

2026 Ft. Stanton Cave Proposal submission criteria and process.

This document will guide you through the Bureau of Land Management Roswell Field Office cave proposal submission process. **Please read this information before you start the proposal submission process.**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Roswell Field Office is now accepting proposals for project work in caves within our field office that require a Special Recreation/Administrative Permit for the 2026 caving season. In addition to proposals being submitted for Special Recreation Permit managed caves, the BLM encourages proposals be submitted for non- Special Recreation Permit caves on BLM managed public lands. In addition to the Special Recreation Permit, a Collection Permit is required for collecting samples on public lands. Please request Collection Permit(s) in your Special Recreation Permit application proposal. Proposals will be accepted from today's date through January 12, 2026.

For the 2026 caving season, proposals will be submitted through the DOI's Recreation and Permit Tracking Online Reporting (RAPTOR) website. Links and how to instructions are described later in this document. RAPTOR is a permit and tracking system for members of the public to apply for Special Recreation Permits (SRPs), Paleontological Resource Use Permits, and **Scientific Research Authorizations** on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). RAPTOR provides an online interface with the public to apply for more easily, and view, the status of an application for a permit as required by Department of the Interior Secretarial Orders 3356 and 3366. **If you have issues with submitting your permit application or proposal through the RAPTOR system, please contact Knutt Peterson at: knuttpet@blm.gov.**

Criteria for Proposals:

The proposal should address all the information requested in the **"How to fill out the RAPTOR Science Authorization Application" pdf**. The BLM requests this specific information to better understand the proposal. The BLM is looking for proposed project(s) that help the BLM/Roswell Field Office fulfill cave management priorities. Proposals will be evaluated by the Roswell Field Office Cave Specialist and the BLM New Mexico Cave Management Team, then approved or denied by the Roswell Field Office Manager.

Special notes:

Before starting the proposal submission process, it is highly recommended that you discuss your proposal idea with the Roswell Field Office Cave Specialist. This will help you and the BLM be on the same page and reduce the amount of back and forth later. knuttpet@blm.gov or 575-626-5076

Fort Stanton Cave (Cave): The BLM would like to see a variety of proposals for 2026. If Snowy River becomes flooded in 2026, the focus will be work in the historic part of the Cave. In the historic part of the Cave, priority will be given to proposals that offer to clean up old survey and do restoration. Other

projects will also be considered. Currently, recommendations from the BLM New Mexico Cave Management Team have limited the total individual entries to 350 for 2026. Given the number of entries, the BLM will approve proposals that fulfill our highest management priorities. A ranking system (page 6) is used to evaluate proposals on several criteria. Ranking is based on how well the proposal meets the criteria and our management priorities. Ranking criteria are defined at the bottom of this document. **BLM management priorities for the 2026 caving season are:**

1. White-Nose Syndrome and other scientific research
2. Mapping and monitoring of Snowy River Passage and side passages
3. Cave restoration
4. Rescue related: Rescue Caches, Rescue Training
5. **Science:** *Subterranean Inquiry: The study and documentation of karst systems within Ft Stanton Cave*
 - a. Geographic resources - creating, refining, categorizing, and making data available in a GIS format
 - b. Detailed airflow analysis in the southern part of the cave.
 - c. General Hydrologic analysis of the Cave system: 2026 focus - better understanding and documentation of water flow and storage within the cave (where is there flow and pools).
 - d. Identification of microclimates
 - e. Biologic resources - inventory and documentation
 - f. Geologic analysis of the cave system
6. Maintenance of infrastructure (Gates, Trails, Ladders, Magic Carpets, etc.) These projects will be coordinated closely with and lead by BLM.
7. Data gathering for Caver Quest
8. Other in-Cave mapping and projects

If you are proposing science work in the Cave, and you are not a subject matter expert, it is recommended that you have a subject matter expert work with you and be a coauthor on your proposal. If you anticipate needing to collect samples, please mention in your proposal that you are also applying for a Collection Permit(s). All trip proposals to far Snowy River South (Midnight Junction) must be camp or bivouac trips. With the current 350 entry limit, each trip needs to be maximized for in-Cave productivity, impact mitigation, and safety.

