



# The Flashlight

## Summertime, and Busier Than Ever

Visitation is up! Last year's cave visitation was up 14 percent when compared to 2008, and the number of visitors coming to the park is still rising in 2010; the end of May showed a two percent year-to-date increase compared to the same period in 2009.

We have weathered a few storms, literally. Park crews are still cleaning up from the January 2009 ice storm, and now, on May 1-2, nearly 10 inches of rain caused flooding and wash outs all over the park. A full assessment of flood damage shows repairs will cost approximately \$500,000; we are in the process of requesting emergency funds from the NPS Southeast Regional Office. Critical needs include: cave trail repair in River Styx; Houchin Ferry campground rehabilitation; replacement of trail surface and water

bars along the Cedar Sink trail; repairs to the mussel-rearing facility; replacement of cables on both ferries; repair to the surface trail outside Violet City; replacement of benches inside River Hall; and repair of the wash outs on Ugly Creek Road.

By late August, cave tour operations will shift from the old side of the visitor center to the new. Office personnel within the old building will move into temporary trailers that will be placed east of the visitor center. Phase II, under the direction of Perry Bartsch, Jr. Construction

Company (Asheville, N.C.), will begin the process of gutting the building to make way for exhibits, offices, and book sales space.

In the fall, the park and the Friends of Mammoth Cave NP will host a public open house to formally celebrate the completion of Phase I – we hope you will be able to join us.

Sincerely,

Patrick H. Reed  
*Superintendent*



▲ Above: A busy day in the Visitor Center; flood damage on Ugly Creek Road; River Hall water gauge reading 49.38'; and the new Visitor Center.

# Mammoth Cave Hotel Improvements

## Summary of Public Comment on the Environmental Assessment

Following a public meeting, media coverage, web postings, and invitations to 68 recent Hotel guests, the park received 30 public comments regarding the scope of the Mammoth Cave Hotel environmental assessment (EA).

### Summary of public comment:

- ▶ On average, commenters ranked lodging and room amenities as the most valued hotel service. The second and third were food and beverage services and upgraded utilities (including heating/cooling system), respectively.
- ▶ *Question: When you travel, what amenities do you look for in a hotel?* The most common response was a clean and comfortable room, followed by a polite, helpful and personable staff.
- ▶ *Question: What type of lodging do you prefer?* A majority of the commenters expressed a desire for cabins, a facility with



Many commenters suggested updating the hotel façade to match that of the new Visitor Center.

an overall rustic style, or rustic cabins. Economy rooms and suites were also noted as highly desirable.

- ▶ *Question: What type of food service is important to you?* The most important aspect of this to commenters was affordability of the choices. Commenters also expressed a desire for good service, healthier options, convenience, room service, and a more upscale experience.

- ▶ *Question: What would encourage visitors to stay multiple nights?* Quality customer service and a swimming pool were the most common responses. Opportunities for saving with package deals or other similar promotions were suggested almost as often.
- ▶ *Question: What else should the planning team consider?* The most common responses were the need for an updated façade to match the visitor center; updated landscaping to improve the general atmosphere to be appropriate for a hotel in a national park; and updated linens, furniture, and carpets in the rooms themselves. Handicapped accessibility to all areas of the hotel was also a frequently expressed concern.



Respondents offered numerous suggestions about their preferences in a dining experience.

The planning team is drafting the EA, which will be released for public comment this winter.

# Bats In Peril

## White-Nose Syndrome and Bats

Since 2006, white-nose syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease, has killed more than one million cave-dwelling bats in North America; in some affected sites, 90 percent of bats have died. Nine of 25 known species of hibernating bats are known to be affected by WNS.

Though there are confirmed cases of WNS in adjacent states, WNS has not been found in Mammoth Cave or any cave or mine or bat within Kentucky as yet. The closest instance is in Dunbar Cave, near Clarksville, Tenn., about 80 miles from the park.

It is not fully understood how WNS is transmitted. First discovered in Howe's Cave, New York, it has since spread to other caves and mines roughly along bat migratory routes. There is strong evidence that it spreads primarily by bat-to-bat and cave-to-bat contact. Evidence also suggests that potential exists for humans traveling between caves to inadvertently contribute to the spread of the fungus.

Park staff have been watchful for the disease; in 2009 and 2010, bats showing symptoms were found in the park and tested for WNS, but the results were negative. The park is drafting a response plan that will address how to manage visitor activities, maintenance actions and research projects as they relate to human movement in and out of the cave.

Park managers have already implemented strategies to minimize the risk of spreading WNS to Mammoth Cave, and, assuming its arrival is imminent, also the risk of spreading WNS from Mammoth Cave. Since June 2009, a visitor screening and shoe decontamination process has been in effect. Beginning in May 2010, the park now provides equipment and coveralls for all of its crawling cave tours. Researchers must conform to stringent decontamination procedures, established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Peter Youngbaer

Bats are primary predators of beetles, moths, leaf-hoppers and other insects that cost farmers and foresters billions of dollars every year. Additionally, bats play a key role in providing nutrients (primarily droppings called guano) that are used by other cave-dwelling organisms that depend on these nutrients to survive.



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# Planning for Trails and Rivers

## Comprehensive Trail Management Plan Update

The Comprehensive Trail Plan (2008) is as an overall framework for managing the surface front- and backcountry trails within Mammoth Cave National Park over the next 10-15 years. The park and its trail partners are making progress on four key issues:

- ▶ **Trail crew** – the park will use \$90,000 from fees to hire a trail crew later this year to address trail maintenance and repair.
- ▶ **Trail projects** – the park has secured funding for two major trail projects this year – \$420,000 for the Big Hollow Trail, parking lot and restroom; and \$382,300 for expansion of the Maple Springs trailhead parking area and extension of Raymer Hollow Trail, which will serve as a connector trail between the facilities within the Maple Springs complex.
- ▶ **Volunteers** – a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Kentucky Mountain Bike Association (KMBA) and the Bowling Green League of Bicyclists (BGLOB) – the park is in the final stages of preparing an MOU with KMBA and BGLOB to construct backcountry campsites along the Big Hollow Trail; and to provide for its long-term maintenance (labor and supplies).
- ▶ **Special regulation** – The proposed special regulation that would allow bicycles on designated park trails is under review in Washington, DC. In the next months, it will be printed in the Federal Register as a proposed rule and available for public comment. Watch for the announcement at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

## Green River Crossing Environmental Assessment

*“The purpose of this project is to provide a safe and reliable connection for travelers across the Green River in Mammoth Cave National Park in an environmentally sensitive and fiscally responsible manner.”*

– Green River Crossing Concepts, April 2009

Work continues on the biological assessment (BA), a requirement for the Environmental Assessment, for the Green River Crossing planning. The park’s contractor, VHB/ Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., is incorporating data from the river studies and information provided by other agencies into the BA.

In the fall, the park will schedule a public meeting and open a public comment period to coincide with the release of the park’s preferred alternative and draft EA. Park managers regret that the delay; more time was needed to comprehensively evaluate each of the alternatives.



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*The Flashlight* is the official newsletter of Mammoth Cave National Park, and is produced by the Office of the Superintendent. For more information about this edition, or about the park:

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## American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Phase II of the visitor center, repair of storm damage from the January 2009 ice storm, and rehabilitation of Cedar Sink trail were the initial ARRA projects for the park. In the coming year, the park will also receive ARRA funding to replace outdated fixtures with energy efficient ones.

