

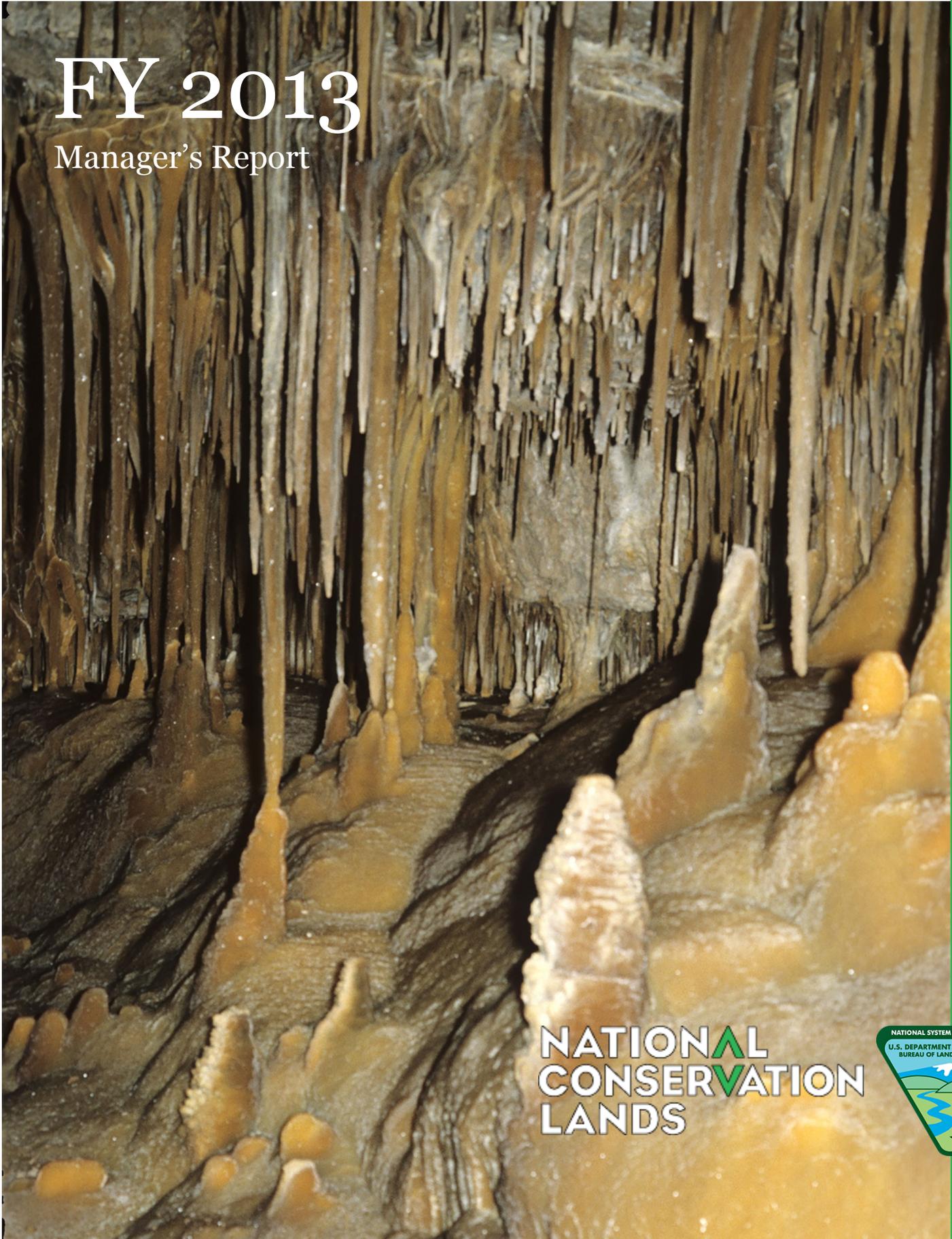
# Fort Stanton – Snowy River Cave

National Conservation Area

BLM

# FY 2013

Manager's Report



New Mexico

NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS



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# 1

## Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave Profile

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### Designating Authority

**Designating Authority:** Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009

**Date of Designation:** March 30, 2009

### Location and Acreage

**Total Acreage is 24,876 BLM acreage: 24,876 Non-BLM acreage: 0**

The Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area is located in Lincoln County.