Proposals for Snowy River exploration should describe the areas your team would like to explore. The BLM Roswell Field Office, the Fort Stanton Cave Study Project, and Strong & Lite trip leaders will work with all survey teams to coordinate areas of interest and operations as new passage becomes known during the caving season.

If your trip has potential to enter the Cave under United States Forest Service (USFS) lands, your proposal will be shared with the USFS cave specialist Jennifer.Foote@usda.gov. USFS will provide recommendations to the BLM. If you are proposing collecting samples on USFS lands, you must ensure you request a collection permit from USFS, which could require significant time for review. Requests for permits from the BLM and the USFS must be made well in advance of your trip date, if not you may not receive a permit! Once your trip dates are approved, YOU MUST CONTACT Jennifer.Foote@usda.gov TO OBTAIN A CAVE ENTRY PERMIT for the USFS portion of the cave. BLM will attach the USFS cave entry

permit to the BLM cave permit. Reports for trips to USFS portions of the cave shall be concurrently submitted to USFS and BLM.

If you are proposing a trip under private property, you MUST present the BLM with written permission from the private property landowner stating that the trip has permission to travel under their property. Please contact the BLM Roswell Field Office Cave Specialist for details on this process.

Trip dates can be changed due to circumstances as they arise (e.g., Snowy River flooding, overlapping trips, sick team members).

Digs create significant impact to the Cave by altering atmospheric conditions and producing spoils piles. If you are proposing a dig, you must provide substantial evidence that the dig is going to pan out. An end goal must be stated (e.g., we will dig 30ft to...), and if that goal is achieved and the dig has not panned out, the dig will be filled in. You must also describe mitigations for impacts created by opening the dig and the digging process. Digs require the proposed work to go through the NEPA process, this can take time. With the current amount of other high-priority work that needs to be done in the Cave, new digs are a low priority for the BLM.

Every entry into the Cave creates impacts to the Cave, and especially to Snowy River Passage. The BLM's philosophy is that by allowing trips into this incredible resource, it is everyone's responsibility to mitigate and repair the inevitable impacts that occur. For mapping and restoration trips to the historic section and Snowy River, please include in your proposal(s) where you recommend cleanup/mitigation or where restoration should occur. Additionally, **trips to Snowy River will photo document specified changing stations and high-impact areas before they enter that station or area and after they leave the station or area. Teams will be notified of these photo monitoring points before their trips.** Proposals focused on restoration or with an element of restoration will be weighted higher than those without. All restoration projects must be cleared by the Roswell Field Office Cave Specialist.

To increase protection for the bat population and other unique lifeforms in the Cave, the BLM requires all cavers to use dedicated cave gear in Fort Stanton Cave. Gear that falls into the dedicated gear category includes helmets, gloves, pads, outer layer of clothing for travel through the historic section of the Cave, boots, and packs. Instruments, cameras, and other gear carried in a pack need to be decontaminated at the BLM fieldhouse before and after the trip. There are several options for cavers regarding dedicated gear. First, the BLM has loaner gear that is dedicated to the Cave and available for checkout with the Cave Specialist. Second, cavers can dedicate their own gear by decontaminating their personal gear onsite, having it certified by the BLM Cave Specialist, and storing it in an individual bin with their name on it on site at the BLM fieldhouse. **The use of dedicated gear by all cavers bolsters the BLM's commitment to protect cave biota.**

During the 2017 season, two assessment trips were conducted on Snowy River. On both occasions, a new formation called "detritusite" was found. These formations turned out to be calcite-encrusted human hair, bits of thread, lint, rubber, and other shredded caver gear. A significant amount of this trash was observed. To diminish anthropogenic trash in the Cave, and on Snowy River, it is important to assess your gear and how you cave. If your gear is starting to fray, it needs to be replaced. Additionally, before entering the Cave, it is recommended that you take a shower and thoroughly comb your hair. If you have long hair, it should be tied back/up. You should find a method to minimize the shedding of other body hair while traveling beyond Turtle Junction (Light weight breathable tights work well). Cavers should be

aware of how they move in the Cave. An important part of being on a Snowy River team is being mindful of your every step and movement. If you drag your knees or feet while crawling on Snowy River, you will leave bits of gear behind. This trash is nearly invisible until it becomes calcified. Efforts to reduce the amount of material shed in the Cave should be implemented by all teams. The BLM is open to any ideas to help address this issue.

