VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD
Grottoes, Virginia
Saturday, December 5 2015

D R A F T M I N U T E S

TIME AND PLACE
The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board was convened at 11:02 a.m. in the Grottoes Town Hall, Grottoes, Virginia.

MEMBERS PRESENT
David Ek, Chairman
Dr. Daniel Doctor
Dr. John Haynes
Meredith Weberg
Robert Denton, Jr.
John Graves
Marian McConnell, Recording Secretary

MEMBERS ABSENT
Steve Lindeman, Vice Chairman
Janet Tinkham

STAFF PRESENT
Tom Smith, Division Director, Natural Heritage
Rochelle Altholz, Deputy Director of Administration
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT
Scott Davis, Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society (VAR)
Craig Hindman, Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society (VAR)

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM
With seven (7) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS
Chairman Weberg opened the meeting and welcomed Board members and staff. The following announcements were made:

- The 2008 CCV Grant has closed. The grant was for a total of $5,000. $4,000 was for the *Virginia Cave Owner's Newsletter* and $1,000 was for protection signed. A report was submitted addressing CCV concerns. A new grant request netted $1,200 for the newsletter.
- The following Board members were reappointed.
    - Daniel H. Doctor, PhD, of Reston, Research Geologist, US Geological Survey
    - John H.H. Graves of Luray, President, Luray Caverns Corporation
    - Meredith Weberg of Woodbridge, Caver
- The Board requests additional clarification regarding Board communications regarding Board business under the Freedom of Information Act.
- Mr. Orndorff noted that the Nature Conservancy will hold a Karst meeting at Natural Tunnel on April 1-3, 2016.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Weberg nominated, and Dr. Doctor seconded, Mr. Ek to serve as Chairman. There were no other nominations and Mr. Ek was elected unanimously.

Ms. Weberg nominated, and Dr. Doctor seconded, Mr. Lindeman to serve as Vice Chairman. There were no other nominations and Mr. Lindeman was elected unanimously.

Ms. Weberg nominated, and Dr. Doctor seconded, Ms. McConnell to serve as Recording Secretary. There were no other nominations and Ms. McConnell was elected unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the June 16, 2015 and September 1, 2015 meetings of the Virginia Cave Board were approved with no changes.

TREASURER'S REPORT

There were no Board expenses in the last quarter. The account balance is $1,873.00.

NATURAL HERITAGE DIVISION DIRECTOR REPORT AND KARST PROGRAM UPDATE

- On behalf of Secretary Ward and Director Cristman, Mr. Smith congratulated Dr. Doctor, Mr. Graves, and Ms. Weberg on their reappointments to the Board.
- Rob Evans, Botanist, has been hired in the Land Conservancy role within DCR, replacing Larry Smith.
- DCR Deputy Director of Operations Joe Elton has announced his retirement. Effective December 10, 2015, Tom Smith will serve as Acting Deputy Director of Operations. A search for a permanent Deputy Director of Operations will be initiated.
- Jason Bullock will serve as Acting Director of the Division of Natural Heritage.
- Natural Heritage has trained 100 volunteer naturalists to log data by phone into the database in order to identify specimen locations in the field.
- Natural Heritage projects include regional species distribution models to find where species may actually occur.
- The Virginia Tobacco Commission provided funding to populate the database with species found in tobacco regions.
- DCR received $221,700 from the Land Conservancy grant for The Cedars Natural Area Preserve.
- DCR is creating a karst specialist position.

Mr. Orndorff provided the following report:

DCR karst staff prepared two successful grant requests to the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias. One was awarded directly to DCR to cover the cost of species determinations for about 3 dozen collections of cave adapted isopods from Virginia caves. The second was awarded to the West Virginia Cave

Conservancy to partially cover the cost of installation of three cave gates (Haynes (WV), Beans (VA, Frederick County, designated significant cave), and Peery Saltpetre (VA, Botetourt County, designated significant cave), as well as repair of vandalized gate on Bacon Cave (Lee County, VA.) Haynes Cave gate is schedule for December 9-11, and Beans Cave from December 13-16. Volunteers are welcome for both of these projects.

Biological inventory of Canoe Cave, a state designated significant cave located beneath the center line of the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline, was performed on November 29 and 30, 2015. Taxa collected were two or more genera of millipedes (*Pseudotremia, Zygonopus*), two genera of amphipod (*Stygobromus, Gammarus (from spring)),* and one genus of aquatic isopod (*Caecidotea sp.).* Aquatic isopods had not previously been documented from the cave. Bait stations were left in three locations in the cave, but no cave adapted invertebrate taxa were present on November 30. Traps were left in place to be checked in mid-December.

As far as bats go, two tricolored bats were observed roosting in the cave. However, the fall of 2015 has been exceptionally mild, and hibernating bat species are probably not yet in torpor. The cave owner shared correspondence received by his mother from Dr. Gay Nussbaum of Radford University regarding investigation of the cave for use by hibernating bats performed on 7 February, 1982. Investigators from Radford University estimated approximately 350 bats in the cave at that time. Not all areas were counted, however in the areas counted there were 112 little brown bats, 150 tricolored bats (formerly Eastern pipistrelles) and 1 northern bat (formerly Keen's myotis.) The northern bat was listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act in spring of 2015. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will be informed of this record, but it is uncertain what weight, if any, will be given to a 33 year-old record of a single bat. All three of these species have been decimated by White Nose Syndrome in Virginia. Nonetheless, the cave will be visited during deep torpor to assess current use as a bat hibernacula.