### Contact Information

Unit Manager	Phone	E-mail	Mailing Address
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Field Office	District Office	State Office
Roswell	Pecos	New Mexico

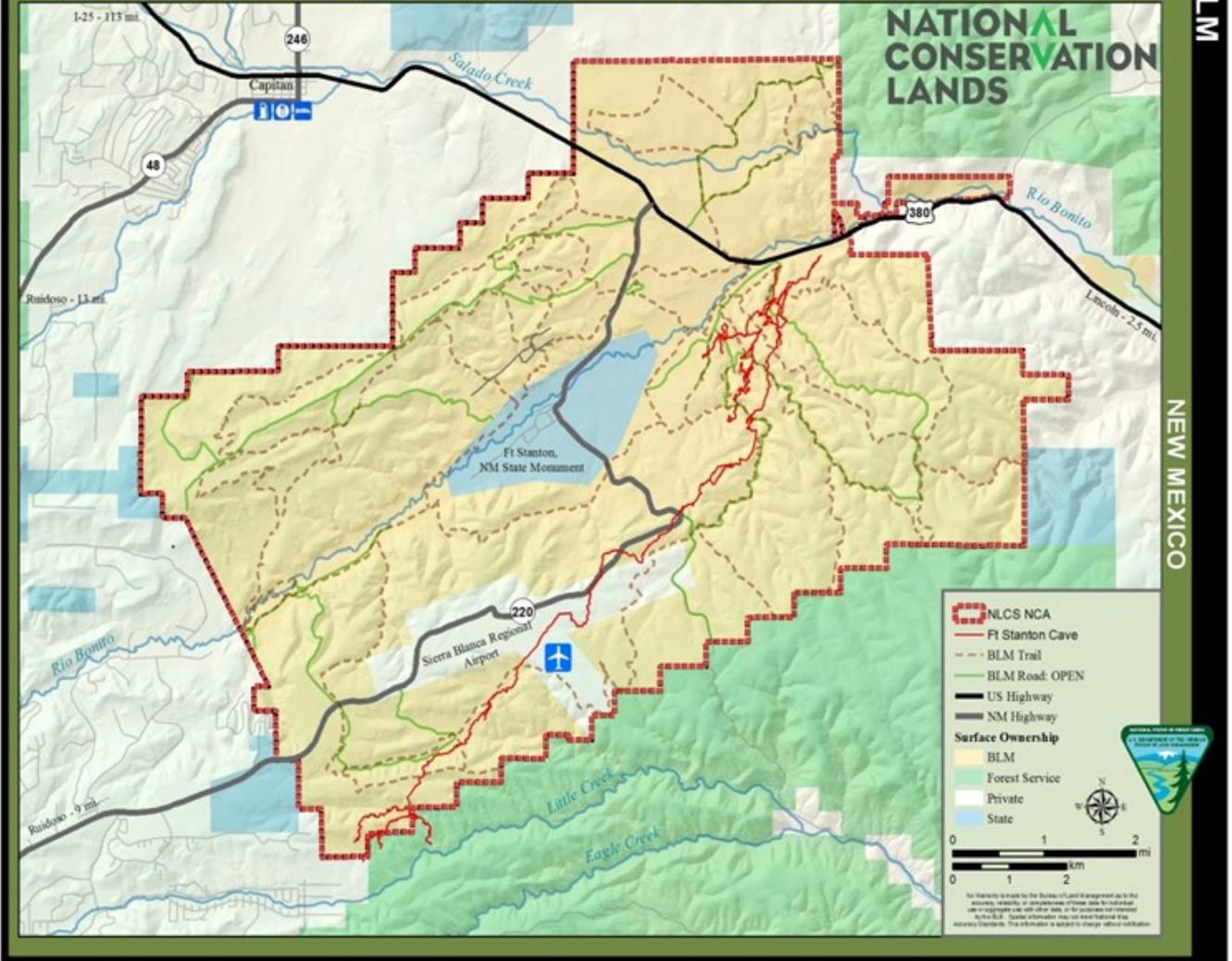
### Managing Partners

N/A

### Staffing

The NCA does not have a specifically dedicated staff, so the work is accomplished through the Roswell Field Office Resources staff. Staff responsible for work within the NCA includes the Assistant Field Manager for Resources; the planning and environmental specialist; recreation specialist; cave specialist; wildlife biologists; hydrologist; natural resource specialist; archaeologist; range conservationists; and range technician. In addition, the Pecos District fire staff assists with fuels and resource management on the NCA as part of their duties as well as the Lands and Minerals staff with realty and geologic projects. When possible and available, the Americorps National Civilian Community Corps is enlisted to perform project work. The BLM works cooperatively with the New Mexico State Monuments who operate a volunteer staffed visitor center in a restored building on the historical Fort Stanton which is surrounded by the NCA. An NCA interpretive area is located in the visitor center.

# FT STANTON - SNOWY RIVER CAVE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA



# Planning and NEPA

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## Status of RMP

### Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Assessment

The NCA Proposed RMP Amendment and Environmental Assessment (NCA-EA) was completed January 10, 2014.

Congress established the NCA by the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law [PL] 111-11, March 30, 2009), in order to conserve, protect, and enhance the “historic, cultural, scientific, archaeological, natural, and educational subterranean cave resources of the Fort Stanton-Snowy River cave system.” The purpose of the NCA RMP is to provide the framework for managing the surface and subsurface resources within the NCA. This RMP incorporated previous management plans where applicable and local community concerns. It also took into consideration any information developed in studies of the land and resources within or adjacent to the NCA.