Expedition leaders are ultimately responsible for the personnel on their expeditions. Expedition leaders should do their best to recruit cavers who are willing to follow the BLM's caving guidelines. Expedition leaders should select cavers who are physically fit, psychologically prepared, with a conservation-minded caving ethic, and exemplary caving skills.

Every team entering the Cave will have one designated team leader. Team leaders are responsible for the safety of their team and the actions of their team members. However, EVERY team member is responsible for bringing issues to the team leader's attention. If a team member is acting in an unsafe manner or causing damage to the Cave, it is the team leader's responsibility to correct that person's actions. If problems persist, the team leader must abort the trip and have the team leave the Cave. A team leader should gear team activities to the least experienced member of the team. This pertains to speed of travel, impact mitigation, exiting the Cave on time, exposed climbing, and all other aspects of the trip. A team leader should put the safety of their team and minimizing impacts to the cave over all other objectives. **To become a S&L team leader you must have a strong, trusting, working relationship with BLM and USFS cave Specialists.**

A team should stay together unless an emergency requires members to separate. Team members entering the Cave are responsible for their own actions in the Cave and for reporting unsafe or impactful behavior they observe. It is everyone's responsibility to assure that Fort Stanton Cave remains as pristine as possible and that each team member acts in a safe manner while in the Cave.

Teams traveling on Snowy River north of Independence Hall should have an experienced team leader (at least three trips on Snowy River) who is familiar with that section of the Cave. Teams traveling south of Independence Hall should have a Strong & Lite team leader and two experienced Strong & Lite cavers. A fourth team member may be new to Snowy River but must have extensive caving experience and be approved by the BLM Cave Specialist. Please size your team to the minimum number of cavers to accomplish the task and maintain safety. Travel to far Snowy River South (; past Bliss Borehole) requires a team to have at least three accomplished Strong & Lite cavers with camp experience. To bring new cavers into the Strong & Lite cadre, it is encouraged to include an experienced non-Snowy River caver on snowy River South trips. The new caver must demonstrate that he or she have the stamina to make the trip. Otherwise, to be included on a Midnight Junction camp trip, new cavers must accomplish a phased set of progressively longer trips. Two or three trips to Midnight Junction without any issues will add a caver to the Strong & Lite cadre. All cavers going to Snowy River will be vetted and must be approved by the BLM Cave Specialist.

Human waste management must be addressed in your proposal. Please consider the length of the trip and describe how you plan to deal with human waste collection, transportation, and disposal. What equipment will you be using? A crumpled up cheap water bottle is not an acceptable pee bottle. The containment device must be able to hold up to the trip you are going on. **ALL HUMAN WASTE MUST BE REMOVED FROM THE CAVE AT THE END OF YOUR TRIP!**

Fort Stanton Cave is an important bat hibernaculum that the BLM is tasked with protecting.

Decontamination procedures are now commonplace within the caving community and are strongly encouraged by national caving organizations like the National Speleological Society. Current U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cave decontamination procedures apply to all persons and equipment entering the Cave. All gear is subject to inspection prior to every trip. Non-dedicated gear will be decontaminated before and after caving in Fort Stanton Cave to prevent cross-contamination of Cave biota to other caves. No cave gear used in White-Nose Syndrome-infected states may be used in any BLM New Mexico caves. **Use of dedicated gear is required for all trips into Fort Stanton Cave.**

If you have any questions regarding the BLM Roswell Field Office cave regulations or the proposal process, please email or call Cave Specialist Knutt Peterson at knuttpet@blm.gov or (575) 626-5076.

