



The Great Saltpetre Cave Management Plan

To Protect and Preserve through Education

Update effective 2025

Changes made to this Management Plan since January 2023 appear in blue text.

I. Policy and Statement of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, Inc

The Rockcastle Karst Conservancy (RKC) encourages projects such as: establishing cave preserves; placing entrance gates where appropriate; opposing the sale of speleothems; supporting effective protective measures; cleaning and restoring over-used caves; cooperating with private cave owners by providing them knowledge about their cave and assisting them in protecting their cave and property from damage during cave visits; and encouraging commercial cave owners to make use of their opportunity to aid the public in understanding caves and the importance of their conservation. As part of this effort, RKC has acquired and holds the deed to the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve and is committed to its careful and long term management. It is the duty of every RKC member to take personal responsibility for spreading a consciousness of the cave conservation ethic to each potential user of caves.

II. HISTORY OF THE CAVE

Great Saltpetre Cave is located in eastern Rockcastle County, Kentucky. The cave is located in a spur of the Big Hill Range and runs directly through the mountain with Crooked Creek passing near both the north and south entrances of the cave.

The first written account of the cave states that it was discovered in 1798 by Robert Baker and his family. The early years of our country's birth demonstrated the need for a domestic supply of gunpowder. Great Saltpetre Cave was found to contain vast quantities of calcium nitrate, a critical ingredient in manufacturing gunpowder. The War of 1812 saw the peak production in saltpetre mining at Great Saltpetre Cave. Employing 70 or more miners during this period made it the largest employer in eastern Kentucky. Mammoth Cave was better known as a saltpetre mining operation, but it did not compare to the production generated at Great Saltpetre Cave. It is because of this mining that the first survey by John James DuFour was made of the cave and its prominence in the region has endured. After the War of 1812 the mining production slowed down and completely came to an end by 1865.

John Lair of Renfro Valley fame was instrumental in the commercialization of the cave with the radio broadcasting of the "Renfro Valley Barn Dance" from inside the cave in the early 1940's. A dance floor was constructed in the Echo Auditorium. A museum section was established to display the mining operations. During the next three decades the cave was opened for tours with various degrees of success. Later, Richard Mullins lived on the property and managed the campground and gave tours. Public visitation dwindled and eventually by 1985 the operation ceased altogether.

In 1989 the Felburn Foundation purchased Great Saltpetre Cave and leased it and the surrounding property to the Greater Cincinnati Grotto, a chapter of the National Speleological Society. The Grotto's management committee, along with help from other regional cavers, maintained the Preserve and steadily improved the infrastructure inside and outside the Cave with an eye toward enhancing the natural setting. This work was so successful that in 2003, the Felburn Foundation offered to give the cavers the Preserve if they would continue the same level of care and establish new Preserves. This was the impetus to form Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) organization. In 2006, RKC accepted ownership of the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve. In 2013 the cave was listed on the National Register of Historic Places due to the comprehensive efforts of Neena Jud.

III. THE GREAT SALTPETRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Great Saltpetre Preserve (GSP) is managed by the Great Saltpetre Cave Committee (GSPC) with representatives from Greater Cincinnati Grotto (GCG), Dayton Underground Grotto (DUG), Blue Grass Grotto (BGG), and Central Ohio Grotto (COG). Each year the chair of the GCG appoints the chairperson of GSPC who then chooses three additional GCG delegates. DUG, BGG, and COG select their own delegates for a total of eight committee members. Monthly meetings are held at locations or online, determined by the GSPC chairperson. All GSPC members shall have full voting privileges. [These](#) GSPC members who are present at each meeting, whether in person or virtually, will vote on all projects and expenditures. Four members constitute a quorum, but must include either the Chair or the Secretary. All monies donated to GSP will be managed by and used specifically for The Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve's [welfare](#). The GSPC will give a financial statement and a report on ongoing projects and plans to the RKC board at least once a year, or at their request.

