Recent Projects of the Indiana Karst Conservancy, Inc.

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Abstract

The Indiana karst Conservancy had its beginnings in the mid 1980s. Since then we have been working with other agencies, landowners, cavers, and so on to work out questions concerning karst and karst features, including caves. For example, one project is the Hoosier National Forest/Indiana Karst Conservancy Karst Inventory Project, where we locate, inventory, and write management plans for all of the caves on the forest as well as provide input for their overall karst resource management strategies. This is an ongoing project, which has gone a long way to build mutual respect between the two organizations, and much has been accomplished. Just last year they presented us with the region's Honor Award for Environmental Protection. Other recent projects include those involving acquisitions, cleanups, nature park development, and the like. This presentation will cover the above and more on what we're all about.

Hoosier National Forest/Indiana Karst Conservancy Karst Inventory Project

This is an example of the Indiana karst Conservancy working with the federal government. The Hoosier National Forest/Indiana karst Conservancy Karst Inventory Project has been active since the late 1980s in a comprehensive endeavor responsible for locating, surveying, and inventorying caves and karst features for their archaeological, biological, geological, hydrological, paleontological, and recreational values and keeping records of findings for the subsequent writing of individual management plans for each cave located. It is a monumental task, to date 107 caves have been confirmed. It is comprises mainly volunteers from around the state with representatives from each individual grotto, survey, and conservancy serving on its board. Related responsibilities include the nomination of significant caves, special areas, and the like. Field work days are held on the third Saturday of each month with management meetings taking place once every other month. In December 1998 the Project was awarded the prestigious Eastern Region Honors Award by the Forest Service.

During the presentation, delegates will be introduced to the project and its philosophy as well as be shown a sample of the Hoosier National Forest's caves along with examples of each of the values listed below. Slides include a map of the karst areas in the state and on the Forest, a large gulf by the name of Wesley Chapel Gulf from the air as well as closer views including inside of its caves, examples of archaeological (historic signatures), biological (amphipods), geological (cave formations), hydrological (cave streams), paleontological (bear wallows and bones), and recreational (challenging traverses) discoveries, team members at work, ceremonial signing of the first completed management plan, and a group shot of those that attended the 1998 Eastern Region Honors Award presentation.

Leonard Springs Nature Park

This is an example of the Indiana karst Conservancy working with city government. Leonard Springs Nature Park is an 84.5-acre park with an emphasis on karst conservation and education. It is managed by the City of Bloomington in cooperation with the Indiana Karst Conservancy and contains three small caves, two large and impressive springs with their associated waterfalls, and various other secondary springs. The property was originally purchased in the early 1900s and dammed to serve as the city's third water source. Later, it

became apparent that the reservoir was not able to hold as much water as anticipated for the growing population due to it being located in a karst area of the Mitchell Plateau. Water shortages ensued and Indiana University threatened to move out of town. Eventually, the city and Indiana University came to an agreement to build a subsequent reservoir in a non-karst area northeast of the city. Leonard Springs ceased being used as a reservoir in the mid 1940s. It remained abandoned until a transfer from the Utilities Department to the Parks and Recreation Department took place in 1998. Currently, the old reservoir and surrounding land are in the process of being reclaimed by nature after over a century of use by farmers, millers, and others.

Various grants were received and work began in the spring of 1999 to turn the once-abandoned property into a prosperous place for people to hike and appreciate the karst resource. A mile-long trail with a 100-stair steel walkway that brings one from the top of the reservoir to the bottom was designed and added in order to reduce erosion. Along the way, interpretive signs placed in strategic areas enhance the learning experience. Other signage includes rules of the park. In addition, together with various other local caving organizations such as the Bloomington Indiana Grotto and Eastern Indiana Grotto, numerous clean ups took place on the property and in its caves as they had been used as trash dumps by nearby residents.

During the presentation, delegates will be introduced to the park and its philosophy as well as be shown a sample of the caves and springs. Slides include a map of the park, introduction and interpretive signage, the trail, stairway, and an overlook used to view a shelter cave along the way, and volunteers active in the process of the cleaning up. Soon the city will start emphasizing educational programs being developed for the park and its visitors.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources Abandoned Mine Gates

This is an example of the Indiana karst Conservancy working with state government. As population in the state increased, it became more and more apparent that coal mines abandoned in the late 1800s through early 1900s needed to be secured. The mines and their various low tunnels had become unstable and prone to collapse. Local residents were concerned that their children could become trapped. Therefore, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources would simply bulldoze them shut.

However, bats had started using them as homes. Eventually, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Indiana karst Conservancy were introduced to each other and an agreement was reached whereas the Indiana karst Conservancy would build bat-friendly steel gates to secure the mine entrances so that the bats and other creatures could come and go yet keep children out. This agreement was to the mutual benefit of not only the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Indiana karst Conservancy but also the bats and local residents.

Work began in the spring of 1999. The Indiana karst Conservancy along with an Department of Natural Resources representative would visit the mine locations and take measurements and photos of the entrances. Later, they would return with a host of volunteers to construct them, welding each one together individually on site. The gates were subsequently primed and gated. Monitoring of the gated mine entrances proved that bats were indeed using them. In 1999, six bat-friendly abandoned mine gates were constructed.

During the presentation, delegates will be introduced to a typical reconnaissance mission to a mine-gating site, be shown photos of a mine entrance being surveyed, volunteers building and welding the gates on site, and gates being primered and painted.

The Orangeville Rise

This is an example of the Indiana karst Conservancy working with a related non-profit organization. In the spring of 1999, the Indiana karst Conservancy acquired one of the largest, most picturesque springs in Indiana, the Orangeville Rise, from The Nature Conservancy. The nature Conservancy felt that the Indiana karst Conservancy would be a more appropriate steward of the property as it focus primarily on conserving karst features. The property consists of approximately three acres and drains several square miles of land to the north and east of the feature. It is part of the world-class karst region of the Lost River System and has been designated a National Natural Landmark. It is also a state-dedicated nature preserve and is considered a prime tourist attraction in the area.

During the presentation, delegates will be introduced to the Orangeville Rise by being shown slides of the spring, signage, and a photo of the signing of the transfer that took place between representatives of the Indiana

karst Conservancy, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and The Nature Conservancy.

In conclusion, the Indiana karst Conservancy is finding that there are many commonalities between the various agencies and individuals as to how karst is managed. Watersheds and properties also overlap in certain areas. They are now not only focusing on working with these agencies, but encouraging the agencies to work together with them for the preservation of our sensitive karst areas. It is a challenge but one that is well worth it.

About the Author

Kriste Lindberg has been an active member of the caving community since 1992. She was introduced to it while teaching nature classes, writing curriculum, and leading field trips for the Chicago Academy of Sciences. Currently, she has been with the Indiana Karst Conservancy for five years, starting as a member in 1994, becoming a director in 1996, and subsequently President in 1999. Throughout this time, she has been collaborating with local, county, state, and federal governments as well as individuals throughout Indiana in the pursuit of maintaining the quality of the state's underground resources. Projects she is part of include the Hoosier National Forest Karst Inventory Project, various cave survey and management teams, Indiana Department of Natural Resources abandoned mine gatings, land acquisition, and most recently the expansion of the Indiana Karst Conservancy's education and outreach efforts (she has earned a BGS degree focusing on the earth and social sciences and an MSED). She is currently employed as the Park Manager of Leonard Springs Nature Park for the City of Bloomington and has been an integral part of the parks development since it began to be developed in the spring of 1999.