How to submit a proposal using the RAPTOR website.

If you adhere the following steps, the proposal submission process should be easy and keep you informed as to where your proposal is within the application, review, and authorization process.

There are some helpful videos at the following site on how to use the RAPTOR site.

<https://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/legacy/course/1178>

1. Go to the RAPTOR home page: <https://permits.blm.gov/raptor/home-gensc>
2. Click on the “Login/Register” link in the ribbon at the top of the page.
3. Click on “Sign in or create an account with Login.gov”. Applicants need a Login.gov account to access RAPTOR. Once you have signed in with Login.gov, you will be redirected back to RAPTOR.

If you already have an Login.gov account, click sign in. **If you are using RAPTOR for the first time, click on “Create an Account.”**

Creating an Account page:

4. Enter your email address and select your language preference. Check the box that you have I read and accept the Login.gov Rules of Use.
5. Go to the email you entered and follow the directions for passwords and other information.
REMEMBER YOUR LOGIN AND PASWORD!
6. When you’ve completed and setup your account, you will be directed to your RAPTOR Dashboard.
7. If submitting a proposal to do work at a BLM Roswell Field Office Cave (Like Fort Stanton Cave) Click the **“Start a Scientific Research Application”** choice.

Use the “**How to fill out the RAPTOR Science Authorization Application**” pdf, that was attached to the call for proposals email, to help you input the information the Roswell FO is looking for in your proposal application.

Also attached to the email is a fillable pdf called “2026 FSC Proposal Operating Plan v2”. Please fill it out and upload it in the “Upload Section” at the end of section 6 in the proposal application in RAPTOR.

Some Tips for submitting a successful proposal:

1. **BEFORE** you fill out the application have a chat with the BLM cave and karst specialist, Knutt Peterson, to talk about your proposal. This action will put us on the same page and reduce a bunch of back-and-forth communications.
2. Fill out the application using the “How to fill out the RAPTOR Science Authorization Application” pdf. You may want to use this document and a word document to formulate your answers **BEFORE** you login to the RAPTOR site. Then copy and paste your answers into the application.
3. **Be descriptive in your answers but concise.** The review team is looking for specific information to make our decision. Sorting through fluff and rabbit trails of unnecessary information is time consuming. There is no need to over explain. Be Concise and yet descriptive! If we have questions, we will contact you to elaborate.

Selection Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated by the BLM Roswell Field Office Cave Specialist and the BLM New Mexico Cave Management Team based on the need for the work proposed and the following three criteria:

Proposal Contents:

Are all questions clearly answered? A rank of four is achieved by fully answering all questions. A rank of three is achieved by answering almost all of the questions. A rank of two is achieved by answering most of the questions. A rank of one is achieved by answering questions in a vague or unclear manner.

Restoration Component:

Proposals focused primarily on restoration or with an element of restoration will be weighted higher than those without. Trips focused on completing several restoration tasks are given a rank of four. Carrying out a restoration task in addition to accomplishing other tasks is ranked three. Restoring only the team’s own impact is ranked two. Trips with no restoration are ranked one.

Team Success:

This category pertains to an applicant’s ability to lead and the quality of their leadership and participation in previous trips. This is the evaluation committee’s best judgment of an applicant’s (and

their team's) past efforts to conduct and participate in safe expeditions, minimize impacts to the Cave, and provide the BLM with accurate data in a timely manner. A rank of four indicates the applicant has always led or contributed to successful expeditions and turned in data to the BLM within two weeks of each trip. A rank of three indicates the applicant has led or participated in successful expeditions with some minor lapses and turned in data to the BLM after two weeks. A rank of two indicates problems have reduced the success of the applicant's past expeditions and they submitted data to the BLM after three weeks. A rank of one indicates there have been serious problems with success on past expeditions and data was submitted to the BLM over a month late.