IV. The Friends of Great Saltpetre Preserve

[Deactivated in 2024. This Section suspended till further notice.](#)

V. ACCESS TO THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE PRESERVE

Because the GSPC is composed of four grottos (GCG, DUG, BGG, COG), any member in good standing of those grottos may have access to the cave preserve and must abide by all rules and regulations. A special agreement (MOU) between GCG and RKC further spells out access privileges between

these two parties. All other persons must be sponsored by one of the aforementioned grottos. Sponsorship is serious matter. Please refer to section XIV Mission Statement. Each sponsor must be willing to do the following:

- A. Be in attendance at all times with their guest while on the property.
- B. Be accountable for all of their guests' actions and advise them of campground and cave rules [and camping fees](#).
- C. [Be diligent that these fees are paid, that guests register their attendance at the kiosk and advise all guests of our liability waiver requirement.](#)
- D. Be responsible for keeping the front gate locked. See section VIII.

E. Sponsoring Large Groups

This may be generally defined as over 12 people and carries responsibility [in addition to those](#) listed above. Sponsors of organized youth groups (e.g. Scouts) or other special interest groups must coordinate plans to visit GSP with the GCG youth group coordinator or other designated sponsor(s) and provide schedules to the GSP committee. Enough prior notice shall be given to avoid problems and potential conflicts with cave access. Also, any other special needs or requests must be cleared with GSPC. In some circumstances where the visiting groups are especially large, arrangements should be made to have additional sponsors or help by Grotto members when touring the cave.

VI. Banishment from Great Saltpetre Preserve.

- A. Cavers or visitors may be banned from visiting GSP for any of the following reasons:
 - 1. Willful misuse of GSP property or facilities.
 - 2. Willful disregard of the safety of themselves and/or others while visiting GSP property.
 - 3. Conduct detrimental to the GCG, BGG, DUG, COG, NSS, caves, and/or landowner relations.
- B. Disciplinary action shall be initiated only upon presentation to the GSP Committee of a written petition for disciplinary action by a member of GCG, BGG, DUG, COG. Upon receiving such a petition, the GSP Committee shall take such actions as are deemed necessary to notify the accused person, in writing of the petition, of the place, date, and time which the petition will be considered by the GSP Committee. The accused person shall have the right to speak on their behalf. Such consideration shall take place no sooner than twenty-one days or no later than seventy days after the petition is received by the GSP Committee.
- C. Disciplinary action under this provision shall be taken only upon three-fourths vote of the GSP committee by a secret ballot in Executive session.
- D. For serious violations observed on site, the offending visitor or caver may be asked to leave immediately by the GSP caretaker or any board member of GCG, BGG, DUG, COG or any GSP committee member. Refusal to comply

may result in local authorities being called and trespassing charges being filed. For these serious on site violations, the disciplinary process can skip step (B)

- E. Banishment from GSP will be for a period of five years. The banished party will be eligible for early reinstatement upon request after a period of one year. A written request for reinstatement must be submitted to the committee for consideration of early reinstatement. If the request is denied then the banished party must wait a period of one year to request reinstatement again. Only one request will be considered annually. If no request for early reinstatement is approved, the banished party shall be banned for the full term of the banishment. The committee must approve early reinstatement by a three-fourths majority by secret ballot. A caver banned from GSP is not necessarily banned from their grotto, but their grotto will be notified of the nature of the violation and the action taken by the GSP Committee.

VII. GSP CARETAKER

Since November 1999, the property has had an onsite resident located a few hundred feet past the main gate. This person is the GSP caretaker whose primary duty is to watch over the property to the best of his/her ability. Residency is granted by the RKC Board and managed by the GSP committee through a separate lease arrangement. Since September 2022 the caretaker's residence is part of the GSP Real Estate asset. Do not automatically expect the caretaker to give out keys to the cave or permit indiscriminate access. The responsibilities of the caretaker and other specific terms of residency are spelled out in the separate lease agreement. By nature of his/her position, the caretaker is considered a special advisor to the GSP committee.

VIII. SECURITY

This is extremely important for the protection of the campground and the caretaker who resides there. The front drive gate has a combination lock. The combination can be obtained by calling either a GCG board member or anyone from the GSPC. The combination will only be given to RKC board members and members of GCG, DUG, BGG, COG. Under normal circumstances, sponsors with guests are not to give out the front gate combination and the gate must be locked at all times. The chairperson of the GSPC will have the responsibility of changing the lock combination as deemed necessary and keeping all appropriate people notified. Remember the combination could change at any time. Call or email first to ensure that the combination number you know is correct.