The need for the RMP was to comply with PL 111-11, in which Congress mandated that the BLM develop a comprehensive plan to manage the NCA and to meet the requirements of FLPMA, as amended. Congress also provided that the surface resources of the NCA would be managed in accordance with the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern Final Activity Plan of 2001. To comply with the Congressional directive, the BLM has prepared a RMP Amendment and supporting Environmental Assessment (EA) for the NCA.

## Status of Activity Plans

The NCA-EA is tiered to and/or incorporates by reference the following plans:

- Cave Management Plan - Fort Stanton Cave (1988);
- Roswell Resource Management Plan (1997);
- Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern Final Activity Plan (2001);
- Fort Stanton Watershed Improvement Project Environmental Assessment (2001);
- Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern Route Designation Plan (2003);
- Discovery and Documentation Procedures in Fort Stanton Cave National Natural Landmark (2003);
- Rio Bonito Acquired Lands (RBAL) Final Activity Plan (2004);
- Resource Management Plan Amendment for Fire and Fuels Management on Public Land in New Mexico and Texas (RMPA for Fire and Fuels) (2004);
- Capitan Area Grazing EA (2010);
- Pecos District Noxious and Invasive Weed Spot Treatment Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2009-134, (2010);
- The Roswell Field Office Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control/Eradication; and Environmental Assessment NM-060-2004-159, (2005).

## Status of RMP Implementation Strategy

The Roswell Field Office is currently in the planning stages for writing the implementation plan for the NCA.

### Key NEPA Actions and/or Authorizations

During FY 2013, there were a number of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs), Authorizations, and NEPA actions issued, including:

1. *12 Hours Into the West* Mountain Bike Race, which included 125 contestants plus spectators;
2. *American Endurance Ride* Conference (6 day 35 & 55 mile horse endurance ride), which included 68 participants plus spectators;
3. *March on Rome* WWII Event, which included 140 participants;

YouTube 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7aocN5r2LU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YH93b3blp2A>

4. *Lincoln County Long-Rifles* Mountain Man Rendezvous, which included 20 participants plus spectators;
5. The BLM issued Cave permits to 151 people to enter Fort Stanton Cave during; and
6. Hazardous fuels reduction EA's.

