

Western Cave Conservancy

Protecting the West's Last Frontier

Vol 17 No 1 Winter 2024

Friend-Raising and Fundraising at the 2023 Western Regional and 75th Southern California Grotto Anniversary

Marianne Russo, Secretary

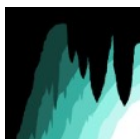
Western Regional

Over the weekend of September 29-October 1, 2023, the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the NSS hosted the annual Western Regional meeting. They chose a venue that cavers have used several times in the past, the Mother Lode Fairgrounds in the city of Sonoma, California. This facility has everything needed for a great event; a spacious meeting hall, with a full industrial kitchen, camping and parking right outside the doors, plenty of bathrooms and showers, plus — being right in town — there are hotels, restaurants, and shopping close by. The recent event was very well attended by cavers of all ages and provided a great opportunity for the WCC to connect with folks and do some much needed fundraising and awareness raising.

Our plans included the preparation and serving of a fundraising dinner on Saturday, setting up the popcorn machine and providing free bags of this snack to folks hanging around the meeting hall. Of course, there was a donation cup close by to which people generously contributed. In addition, I brought a few boxes of t-shirts, books, and prints from the Ray and Gale Beach estate and set these out, also in exchange for donations with a small lamp being put on the silent auction table.

Mike Spiess, chef extraordinaire (along with being a director and the treasurer for the WCC) set to





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work creating a menu to please everyone. A number of attendees were vegan and his choices for the menu were all vegan except the BBQ chicken provided to the meat lovers. The vegan entrée option was BBQ Beyond Meat sausage. The other items provided were fresh corn on the cob, vegan BBQ beans, green salad, and toasted French bread. Dessert consisted of vegan cookies made from scratch the day of the banquet. John Tinsley and myself did all the baking using vegan butter and flax seed instead of eggs. We made two varieties, pumpkin spice and oatmeal raisin, both of which were delicious. We made dozens and dozens of large cookies and many folks had seconds, until they were all gone. Beverages consisted of lemonade, ice water, and beer. A

wonderful assortment of craft-style beer was donated by Matt Bowers and John Hargreaves, courtesy of local suppliers. Mike performed the barbecuing honors, grilling all the chicken and sausages to perfection. We were very lucky that he has so many connections around the state because the large BBQ trailer was generously provided free of charge by Bob Wix, who was a referral from a friend of a fishing buddy in Twain Harte.



As the time for serving dinner approached, several volunteers showed up to help us out with final preparations and serving. Special thanks go to Barb Maeso Ruble, Steven Johnson, Heather McDonald, Lindsey Thayer, Steve Hobson, Melanie Jackson, John Tinsley, John Hargreaves, and Pete Dickman. Thanks also to Ernie Maier who provided warming trays for our serving line. The help of all these volunteers was absolutely essential and appreciated. Almost everyone attending the event purchased the dinner and, along with donations for popcorn, Beach items and outright gifts, the conservancy netted \$2,480 which went toward finishing off our recent Challenge Match campaign to help pay off the Volcano Natural Preserve.

The WCC was able to show a little appreciation to some of the many cavers from all over California who attended by facilitating four different trips to Rippled Cave over the course of the weekend. A total of 32 visitors enjoyed this opportunity thanks to

the volunteers who led the trips. A big “thank you” goes out to Brody Blacet, Katrina Smith, Ernie Maier, and Steven Johnson who organized and led these trips.

The board of the Western Cave Conservancy extends their appreciation and gratitude to the San Francisco Bay Chapter, its Regional organizing committee, and volunteers for their tremendous support at this event. Thanks also to all the Western Region officers and all the attendees who made this event so successful.

SoCal Anniversary

This event was held on the weekend of October 20-22 at Lake Morena campground, which is in the hill country approximately 50 miles east of downtown San Diego. This was a beautiful time of year down there, cool at night but very pleasant during the day. Steven Johnson and I flew down there on Friday and met up at the San Diego airport in the late afternoon on Friday. Steven had arranged for a rental vehicle and we drove east to the campground. We had a pleasant time visiting with everyone and getting oriented to the planned schedule of events. They had a full plate of cave trips, presentations, and evening festivities for the weekend. Our agenda included talking to as many people as possible about the WCC and about what we might be able to help them out with in this part of the state. In addition, we were to host a fundraising continental breakfast on Sunday morning.

