



1 October 2024

To: Land Sachsen-Anhalt
Staatskanzlei
Ministerpräsident Dr. Reiner Haseloff
Hegelstraße 40 – 42, 39104 Magdeburg

Re: Resolution for the protection of the karst landscape in the southern Harz

Dear Minister,

On 10 March 2021, I sent a letter to Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz with the following paragraphs on behalf of the International Union of Speleology (UIS), when I was its president to express great concern about the Lower Saxony Regional Plan to expand quarrying of gypsum. I have now learned that exploratory drilling for possible gypsum quarrying is proposed for the southern Harz and my concern continues, as I fully support the resolution of the Verband der deutschen Höhlen- und Karstforscher e.V. The UIS is composed of 57 member countries. It is a member of the International Council of Scientific Unions, and is the largest international organization for speleology, which encompasses cave and karst science, management, and exploration. Also in 2021, I was the Executive Director of the US National Cave and Karst Research Institute, which has no direct involvement in Germany but was concerned about the proposed quarrying as a major institution knowledgeable about the importance of karst. I have since retired from that position.

“Gypsum is an important and valuable commodity worldwide. Throughout history, quarries were the only practical and cost-effective way of obtaining gypsum for its many purposes. However, the situation is now different. Synthetic gypsum is now available easily and cheaply. For example, phosphogypsum is an abundant waste product used by many countries for construction, road building, fertilizer, and landfills.

The UIS strongly encourages you to use inexpensive phosphogypsum and other synthetic gypsum wherever possible and reduce and eliminate gypsum quarrying. Gypsum forms cavernous landscapes known as karst. Excellent examples of gypsum karst are rare in temperate climates, which is why part of Germany’s gypsum karst is recognized by UNESCO as a Global Geopark and the world’s only gypsum karst Biosphere Reserve. The economic value of gypsum karst extends far into the future and is thus much greater than the short-term economic gains from quarrying. Tourism in the Geopark and Biosphere reserve are sustainable and perpetual sources of income for the region, as are the many scientific benefits and knowledge gained from the gypsum karst such as on Germany’s rich cultural heritage, prevention of sinkhole collapses, increased understanding of past climates to better manage climate change today, and the unique microbial ecosystems with potential to create new medicines and industrial products. Preserving the gypsum karst also provides many benefits to the human environment of the region.

Thank you for considering this letter. We urge you to reduce and, if possible, eliminate gypsum quarrying, and to contact us if you need additional information.”

Sincerely,

George Veni, Ph.D.

Past-President, 2017-2022

Union Internationale de Spéléologie