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My descent into caving was rapid and identity-consuming. I'm relatively new to caving, so here's a little about me. I grew up in Washington State and attended college in Minnesota, studying geology. I have lived in South Dakota for the last several years, and the moment I moved to the Black Hills, I wanted to get involved with caving.

A serendipitous encounter put me in touch with the Paha Sapa Grotto, and within days of moving to SD, I met up with complete strangers and spent much of my summer digging rat midden out of a cave. During that time, I met individuals who took me under their wing and taught me everything I know about caving. I quickly became a project caver and

have participated in numerous exploration expeditions in Jewel Cave, Wind Cave, and Ft. Stanton Cave.

Eventually, someone told me I should join the NSS and my response was, "why?" As I have become more involved in my grotto and NSS affairs, this sentiment is one I hear echoed from many cavers. Since originally being told I should join the NSS, I became the New Members Chairperson for the grotto. In that time, our grotto has spearheaded the Jewel Cave 200th mile celebration, participated in the Wind Cave 150th mile celebration, organized a yearly dig project, had members create a new eight-cave nature preserve, and most recently, hosted a three-day event for the Spring 2020 BOG meeting.

As New Members Chairperson, I have watched our membership swell to well over 100 members and have witnessed many of our first-time cavers become "hooked" on caving. Our membership has an extreme sense of pride in our grotto's mission and are often willing to make personal sacrifices to accomplish our goals. Within the NSS, I'm on the Internal Organizations Committee and Website Steering Committee and am currently the Logistics Chair for the 2022 NSS Convention. Through all these efforts, that same question still comes up as I interact with newer and life-long cavers alike: "What is the benefit of the NSS to me?"

If someone were to ask me now why they should join the NSS, I could certainly list all the reasons people have joined the NSS in the past. Historically, the NSS has been the leading organization promoting the founding pillars of conservation, exploration, and scientific advancement. They have served as a resource and national voice for cavers and grottos alike. Sadly, these are not the qualities of the NSS today.

Our membership is declining, our average age is increasing, and there is a resistance to making changes that will advance us into the modern era. I firmly believe that the NSS is on a precipice. We can continue to carry on as usual, unwilling to address issues plaguing our organization that will eventually lead to our organization's end, or we can reorganize and face changes with a new and fresh perspective.

I want to bring the enthusiasm for caving the Paha Sapa Grotto has instilled with me to the Board of Governors. As a director, I will work to help present a clear answer to the public and

members alike. Our history and purpose are compelling, and something we should take pride in sharing. Our digital and online presence needs a fresh appearance so that we can stay connected with newer and younger members. However, we must be true to our past and find a way to help our long-term members share this rich history with newer members and renew the organization's commitment to be a leader in conservation, exploration, scientific endeavors, recreation, and restoration. Most importantly, the NSS needs to be a beacon of education and a source that anyone interested in caving can readily find. I want to bring my brand of ideas and enthusiasm to these efforts.

Communication is important to me, and as a director, I will be readily available to support the most essential part of our organization: the members. I might not always know the answers, but I will work endlessly for the members to find someone who does. I am always happy to talk caving so please feel free to reach out to me anytime at nicholastonn67@gmail.com or at 507-640-0073.