Saturday morning Steven and I drove back west, into one of the San Diego suburbs to shop at Costco and Walmart, where we were able to purchase everything we needed for the breakfast, including a couple of ice chests to keep the perishables cold. For the Saturday evening meal, a caterer provided delicious and plentiful Mexican food. This was followed by some interesting slide shows and talks, a raffle, and auction. Dave Bunnell, acting as the auctioneer, showed off a skill which he has honed over the decades!

Steven, a couple of volunteers and I laid out the WCC breakfast early Sunday morning. We had purchased a variety of items such as fresh fruit, yogurt, granola, cereals, muffins, bagels, and cold beverages. Some tables were arranged around the registration tent and folks came and went throughout the morning, sitting in the warm sun to eat and chatting with their friends. When we were wrapping things up, the leftover food was donated to whoever wanted it and a couple of people gave us generous donations in exchange for the ice chests that we could not take home on the plane.

The SoCal Grotto very generously donated 50 percent of the proceeds from both the auction and the raffle to the WCC! Including these proceeds, plus several donations from members, and the net from the breakfast sales, the WCC received \$586. We also recruited two new members for the Conservancy and received membership renewals from a few others, which added still more contributions for our cause.

I want to thank the SoCal Grotto and their anniversary organizing committee for giving us such a warm welcome and being so generous with their auction and raffle money. Finally, I want to



give a special thank you to Carol Vesely who first contacted us to see if we would be interested in participating in their event, and for making sure that we got all the information and help we needed.

A Good Year For The WCC Thanks To Member Support

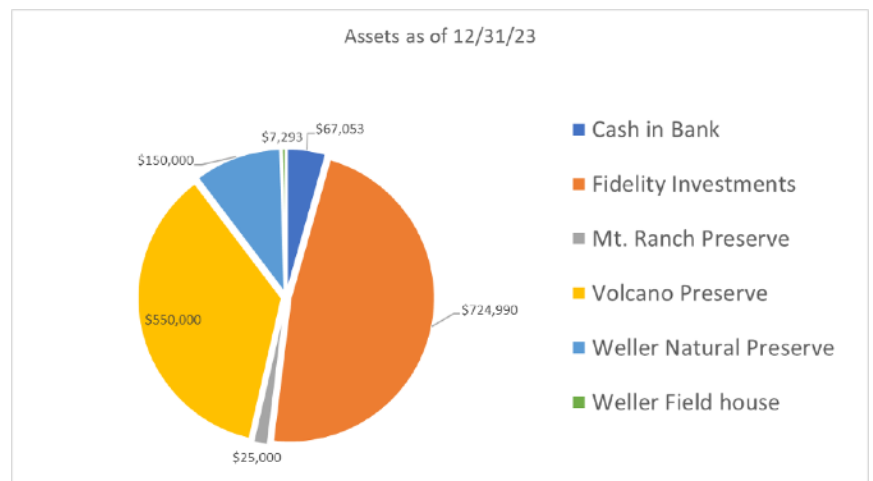
Mike Spiess, Treasurer

The year 2023 was a good year! We turned 20 and completed our biggest acquisition ever. The Volcano Natural Preserve property is paid off thanks to the many donors who contributed to this effort. With multiple parcels, lot line adjustments, and a loan, this was the most complex transaction we have done to date. About 150 individual donors and organizations contributed an average of \$2800 to this effort over almost three years. Our financial position improved by 4.9% from last year. This improvement was driven primarily by an 11% growth in our investments (despite a \$35,000 withdrawal).

