

Mark Hodge, 63563RE, Virginia

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Hello, my name is Mark Hodge, and I'm running for the NSS BOG once again this year. I would greatly appreciate your vote.

I'm fairly new to caving, having started in 2011, but I live close to many caves and get underground three or four times a week. I love caving and most of my friends are cavers. I have formed numerous close bonds as a result of caving and can't emphasize enough how much caving means to me.

I am active in a number of caving organizations; I serve on the Virginia Cave Board, am the Chairman of the Virginia Area Region of the NSS, serve as an officer of the Butler Cave Conservation Society, am the Director for Highland County of the Virginia Speleological Survey, and am an active member of a number of other caving organizations.

My primary caving focus is project caving but I also love introducing non-cavers to caving. I took over 100 people into Butler and other caves this past year. I think taking people on tours is the best way to promote our sport to the population at large.

I spend a lot of time reaching out to local landowners and have helped map many local caves. Afterwards we provide the landowners with a copy of the map and pictures of their cave.

I believe the NSS preserve system is very important and I would work to purchase new caves so we can promote and protect them.

I served 30 years in the military, retiring at the rank of E-9 (Chief Master Sergeant). I served in that rank for 9 years, so I have a broad background of managerial and staff experience that I feel would be valuable as a member of the BOG.

I have done a lot of NCRC training and even helped instruct at two regional events. I think the NCRC is a very valuable resource of the NSS and I would do everything possible to ensure its continued viability. I believe anyone serious about caving should take at least one course. The instructors are first rate and the courses are wonderful learning opportunities.

I believe the biggest challenge we face is the continuing decline of our membership, although the recent slight uptick is encouraging. I believe the best solution is to reach out to non-caving organizations and individuals and give them tours of wild caves. I do this through Staunton Parks and Recreation, local scouting organizations, and local churches. I have also worked with local law enforcement to give them caving orientation.

If you have any questions for me you can contact me at markhodge@virginiacaves.org. I am also on a number of caving communities on Facebook.

Above is a picture of me having fun in Serpent Cave. On this day I was accompanying Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation staff members who were doing a biological survey of the cave.