

# American Cave Conservation Association

By Mary Jo Harrod  
Division of Compliance Assistance

In 2006, the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA) joined forces with KY EXCEL, Kentucky's environmental leadership program, to host university students willing to dedicate their free time to work on conservation projects in south-central Kentucky. In a partnership with the county solid waste coordinators, ACCA identifies cleanup sites and facilitates the removal of unsightly and dangerous debris and recyclables that threaten the karst habitat and regional drinking water.

"Each Alternative Spring Break (ASB) team brings an average of 12 members to work for a week," says Peggy A. Nims, ACCA education director and volunteer coordinator. "Usually, they work six hours a day for five days. At the federal volunteer hourly rate of \$22.50, this equates to over \$8,000 in in-kind donations. Intangible benefits include a cleaner environment, which is more attractive for possible investment and healthier for residents," said Nims.

City and county agencies supply equipment and dumpsters, while ACCA provides staff to facilitate the projects, supervise the teams and share cave ecology expertise.

Though the area's weather can often limit outside work, a big challenge is identifying viable projects to challenge the students and offer them a rewarding, meaningful experience.

Coordinating team schedules with community agencies and professionals is vital to the success of the project. Good communication and flexibility are also fundamental in meeting everyone's needs.

"Together, ASB teams removed 6,500 pounds of household trash, discarded carpets, furniture, glass, cans, old tires and 3,500 pounds of recyclables from illegal roadside dumps and sinkholes," says Nims. "Also, they spent many hours implement-



ing erosion control measures and several other activities to benefit the community."

Other projects include restoration of habitat, protection of karst ecosystems and water resources in the Upper Green River Watershed and promotion of cave conservation issues. Most of the students have never been to Kentucky or inside a cave and are exposed to different cultural and social issues. They also learn about cave systems, develop leadership skills and team-building, identify community partners who share mutual goals and inspire others to become good stewards.

"The focus of ACCA projects is always stewardship of the land on which we live and the caves beneath our feet," says Nims. "KY EXCEL motivates and challenges us to be good stewards of Kentucky's natural resources and care about the environment."

## KY EXCEL New Members

CDP Engineers Inc.—Fayette County  
City of Hurstbourne Acres—Jefferson County  
C.R. and Karen's Household—Anderson County  
GleanKY—Fayette County  
Goodmann Household—Franklin County  
Kentucky Beef Network—Fayette County

KY EXCEL is Kentucky's voluntary environmental leadership program. Setting a positive example, the program's members have committed to a variety of projects that go beyond the environmental regulations to improve and protect Kentucky's environment.

Be an environmental leader and join KY EXCEL!  
Call 1-800-926-8111 for more information or visit <http://dca.ky.gov/kyexcel/>.



**TOP:** Students take a moment from work to pause in a cave.  
**ABOVE:** Students pose in a group as they work outside.  
Photos courtesy of ACCA.