

# **Welcome to the 2003 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium**

The theme of this year's symposium is "Protecting the Aquifer in Karst Regions." Florida contains the largest concentration of springs in the world with 33 first magnitude springs and over 600 lesser magnitude springs throughout the state. The springs and their cave systems are home to over 40 species of cave-adapted life and are crucial wintering habitats for the endangered Florida manatee. As windows into Florida's karst aquifer, the springs provide an important gauge of the health of our water supply.

Only thinly protected by the overlying soils and sediments, Florida's aquifer is particularly susceptible to the effects of the exploding population of the state. We face many threats and challenges to our water supply: point and non-point pollution, increased nitrate levels from fertilizer, spreading of exotic plant species, and depletion of the aquifer due to increased usage by an exploding population.

In the past few years, we have seen a drought unequaled in recent history. Wells and public water systems have run dry. Water restrictions are fast becoming a way of life. Many of our favorite springs have stopped flowing altogether. This brings our water resources to the forefront of public consciousness and the realization that they are finite and they are in trouble.

The 2003 Cave and Karst Management Symposium will bring special focus on the problems and solutions of managing the aquifer within karst areas. We look forward to this opportunity to share information aimed not only at the management of karst aquifers, but to the many areas of the world's cave and karst.

Michael Poucher  
Chairman

