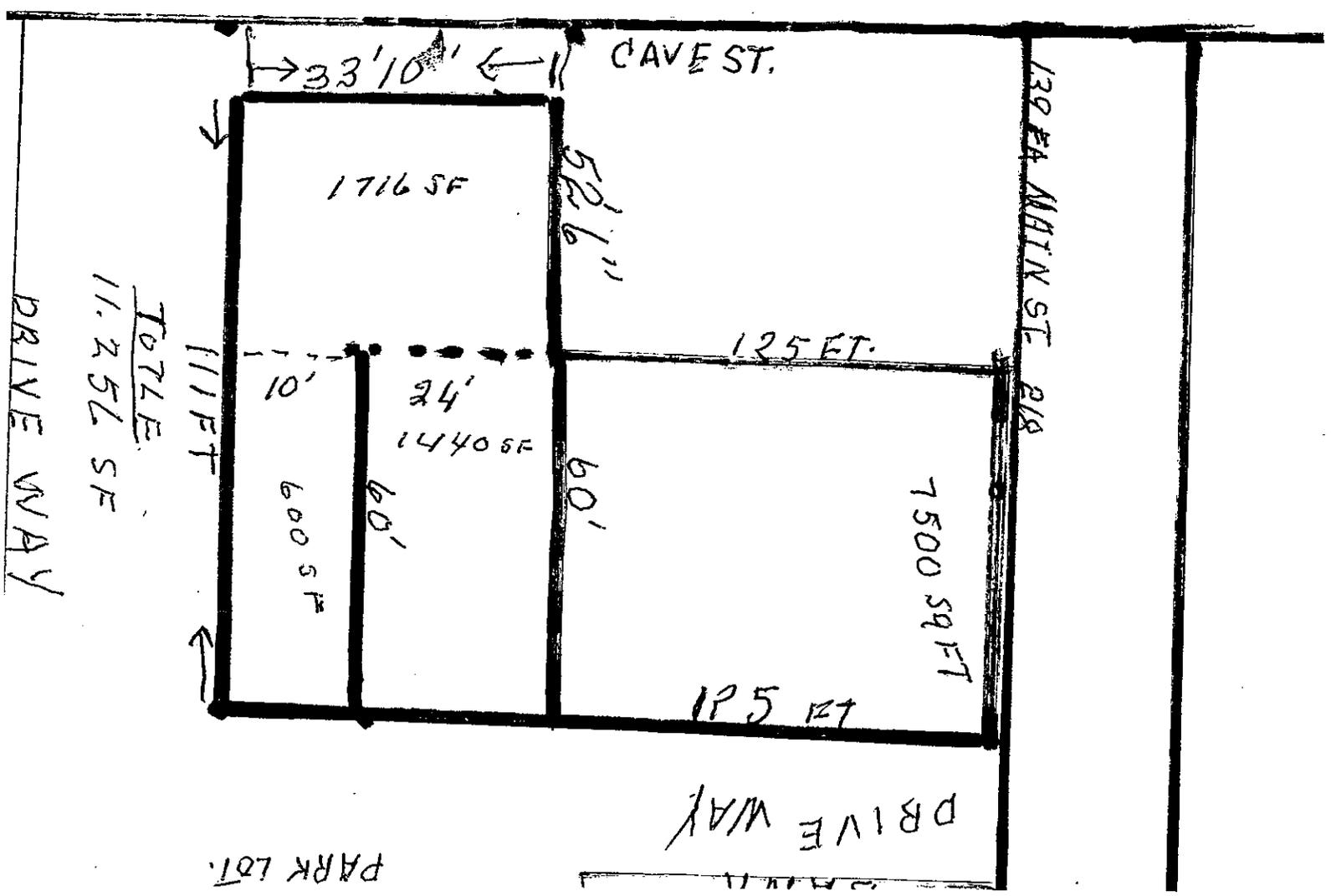
Because Horse Cave is both central to the NSS membership and located in one of the premier caving regions of the world, we feel strongly that NSS members will be behind this proposal. We further believe that a significant percentage of the NSS membership will visit this facility and lend volunteer support. Finally, we predict that a Horse Cave facility will draw interested public that visit Mammoth Cave National Park and wish to learn more about cave exploration, research, and conservation.

WKU students regularly seek seasonal employment. The NSS can easily tap into this pool, potentially from students within the science or information technology programs. For example, students within the Geography and Geology programs commonly seek winter or summer financial support. Furthermore, undergraduate students at WKU must develop a community service portfolio prior to graduation. NSS opportunities can provide an outlet for these students to volunteer time.