# 3

## Year's Projects and Accomplishments

### General Accomplishments

The BLM completed work on a historic building within the Fort Stanton compound, which is rented by the BLM from New Mexico State Historic Sites. This was also dedicated office space for the BLM's NCA Headquarters. In addition, there were approximately 850 acres treated with prescribed fire to restore the landscape. Finally, four special recreation permit events took place:



American Endurance Ride Conference, horse endurance ride of 55 miles a day for 6 days.



12 Hours Into the West Mountain Bike Race, 100 miles in 10-mile laps



March on Rome: World War II reenactment of Alban Hills battles, Italy, 1944



Lincoln County Longrifles Mountain Man Rendezvous



The Fort Stanton Cave Study Project did extensive Cave survey work, covering many facets of inventory and scientific study of the Cave and its Snowy River Passage (longest known cave formation in the world).

## Current Areas of Focus

**What were the major issues during the past year? What is being done to address them? What issues are expected to arise in the next year and what is being done to prepare for them?**

The threat of White Nose Syndrome to bats is a significant ongoing issue that continues to be addressed by a public cave closures and highly restricted administrative access. The renovation and maintenance of facilities, including water pipelines, campgrounds and the NCA headquarters has been a major issue and will continue to be a major issue in the coming year.

## Education, Outreach, & Interpretation

**Describe the educational, outreach and interpretation programs, projects, and work completed at the unit in the past fiscal year.**

<b>Interpretive Outreach – FY 2013</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Location &amp; Organization</b>
10/8/12	Snowy River Passage & Caver Quest	Ruidoso Womens' Club
Jan 2013	Snowy River Passage	NSS-Arizona Regional Association
2/23/13	Snowy River Passage	El Camino Real International Heritage Center
4/6-7/13	Leave No Trace Trainers Course	Ft Stanton NCA
4/11/13	Leave No Trace Awareness Class	Pack 58, Catholic Church, Ruidoso
5/14/13	Super Day Cave Mapping	Roswell Independent School District, ENMU Campus Roswell
7/12/13	Snowy River Passage	Fort Stanton Live—annual living history event
7/13/13	Snowy River Passage	Fort Stanton Live—annual living history event
7/14/13	Snowy River Passage	NSS Convention —Exploration Session
7/15/13	Snowy River Passage	NSS Convention — Photo Session
7/16/13	Caver Quest Simulation Game	NSS Convention — unscheduled presentation
7/27/13	Snowy River Passage	16th International Congress of Speleology
Dec 2013	Snowy River Passage	NSS-SWR Winter Technical papers
	12 presentations	12 outreach activities

## **Fort Stanton Cave Study Project (FSCSP) Interpretation and Public Outreach**

- Issued a 20 page Annual Report for 2012.
- Printed 2500 brochures describing and promoting the FSCSP.
- Caver Quest, the avatar based simulation of travel through Snowy River continued to be developed during 2013 by volunteer Ron Lipinski.
- Newspaper, magazine, and online articles by

## **Partnerships**

**Describe the partners or friends groups that collaborated with the unit in the past fiscal year. Briefly describe any significant partnerships between the unit and outside groups.**

### **New Mexico Historic Sites**

The New Mexico Historic Sites/Fort Stanton Historic Site is the location of the NCA Headquarters Office and ware yard, which is on State-owned land in the center of the NCA. New Mexico Historic Sites also operates a visitor center for the historic Fort and has dedicated space in the visitor center to the BLM to interpret the NCA.