The extent of portions of the cave is not well depicted on the 1943 map, and plans for a new survey are in the works. Roots and insects in the cave, as well as portions of the 1943 map, suggest that the cave comes very close to the surface directly beneath the pipeline route. Plans are in the works to perform a modern survey of the cave. The 1943 map indicates ~ 1000 feet of passage. Water from the cave, which includes three deep lakes at the northeast end of the cave, appears to resurge at a large spring at the bottom of the draw below the cave. Water in the cave is most likely derived from springs that emerge from talus slopes along the northwest slope of Sinking Creek Mountain, upslope from the upper boundary of the limestone outcrop belt. These springs are used as water supplies for several houses and a farm in the area. Landowner has expressed concern about potential impact to these springs from construction and operation of the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

Inventory of karst features in the Cedars NAP is nearing completion. Approximately 200 karst features that are significant at the scale of the preserve, including numerous small caves, intermittent springs, karst windows, and blind pits have been documented. A final report will be prepared outlining survey

and biological inventory needs, and funds will be sought to perform a high resolution LIDAR survey of this unusual and highly biodiverse area.

Hibernacula surveys for tricolored bats at ~ 25 reference caves will be performed in January and February, 2016 as part of a long-term population monitoring project.

FOIA REVIEW

Ms. Altholz provided a review of the Freedom of Information Act and how it applies to members of collegial bodies.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owner's Newsletter

- Meredith Weberg will continue as editor of the newsletter.
- Staff and Board members should submit articles pertaining to education on caves by December 15, 2015.
- Articles of interest to cave owners and photos should also be submitted.

Virginia Cave Week

- Virginia Cave Week is April 17-23, 2016
- Janet Tinkham will head the planning committee.
- Michelle Baird, John Graves, Marian McConnell and Meredith Weberg will work with the committee.
- Members should submit theme suggestions.
- The website should be updated. Member suggestions are encouraged.
- The notice to cavers will be sent in January 2016
- Butler Cave Society has expressed interest in sponsoring cave tours.
- There was a suggestion to focus on sinkholes and not using them for trash deposits. Lidar in Page County could be used to show how sinkholes are identified.
- The DCR Public Communications Office (PCO) should be involved in promotion and outreach.

Proposed By-Laws for the Board

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

Virginia Karst Map

- Dr. Doctor asked that the map be posted on the DCR website.
- There should be a basic map for public use and a more complex map for technical professional use.
- DCR has the ESRI licenses to include the map on the website.

Communications Protocols and Processes and VCB/DCR Roles and Procedures

- Outside of official meetings, Cave Board business should be channeled through the DCR Board Liaison for distribution to members.
- Members are reminded that they serve at the pleasure of the Governor.
- Meeting agendas should be distributed to the Board at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
- Board members should take care to communicate via proper channels.
- All public meetings of the Cave Board or subcommittees should be noticed through the DCR Board Liaison.

Natural Gas Pipeline Comment Protocols

- When the draft DIS document regarding the pipeline is released, the Cave Board is invited to make comment through the Department of Environmental Quality as established in the state protocol.
- There will be a two-week period for comments.
- Minor route adjustments are still being made for the pipeline to project species of animals and plants.
- Dan Doctor and David Ek will take the lead regarding comments from the Board.
- The Cave Board should consider another document addressing the pipeline routing changes and affects on karst or other conservation sites.

NEW BUSINESS

Cave Trail Brochure

Ms. Weberg advised that the work on the Cave Trail Brochure continues.

Environment Virginia and Appalachian Karst Symposium 3

- Possible topics were discussed. Mr. Orndorff reviewed the previous year's topics.
- Ms. Weberg will organize a workshop for the symposium with the assistance of Mr. Ek.
- Sinkholes were suggested as a topic since the matter will be discussed during Cave Week.
- Dr. Doctor suggested collaboration with the Appalachian Karst Symposium and Sink Hole conference being held in April 2016.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Ek suggested searching for and pursuing a grant that would assist with a study of the economic impact that cave and karst landscapes have on a community. Mr. Smith noted that DCR has a volunteer service conducting an economic impact study of natural area preserves. He further suggested that this group could be asked to consider doing the same for cave and karst. The Board supported the concept and Dr. Ek will report back to the Board with findings.

Ms. Weberg asked about the cost of signs for the Cave and Karst Trails and how they might be developed through the state. Mr. Smith will explore and report back to the Board. Mr. Smith advised

that there are challenges with roadside signage and that it would be easier to erect signs directly on private property.

The Board asked that the minutes of meetings be provided in a timely manner following meetings. Minutes will be provided by DCR within the required FOIA timeframe for public posting (ten working days).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Craig Hindman suggested that the Board may be too narrowly focused regarding FOIA guidelines and rules.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Virginia Cave Board will be Saturday, February 20, 2016. The location is to be determined.

Respectfully submitted,