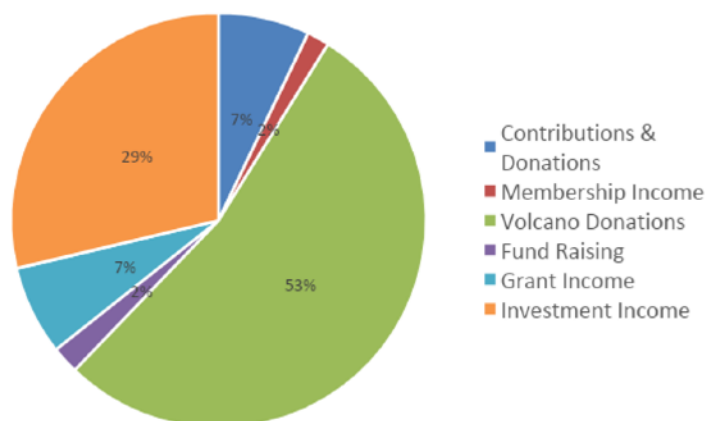
The Board has established two funds in the name of Bill Papke and Gale and Ray Beach. One is to fund additional property acquisitions and one is to generate operating funds. For 20 years the WCC has been an all-volunteer organization. As we mature and our operations become more complex, we must position ourselves to pay increased management costs on our properties. At some point we will find it necessary to hire staff. These investments will allow us to do that when the need arises.

The Natural Bridges restoration project is a good example of how the WCC can fulfill its mission to conserve karst resources. The project has raised \$7500 and the WCC will contribute \$3,250. Like Windeler and SVR, these types of projects are partnerships with other organizations that further our goal of conservation while retaining responsible visitation, but there is still a financial commitment by the WCC. Funding projects like these is an important aspect of our financial planning.

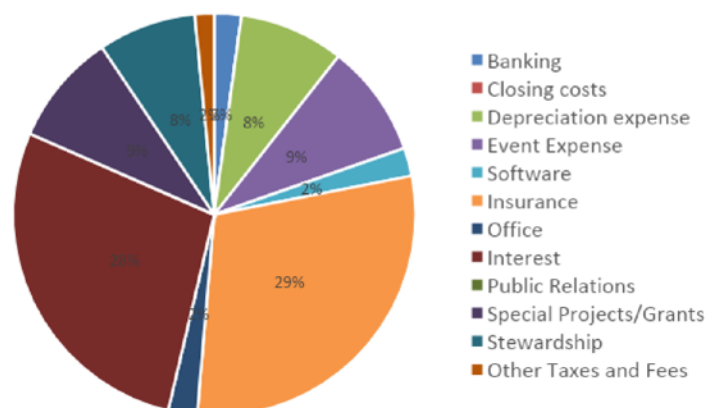
As Of	Total Net Assets
12/31/2023	\$1,524,336
12/31/2022	\$1,453,824
Change	\$70,511



Income 2023



Expenses 2023



Volcano Natural Preserve – Fundraising Journey and Final Payment!

Marianne Russo, Secretary

At long last, the final payment for the 150-acre Volcano Natural Preserve has been made and our fundraising campaign is winding down. When we started negotiations for the property back in February of 2020, we began soliciting donations to help make this purchase possible. The price agreed upon was \$550,000. The board agreed to use \$100,000 of our invested funds, leaving us to raise the remaining \$450,000 from donations. Fortunately, the WCC had some very generous donors who gave us a great start on achieving this goal. One very special person gave us, in total, \$110,000. A number of other cavers made significant donations ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The Mother Lode Grotto pledged \$50,000, if we could match it with other donations. It took some time but with the help of dozens of cavers and friends from around the United States we finally matched that amount in March of 2021. By July of that year, we had raised \$290,000 of the needed \$450,000.

In time for the 2021 Speleo-Ed event in Weed, California, we announced a Challenge Match of \$25,500 which was put up by pledges from several of our serious donors. In addition to the generous bequest we received from the estate of Ray and Gale Beach, we also were the recipients of many of their art objects and cave-related items. We brought a selection of these materials, a large photo display featuring the Volcano caves and property, and the WCC popcorn machine as well as many of the WCC logo items to this event. We set up a large booth at the venue used for dining, event parties, entertainment, and general socializing. This proved to be a great place to interact with all the attendees. Between sales of Beach items and numerous donations, we matched over \$5,400 toward the “Challenge”. In addition, one of the dinners provided during the event was a WCC fundraiser. This alone netted us an additional \$1,200. By early

February 2022 we had met the Challenge and about a month later when all the pledges were sent in, we had accumulated \$341,000 of our \$450,000 goal.