### **Fort Stanton Cave Study Project**

The FSCSP works with the BLM under an assistance agreement for the study of caves on the NCA. The following are highlights from their *2013 Annual Report Summary*:

**Hydrological Exploration FSCSP:** The hydrological aspect of the cave is as significant as the extent. During FY 2013, the FSCSP fielded eight exploration and survey trips. These trips inventoried over 5.5 miles of new passage, bringing the Cave up to 31 miles in length, currently the 14th longest cave in the United States and 62th longest in the world. The Snowy River passage, discovered in 2001, along with the side passages found since then, now account for the vast majority of the Cave, over 18 miles. The furthest frontier of the new survey is now over 11.4 miles from the entrance of the cave making it the most remote cave passage known in the world. Around 22.24 miles (84.6%) of the Cave lies under the NCA, 4.01 miles (15.2%) of the Cave lies under the Smokey Bear District of the Lincoln National Forest, and 277 feet (0.2%) of the Cave is under private land. Another significant aspect of the Cave is its footprint. The Cave stretches almost 8 miles “as the crow flies” from one end to the other. The FSCSP was recognized by the International Union of Speleology during its quadrennial congress in July in Brno, Czech Republic, with its Team Exploration Prize. To quote from the award: “Excellent exploration is conducted with excellent science, and follows top standards for cave protection. The Fort Stanton Cave Study Project stands as a shining example for all members of the UIS to follow.”

**Geophysical Work FSCSP:** During FY 2013, seven resistivity surveys were conducted. They occurred on BLM , U.S. Forest Service, and private land. In additions, one gravity survey was conducted on private land.

**Surface Reconnaissance FSCSP:** Multiple trips to the Devil’s Canyon Area were made looking for an old dig west of Devil's Canyon culminating with the discovery of a new cave (Gopher Badger Cave) in October.

**Cave Radio Location FSCSP:** In April, a radio location was made in far south Snowy River at SRS588, some 5 miles beyond the last radio location in the Cave. This resulted in a ~300 foot adjustment to the survey at that location. Cave radios are low-frequency radios that allow cavers to talk from the surface through the limestone up to 900 feet below surface.

**Resurvey FSCSP:** A long-needed resurvey of sections of the Cave was begun in an area known as The Trophy Room.

**Additional Partners:**

- University of New Mexico, Departments of Biology and Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Albuquerque;
- New Mexico Tech University, Karst Studies, Socorro;
- National Cave & Karst Research Institute, Carlsbad; and
- New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, Socorro

**Restoration Activities**

During 2013, a restoration trip was conducted in Snowy River Passage to clean and/or replace plastic “Magic Carpets” along with other cleanup activities from Turtle Junction to Mt. Airy.

**Maintaining Rescue Caches**

In conjunction with restoration activities, several rescue caches in this same part of Snowy River were monitored or maintained.

**Small Cave Survey**

Surveys were begun in three small caves on the Lincoln National Forest, which may have related resources to the Fort Stanton Cave (Camp Cave, Sam's Roadside Cave, and Gopher Badger Cave).

**Field House (aka BLM Bunkhouse) Area Maintenance**

Two very significant upgrades to the BLM's Field House were undertaken by the FSCSP. One was the installation of a cell phone booster, and the other was beginning an irrigation project to supply water to newly planted cottonwoods trees. Shrubs were also planted in front of the Field House.

## International Recognition (16th International Congress of Speleology, Brno, Czech Republic, July 2013)

The International Union of Speleology presented the FSCSP with a first place recognition for exploration between 2009-2013. The award states: "Fort Stanton Cave Study Project personnel have set a world record for exploration to a distance of 18.4 km from the nearest entrance. Much of the exploration took place over the Snowy River, the world's longest speleothem at 18 km. Concurrent with the exploration, cave survey and scientific studies have been carried out. After each expedition, a comprehensive report has been published. An outstanding feature of the exploration has been with team's dedication to the environmental protection of Fort Stanton Cave."



## Volunteers

The FSCSP provided approximately 10,320 volunteer hours. Campground hosts provided 2,568 volunteer hours through maintenance assistance of the camping facilities, and assistance with resource projects within the NCA. Other volunteer contributions came from the Girl Scouts of America and the American Endurance Rider Conference (AERC). Volunteers contributed over 300 hours in remodeling of the NCA Headquarters building at Ft. Stanton, a 1883 military building that had been considerably altered over more than 100 years of various uses. Research scientists provided 232 volunteer hours in bat census's and White Nose Syndrome (WNS) monitoring.