From a financial standpoint, it may be easy to recruit seasonal and permanent employees. Horse Cave is in a low-cost of living area. Online estimates suggest that Horse Cave is 15% cheaper than the national average and 6% cheaper than Huntsville. Housing provides the greatest savings. Housing is 30% cheaper in Horse Cave compared to Huntsville, and is readily available within a 30-mile radius.

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FLOOR PLAN FOR BUILDING THAT IS FOR SALE



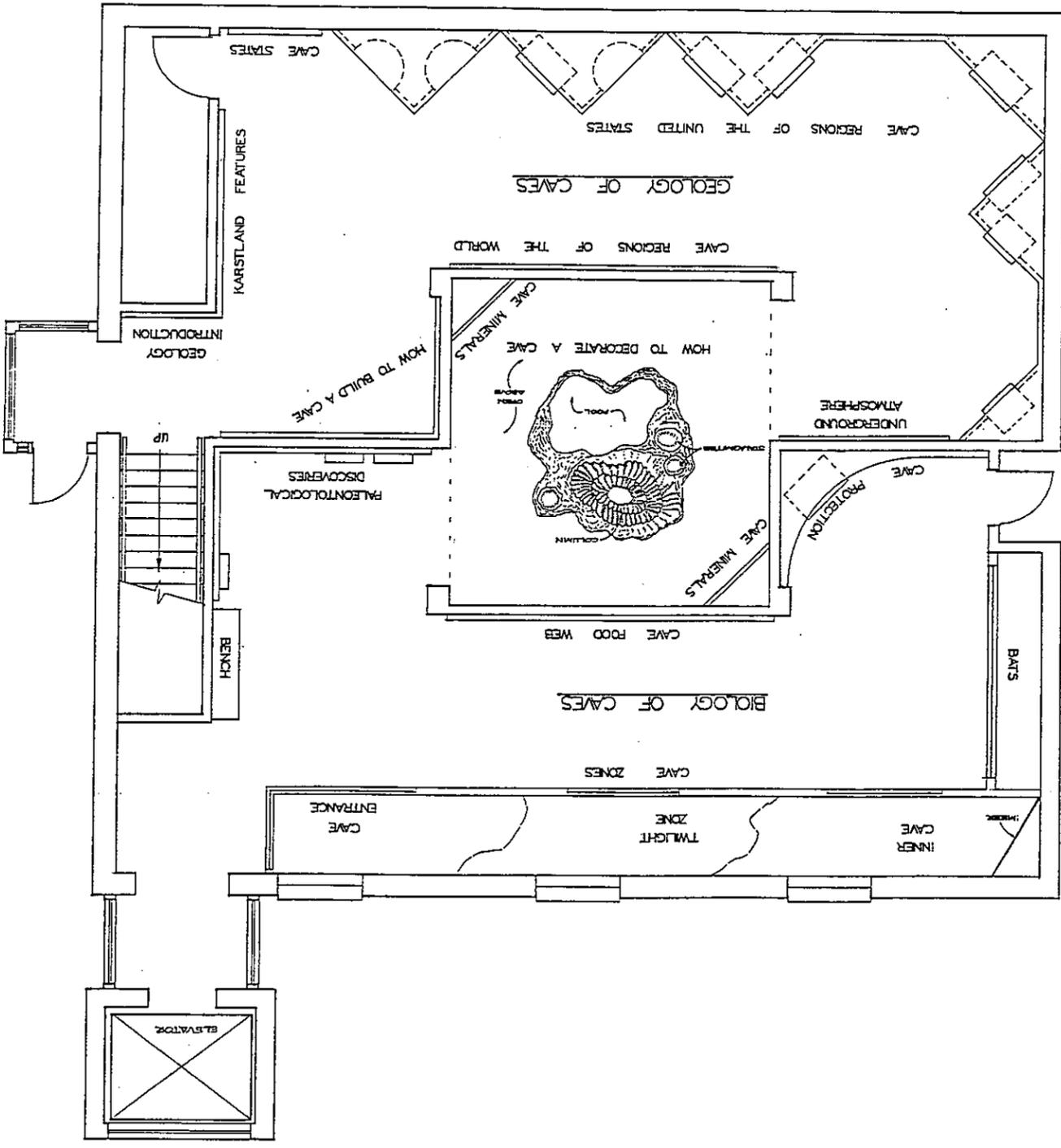


chase studio  
STAR ROUTE 3, BOX 133, CEDAR CREEK, MO. 65627

project: The American Cave and Karst Center  
exhibit: FLOOR PLAN  
drawn by: JRN  
date: 12/21/89

1/8"=1'-0"

LOWER LEVEL FLOOR PLAN



1/8"=1'-0"

STREET LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