By December of 2022 we were still almost \$100,000 short of our fundraising goal. So, I went back to several of the larger donors and asked for one more round of challenge pledges and was able to form a final \$30,000 challenge that would be paid if we matched it with other contributions. This challenge started on December 11, 2022 and people responded quickly throughout December by donating over \$14,000. Contributions dropped off in the new year but slowly kept coming, a few hundred dollars to a couple of thousand each month with an uptick in August. At this point we had raised over \$28,000 toward the \$30,000 Challenge. At the end of September, as described elsewhere in this newsletter issue, we attended the Western Regional and finished off the match and a little extra to the tune of just under \$2,500. By the end of November 2023 all the pledges had been sent in, and with various other contributions that were received we had now raised another \$65,000, so we only needed about \$34,000 more to meet our original goal.

As of the writing of this article in mid-January 2024, we have received over half of that final \$34,000 we needed to raise and are now only \$15,200 short. The last payment was due at the end of December 2023 and that has been made. The conservancy will absorb the rest of the cost, although a few more contributions may come in to help with the shortfall during the next few weeks.

The board of the Western Cave Conservancy wishes to express our immense gratitude to each and every person who contributed to make the purchase of the Volcano Natural Preserve possible. We received approximately 650 separate donations from February 2020 until today and each one, large or small, was an important part of this successful acquisition. I would like to especially acknowledge a group of cavers who were so instrumental in providing substantial support, many during the critical start of our fundraising effort. These special people, who believe so strongly in the mission of the WCC include Bill and Peri Frantz, Jim and Claire Lakner, Ken Laidlaw, Jim Hildebrand and Joan Kusek, Mike Spiess and Pat Witt, Rich and Midori Sundquist, Paul and Kathy Greaves, John and Marilyn Tinsley, Daniel Veelik and Beatriz Farfan, Gail McCoy and Thomas Mathey, Marianne Russo and the late Jerald Johnson. Finally, a sincere thank you to the National Speleological Society who provided a \$5,000 grant to help with this purchase.

On The Importance of Membership

Marianne Russo, Stewardship Director

Dear Friends,

I just finished reading much of the current issue of the NSS News (Vol. 82, Issue 1). This issue was devoted to the cave conservancy movement. It includes an outstanding overview by editor Joel Despain, and articles on a variety of topics from several different conservancies, including the WCC. This issue gives an excellent overview of what cave conservancies and the NSS have done for protecting and preserving caves, and makes an interesting read.

Of course, as Joel points out, the vast amount of volunteer effort that thousands of cavers have provided over the years is a major factor in the success of this movement. However, it is important to remember

that none of these accomplishments would be happening without the financial and social support of the membership in the NSS and the individual conservancies. Raising money for a particular cave purchase or similar project that produces an immediately obvious benefit — like new caves to visit or better access — has rarely proven to be difficult. But, getting cavers to stay invested in these organizations with ongoing support has been a challenge.

The bigger a conservancy grows the greater the benefit to the caving community and to cave conservation. However, this also means that the need for ongoing financial support also increases. Long-term success is dependent on long-term support from the caving community. The best way to accomplish this support is through building membership. Even modest membership donations, like \$25 a year, can be a huge resource if they occur in large numbers.

In addition to contributing membership donations, members can also act as cheerleaders for the work of the conservancy and encourage other cavers to appreciate and support that work. The WCC has made a great start over the last 20 years, thanks to all of you. Please continue your support and give some thought to encouraging other cavers you know to join and get involved in preserving cave resources and caver access.

Have some great caving adventures in 2024!

The WCC Is Nothing Without Its Members

Steven Johnson, President

As we brought 2023 to a close, we were finally able to send off the final payment for the Volcano Natural Preserve, which means that the Conservancy owns it outright.

But really, though, I prefer to think of it as: “All cavers, present and future, have secured responsible access to these caves in perpetuity” – we do what we do not just for us, but for the kids and grandkids and future cavers who might otherwise lose access due to property development, sprawl, or other factors.

What enabled us to secure this property? You, the members! It’s your generous donations that enabled us to make this purchase for the benefit of everyone. Donations came in from across the country, big and small, and they all added up to a win for caving in California.

At the time of this writing, we don’t have any other property purchases on the imminent horizon, but the ongoing financial support of our members has ensured that we’re in a place to negotiate when the (rare) opportunity comes up. On behalf of future cavers, I thank you all for your generosity.

As always, we’d love to hear your thoughts on all things related to the conservation of caves, and how the WCC can help everyone succeed at this goal. Please feel free to share them with me at steven@westerncaves.org.

Cave softly!