Volunteer planting trees at  
Rob Jagers Campground



Remodeled interior of NCA  
Headquarters Building

## Budget

### **Include total FY budget, 1711 base, 1711 one-time funding, and other funding**

The FY 2013 1711 base funding was \$142,000 (\$112,800 labor, \$30,000 in operations). In addition, approximately \$310,000 from other BLM programs such as range, wildlife, cultural resources, and recreation support project work.

## Land or Easement Acquisitions

No private inholding are located within the NCA. State land and regional airport land is located within NCA boundaries, but only certain parts of those lands would be available or of interest to the BLM for acquisition and management as part of the NCA. New Cave inventory continues to occur within the NCA, however, the Snowy River Passage is confirmed as being located on private lands adjacent to the NCA. All future inventory and documentation of the Snowy River Passage will be located on private lands. This creates new needs in protecting Cave resources. Conservation of the Cave within the NCA is dependent upon conservation of the Cave outside the NCA. The BLM is developing a strategy to seek acquisition of Cave interests in order to conserve the Cave as a whole, and to assure conservation of the cave within the NCA.

# 4

## Science

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### Science

**Include current science projects (name, description, key words, principal investigator, project status, BLM's contributed funds [if any]), future science opportunities, and status of unit's Science Plan.**

During FY 2013, the FSCSP conducted or facilitated numerous cave science projects. A majority of this work occurred during week-long cave expeditions (2-3 such events occur on an annual basis). 2013 science projects include:

- Ferromanganese and other mineral sampling in the Cave;
- Surface soil sampling (locations coordinated with deposit sampling mentioned above);
- Water sampling at Snowy River North and Midnight Creek;
- Monitoring water levels under the clay floor in the Cave's Main Corridor (twice during the year);
- Deploying water level data loggers throughout Snowy River (comprehensive network throughout the length of Snowy River);
- Monitoring temperature/humidity data loggers in the Cave and other small caves (During each expedition);
- Soil sampling in the Cave for the presence of *Geomyces destructans*, now referred to as *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*;
- Mineral sampling by an New Mexico State University team for biosignature identification;
- Paleoclimate study of broken formations in the Cave;
- Kuenzler cactus studies; and
- Bat surveys

# 5

## Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

### Resource, Object, or Value

**Historic** – The Cave contains numerous historic objects in its front portion. Objects are present from the entrance of the Cave through Conrad’s Passage and to Twenty Steps and Three Way Hill that include (but are not limited to) a ruined boat, historic wall inscriptions, sculpture-like objects made of mud, a rock enclosure, and carbonized fragments that may be remnants of cane torches. These objects span the 19th and 20th Centuries.

### Stressors Affecting this Resource, Object, or Value

Stressors that affect historic items in the Cave come from both people and the environment. The composition of the historic objects in the Cave, such as the boat, are fragile to extremely fragile. People touching the objects cause them to disintegrate. The Cave environment, specifically the humidity, support bacteria and fungi that feed on any organic input to the Cave environment. With regards to the inscriptions, most have been scratched into the soft decomposing limestone. The nature of decomposing limestone is that its surface is continually turning to dust. As time marches on, the inscriptions will eventually disappear. People touching either the objects, or the decomposing limestone where the inscriptions are located, will destroy these historic items. Though the stresses described are natural processes, the knowledge these objects possess can be preserved through recordation, but this value is potentially lost without adequate staffing and funding to complete recordation. Looting and vandalism is a stressor on historic items and inscriptions contained within Cave. However, since the Cave has been closed to recreational caving , due to a White Nose Syndrome closure since January 2011, this has alleviated this stressor.