Various property structures also require security and therefore have keyed locks. These access keys are held by GCG board members and GSPC members and RKC Board members. When access to a structure is via a key in a lockbox, the combination shall be given to all GCG Board, GSPC, and RKC Board members. "Specialty keys" for maintenance and security purposes may be held by selected GSPC members and are not included with the access keys. The GSPC will ensure that there are no fewer than two copies of specialty keys

available for Committee members' use. The pay-pipe located at the kiosk is exclusively accessed by the treasurer and those authorized by the treasurer.

The Kitchen will be open whenever possible by a GSPC member or GCG Board. However unless one of these persons is on GSP property for supervision and security, the kitchen will remain locked. **Kitchen care, start-up, and shut-down procedures are critical and must be followed**, especially in winter. Keys for access will not be issued or loaned to any person unless they have been trained on operating procedures and signed the 'kitchen key' form. Posted instructions inside and outside the kitchen must be followed to protect this facility from needless expense, damage or abuse.

IX. CAMPING AT THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE PRESERVE

Camping, including the use of the two sleeping cabins (mondos), is on a first-come, first-serve basis. The first person occupying a cabin has sole discretion of allowing additional occupants. No pets are allowed in the sleeping cabins. Sleeping Cabins are not for use by Youth Organizations. Youth Groups should stay in the area reserved for them at the far end of the main camping field where the Scout Shelter is available for use.

Electric sites are available in the middle campground. The lower mondo is also considered an electric site. [Random locations around the property with a power outlet utilized for overnight camping, shall be considered a site requiring standard electric overnight fee.](#) See section XI

The shower house will normally be open for use during warm weather. They are out of service in winter months during freezing temperatures.

Please remember that your camping donations are used for the upkeep of the property. Suggested donations for nightly camping plus use of electric are described in section XI.

X. SPECIAL EVENTS

The GSP property typically hosts various events during the course of a year. These are, but may not be limited to:

New Year's Eve Party

Open House

Karst-O-Rama

Caver Appreciation Weekend

Halloween party

Work Weekend(s)

These events are held for the benefit of cavers, their family or sponsored guest(s) and, in the case of Open House, the general public. Each such event shall be arranged and managed by its own subcommittee and will report to the GSP committee. Other special groups or events held with the permission of the

GSP committee and requiring use of facilities, cave, or campground, are expected to make a financial contribution to the Preserve.

XI. CAMPGROUND RULES, REGULATIONS & FEES

Everyone must register at the kiosk. Camping requests are \$10.00 per night per person. Electrical sites are an additional \$10.00 per night at designated campsites & the lower mondo cabin, and are restricted to members' use during heavy visitation. Camping donations are payable upon arrival and may be deposited in the pipe next to the kiosk. Use the payment envelope and fill in your name, date, and any affiliation. Please print legibly. If a receipt is required, indicate so and give an address. Notify a GSPC person or the Caretaker for approval of extended stays, for example beyond four nights. Whether camping or not, donations are always gladly accepted, appreciated and needed.

Property insurance requires that all Grotto members, their guests, Officers and members of the Friends of GSP, must have a GSP liability waiver signed and on file. Waivers are available at registration kiosk or may be downloaded and printed off the RKC and GSP website. Waivers will be valid from date signed and need not be renewed unless contact information changes. They are filed in the RKC archives. All youth group visitors under the age of 18 are required to have a signed liability waiver for each visit to the Preserve whether they camp or not. No exceptions. Parents, or a legal guardian, must sign for minor children. These waivers are to be collected and retained by the sponsoring Grotto member, or placed in the box at the shelter or at the kiosk.

The speed limit is 7 MPH. Drive on designated roads and in campground area.

All trash must be removed from camping area when leaving. Dispose of or recycle properly. Leave no trace. Use only designated fire rings. All fires must be extinguished before departure. No live timber is to be cut on the premises. **Do not create campfires in the open grass. They are unsightly, scorch the ground, and make mowing difficult.**

Quiet hours are between 11:00 PM to 6:00 AM. Please be especially mindful of this when campground is occupied.

