

The William J. Stephenson Nature Preserve Management Plan

Introduction:

Sixty acres of the new National Speleological Society's headquarters property, which lies within the city limits of Huntsville (AL), has been designated as a nature preserve. In the early 1800's the Davis family were the first recorded owners of this parcel of land granted from the government office in Nashville, TN. Various members of this family held ownership until the 1950's when it was sold to the Shriners'. This organization maintained the property until it was purchased by the NSS.

Resources:

Underground: Two caves and one pit are confirmed within the preserve which reaches from just behind the headquarters building to the top of Drake Mountain. Blue Balloon Cave has a crawl entrance and extends horizontally for 173 feet, while nearby Tree Root Cave has a chimney climb entrance, is 592 feet long, and 60 feet deep.

Biological: Although a formal critter count has not yet been done, bats and salamanders have been sighted.

Archeological/Paleontological: No significant findings have been reported at this time

Water: No continuous flowing stream is known to exist on the property

Access Policy (Rules) for the Preserve:

No special permission shall be required. However, notification of intent to visit the Preserve (or the NSS grounds in general) should be given to the Preserve Manager for Register data collection, and for individual's safety. Visits to the Preserve should coincide with NSS Office hours; Monday-Friday 8am-5pm (not open on major holidays).

No recreational tours for pay will be permitted.

No campfires permitted.

Disturbing plants or animals on the property is not allowed without express permission.

Trash/waste must be carried out by the visitor

Parking available in designated paved areas only

Management Plan:

Further research on the property will be done to expand the knowledge of its history.

Further exploration for caves and karst features will be ongoing

Formal trails will be established and monitored for erosion

A biodiversity inventory of the caves and surface features will be conducted with local University assistance

An information kiosk will be placed at the trail head with information related to the property caves, caving safety, etc.