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored
25,080 acres	31 miles of Cave identified to date, including outside of the NCA (70 acres)	The front portion of the Cave is approximately 20 acres.	20 acres

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Status is stable	Trend is stable at this time

# Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

## Resource, Object, or Value

**Cultural** – The Cave contains cultural links to indigenous and contemporary communities. The Fort Stanton Cave has been subject to modern exploration beginning around 1970. A number of digs, reinforcements, gates, and instruments have been and continue to be utilized to allow cavers to safely enter new portions of the Cave for continued exploration and scientific research, while also providing protection to the Cave environment. This activity most notably led to the discovery of the Snowy River Passage and the designation of the NCA. Primitive trails inside the recreational portion of the Cave also exist to minimize impacts to the Cave. The Cave has cultural links to indigenous and contemporary communities.

## Stressors Affecting this Resource, Object, or Value

Cultural resources, objects, and values are stressed by interaction with people. Due to the current closure of the Cave to minimize the risk of introducing White Nose Syndrome to bats within the Cave, contemporary users of the Cave have been impacted by a minimized and regulated number of entries. Recreational users currently do not have access to the Cave. The reduced number of entries to the Cave puts less pressure on modern human Cave features, but also diminishes the link the Cave has to the community.

Feather Cave is less well known, is gated, and requires special permission to enter. The local Native American population has a special connection with Feather Cave. Feather Cave receives little to no visitation each year so stressors to cultural resources are minimal.

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Status is Good. Cave was closed due to White Nose syndrome, and no public access is allowed.	Trend is stable at this time

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored
25,080 acres	Approximately 30 acres	Approximately 30 acres	Approximately 30 acres

# Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

## Resource, Object, or Value

**Scientific**– The Cave is scientifically important on behalf of past research and continued scientific research, containing geomicrobiological, geological, mineralogical and paleoclimatological resources, mineralogical and paleoclimatological resources within the Cave.

These include:

1. Biodiversity and mineral-precipitating capability of the unusual microbiological communities inhabiting abundant black manganese-rich crusts on walls and ceilings;
2. Nature of branching microbial communities on mud deposits;
3. Potential for human use, (e.g. pharmaceutical, industrial, or bioremediation); and
4. Understanding of the Cave in relation to regional geology and paleoclimatology.

## Stressors Affecting this Resource, Object, or Value

Access is limited by the White Nose syndrome closure. No stressors are currently present.

A potential future stressor to the Cave and its important scientific value could result from an access portal drilled into the cave. An access portal could alter the current cave climate. With the Cave documented to be outside of the NCA, legal protection of the Cave is less certain. The stress on troglobitic lifeforms could be devastating in the long term.

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Status is Good. Cave was closed due to White Nose syndrome, and no public access is allowed.	Trend is stable at this time

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored
25,080 acres	Approximately 70	Approximately 70	Approximately 70

## Resource, Object, or Value

**Natural** – The Cave is minimally developed and contains significant geologic and biologic features, including unique plant and animal species. Though the entire cave is generally free of human developments, the Cave has two distinct regions: the front part of the Cave which has minimal developments including trails, stabilizing reinforcements, and gates; and the Snowy River and associated passages which do not contain developments. The natural geologic and biologic features of both portions of the Cave are the subject of scientific endeavors in geology, hydrology, wildlife biology, and microbiology. Several species of bats are known to hibernate in the Cave, and one of the largest known winter roosts of the Townsend’s big-eared bat in New Mexico occurs here. Other organisms that inhabit the Cave include extremophile microorganisms that may exist nowhere else in the world. These include a wide diversity of fungi, antibiotic-producing actinobacteria, and multiple strains of manganese-using bacteria that survive by chemically breaking down manganese compounds. The Snowy River formation (the white calcite floor deposit thought to be the largest continuous cave formation in the world), black manganese crusts, various forms of stalactite, stalagmite, and flow stone formations, pools, mud deposits, fossils, and scenic cave settings are geologic features that contribute to the natural wonder of the Cave complex.