By terms of our deed, hunting is not permitted anywhere on GSP property.

No brandishing or discharging of firearms on the Preserve. No fireworks, carbide cannons, or explosives on the Preserve.

GSPC recognizes that the property is a wonderful place for pets to run and get exercise. However pets must be controlled at all times. All pets must have current inoculations for rabies as prescribed by the camper's state of residence. **(Kentucky Administrative Regulations 304 KAR 1:040)** The main shelter house and scout shelter are to be used as eating areas or gathering places. During times of heavy use, be considerate of other people using the shelters by keeping dogs or other pets at a distance. In general restrain pets from annoying behavior. Aggressive animals should be on a leash or otherwise confined. There

is to be no camping, or parking of vehicles under the shelters. All persons using the shelters must tidy up before leaving, even if they were found in poor condition.

Motorized vehicles are prohibited for off-road use at GSP, with the exception of pre-approved GSP Maintenance vehicles. Nuisance behavior with these vehicles is also prohibited.

Horses are prohibited at GSP campground.

XII. POLICY FOR CAVE ACCESS

Access to the Great Saltpetre Cave is a privilege. Officers of RKC, GCG and the GSPC hold the keys to the cave. To borrow a key to the cave you must be a member in good standing of GCG, DUG, BGG, COG. Permission to visit the cave must be made in advance with a GSPC member or GCG board member, or the caretaker. Authorized key holders are highly encouraged to use the "Cave Visitation Rules" form when loaning their key to others. While visiting the cave the gate must be locked at all times and should be unlocked and re-locked as you enter and leave. [You are strongly advised to carry a spare light in event of a power failure.](#) Key to cave must be returned as soon as possible.

XIII. THE GREAT SALTPETRE CAVE STATUTES

RKC and the GSPC actively promote the conservation of caves. All visitors pledge to protect the historical, geological and biological treasures found underground. The management committee stresses that nothing shall be done to deface or spoil the natural beauty and life forms found in the cave.

No marking on the cave walls or ceilings.

No rock climbing or rappelling above the cave entrance.

No camping is allowed in the cave.

No unauthorized vehicles or bikes are allowed in the cave.

No fires are allowed in the cave.

No children permitted in cave without adult supervision.

No using cave as a restroom.

Pets are not allowed in the cave without approval.

Scientific study and research involving the exploration of Great Saltpetre Cave is encouraged and shall be approved by the GSPC upon review. Archeological excavations must also obtain a State of KY permit in accordance with **Kentucky Revised Statutes 433.871 thru .885.**

A written report of any findings must be filed with the committee. The cave may be used for the teaching of conservation and safe caving techniques. Any groups proposing to use the cave for these purposes must be covered by

insurance and individual release forms properly signed and submitted to the GSPC secretary.

Because of the colorful history of the cave and its accessibility, the media may publicize it in magazines and newspapers, without disclosing the precise location, with permission from the GSP committee.

XIV. Mission Statement

Our long term mission is to preserve and protect the natural resources of the Great Saltpeter Preserve. It is a karst preserve protected as a pleasant and convenient haven for cavers and those who enjoy the caving experience. It is available as an educational outreach for adventure groups, schools, and other special requests. However all such visits are by scheduled invitation and/or sponsored arrangements since the GSP is managed entirely through dedicated volunteers. It is not promoted as a commercial campground, a private event venue, or a general tourist stop. **GSP does not allow business or political activities for special interests or private financial gain whatsoever.**

Our stewardship of the land means not developing the property or creating high impact improvements. It means careful maintenance and restoration of buildings and structures which are important and/or historically significant to the campground area, as well as providing reliable infrastructure for the convenience of cavers and sponsored guests. Low impact and low visibility improvements such as running water, telephone, cave lighting, appropriately sited and sensitively integrated structures, are usually acceptable since they enhance comfort and security without compromising our mission. Visible and permanent changes on or to the property, or in the cave, must be thoroughly evaluated so as not to clash with our mission. Each idea, plan, and project shall be measured against this. Any such improvement or restoration project shall be evaluated to keep long term (life-cycle) costs down and minimize ecological impact. Think "Green".

Approved October 9, 2025 by GSP Management committee

This supersedes all previous versions of the GSP Management Plan