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Greetings,

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Mark Bishop, I am the owner, manager, caretaker of Niagara Cave near Harmony Minnesota. I purchased the cave and business in April of 1995. I will turn 62 years of age later this summer and am looking toward retirement within the next couple of years. My plan is to sell the cave and business after over 25 years of successful operation.

Several years ago, I met with and spoke to then State Parks Director Courtland Nelson about having the State of Minnesota purchase the cave and business at some point in the future. He visited the cave and we had a few discussions on the prospect. At the time I wasn't quite ready for retirement so I didn't pursue the sale. I have now reached that point in my life and would be interested in reopening the discussion with you to see if have any interest in acquiring, preserving, and incorporating Niagara Cave into the state park system.

If you have never experienced Niagara Cave, I invite to first thoroughly read our website, do some internet research, then of course, come for a visit. You will find that Niagara Cave is a very special natural resource.

Niagara Cave has been chosen by several news outlets and outdoor ratings sites as one of the best show caves in the United States. Niagara Cave received the second most votes by readers of USA Today for Best Cave in the USA after Kartchner Caverns in Arizona. In 2018, USA Today also determined Niagara Cave to be the Bucket List destination for the State of Minnesota.

Niagara cave is currently being considered by the National Park Service for the status of Natural National Landmark. Even more significantly than all of the above accolades, Niagara Cave was recently visited by a research team from the United Nations for evaluation and consideration for the prestigious designation of becoming a World Heritage Site. If Niagara Cave were to receive this designation it would be the first in the Upper Midwest.

Both of these designations, as I'm assure you are aware, take a great deal of time to come to fruition. One or both may become a reality at some point. Just being considered, I feel, is a great honor.

Most of my adult life has been dedicated to the preservation and conservation of this precious resource. We use it as a tool to educate the public on a variety of conservation themes, providing paleontological interpretation with our most impressive display of 450 million year old Ordovician Period fossils embedded in the walls throughout the cave, explain speleothem formation, and last but not least, visitors get to witness one of Minnesota's most impressive waterfalls and one of the nation's most impressive subterranean waterfalls.

It is my hope that the State of Minnesota feels that this resource is worthy of protection. The cave will be offered for sale soon. My concern is that if an individual or other entity wants to use Niagara Cave as purely a source of income, negligence or irrecoverable damage could be incurred.

I am aware that Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park is currently under a state of transition. In my earlier meetings with Courtland Nelson the possibility of incorporating the management staff from Forest/Mystery Cave to oversee the operations were discussed. Since we are only about 20 miles apart with similar operations it could be a practical application.

By the fall of 2020 Niagara Cave will become the terminus to the State Bike Trail extension that has been approved and funded. The surveys and land acquisitions are currently taking place with engineering occurring this summer and with construction slated to begin in the spring of 2020. State ownership of Niagara Cave would provide an opportunity for the development of a State Trailhead on the cave property. It would be a logical assumption that the new trail will also attract more visitors to the cave.

Niagara Cave would be a self-sustaining entity for the Park System. We currently welcome between 28,000 and over 30,000 visitors each summer season. The revenue would more than pay for necessary staffing and maintenance.

There are many aspects to Niagara Cave that makes it a special place that, we feel, deserves protecting. Our family has had many long discussions on what should happen upon my retirement. It is unanimous consensus that we feel that the Minnesota State Park System would be the ideal caretaker to preserve and protect this amazing natural resource.

Unfortunately, I am not in a financial position to donate the property. I have spent a great deal of the income investing in improvements within the cave and on the cave property. In addition to the business, this property also contains our home. I recently met with a business broker to help determine a value for the property and business. After briefly looking over the books, discussing previous investments and looking over the grounds he felt that \$3.75 million would be a reasonable starting point. Then I took him through the cave. After returning to the surface his response was, "How can you put a price tag on that!?"

I am writing this letter to open a discussion on the future of Niagara Cave. This letter is being sent to Director Erika Rivers and Deputy Director Phil Leversedge for your review. Please contact me with any questions or feelings regarding this opportunity.

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,

Mark S Bishop

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