## Stressors Affecting this Resource, Object, or Value

The bat populations in the Cave are potentially at risk from White Nose Syndrome, a fungal infection that has caused devastating declines of bats in other caves. The threat of introduction by people of the fungus was addressed by a closure of the Cave allowing for minimal and only regulated Cave entry. Break-ins happen, and these could contribute harm to biological values in the Cave as well as vandalism to Cave formations. With the Cave documented to be outside of the NCA, legal protection of the Cave is less certain. A potential future stressor to biological and physical features of the Cave could result from activities outside the NCA that intersect the Cave.

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Status is Good. Cave was closed due to White Nose syndrome, and no public access is allowed.	Trend is stable at this time

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored
25,080 acres	Approximately 70	Approximately 70	Approximately 70

## Resource, Object, or Value

**Educational** – The Cave provides important educational opportunities regarding scientific, historic, and archeological subjects. Past and future discoveries of Cave resources provide a wealth of opportunities for educational outreach. Subjects include geology, hydrology, microbiology, and archeology. Educational opportunities may be delivered to students and others entering portions of the Cave suitable for visitation. Other educational opportunities are delivered off-site through text, video, and live presentations.

## Stressors Affecting this Resource, Object, or Value

Educational values are diminished by not being able to enter the Cave during the closure for White Nose Syndrome. However, numerous other opportunities are available outside of the Cave and these can reach an even broader audience than Cave entry-focused education.

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Status is Good. Cave was closed due to White Nose syndrome, and no public access is allowed.	Trend is improving.

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored
25,080 acres	Approximately 70	Approximately 70	Approximately 70



# 6

## Summary of Performance Measures

The NCA Plan was completed on January 10, 2014, and the BLM is currently in the planning stages for writing the implementation plan for the NCA. This will provide the needed objectives and guidance necessary for the gathering of additional information and monitoring of the NCA.



Red Velvet flowstone and stalactites

Summary Table*		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Historic	Good, closed due to WNS	Stable
Scientific	Good, closed due to WNS	Stable
Archaeological	Good, closed due to WNS	Stable
Natural	Good, closed due to WNS, no recreational use during 2013	Stable
Educational	Good, had several survey and scientific trips during FY 2013	Improving
Cultural	Good, closed due to WNS	Stable

# 7

## Manager's Letter

Dear Friends of the Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave NCA,

The Roswell Field Office is proud to have the NCA under its administration. It provides significant opportunities for the scientific community, as well as for the recreational community that vary from visiting archaeological sites to using equestrian/hiking trails. There are many management challenges that require making decisions on how to conserve, protect, and enhance the resources, objects, and values of the NCA while allowing for use of the Cave. We continue to work diligently to allow for Cave uses while protecting these nationally-significant resources.

The subsurface resources are still being explored and discovered, with important archaeological, paleontological, micro-biological, and geologic scientific discoveries occurring every year. Although new cave inventory continues to occur within the NCA, the majority of un-inventoried Cave occurs on lands adjacent to the NCA, including National Forest and private lands. This creates new needs in seeking effective ways to protect cave resources in conjunction with the neighboring lands.

In FY 2013, the NCA received 19,000-21,000 surface visitors, issued 45 special recreation permits, and provided for Cave entry to 151 cave explorers/researchers. The workload is difficult to sustain due to a very limited staff and budget. Volunteer organizations play a critical role in helping to fill gaps, such as assisting with monitoring, signage, and upgrades on the trail system, but cannot fill all gaps. A use fee was recently approved and implemented for the maintenance of the Rob Jagers Camping Area to help to support the needs of that site.

We look forward to the official opening of the NCA Headquarters Building on the Fort Stanton Monument during 2014. This will include office space for various resource specialists as well as the opportunity for staff to telecommute from the NCA.

Sincerely,

*Jerry Datchover*

Manager, Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave NCA





# NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

**Bureau of Land Management**

**Roswell Field Office**

**2909 West 2nd Street**

**Roswell, New Mexico 87557**

**Phone: 575-627-0272**

**[www.blm.gov/nm/fortstanton](http://www.blm.gov/nm/fortstanton)**