

**Virginia Cave Board
Work Session and Board Meeting
April 11, 2015
Luray Caverns
Luray, Virginia**

FINAL

Virginia Cave Board Members Present

Dr. Daniel Doctor
Mr. Robert Denton, Jr.
Mr. David Ek
Mr. John Graves
Mr. Rick Lambert
Mr. Steve Lindeman, Vice Chairman
Ms. Marian McConnell
Ms. Janet Tinkham
Ms. Meredith Weberg, Chairman

Virginia Cave Board Members Not Present

Ms. Michele Baird
Dr. John Haynes
Mr. Roger Kirchen, Department of Historic Resources, ex officio member

Department of Conservation and Recreation Staff Present

Mr. Wil Orndorff
Mr. Michael Fletcher

Others Present

Mr. Bob Bisham, Dominion
Tony Canike, Virginia Cave Conservation Society
Nathan Farrar, Virginia Cave Conservation Society

Work Session

Ms. Weberg called the work session to order.

Mr. Ek reported that the workshop at the Environment Virginia Conference went well and was well attended. Approximately 60-70 people participated. The workshop helped to get the word out concerning cave and karst issues. Mr. Orndorff gave an overview of the stormwater management regulations and their transfer to the Department of Environmental Quality.

Ms. Tinkham gave an update regarding Cave Week, scheduled for April 19-25. The theme for the week is Bat Conservation. The kickoff event will be held at Front Royal Grotto and will be co-sponsored by the Save Lucy Campaign. Butler Cave Conservation Society will host a trash cleanup at a karst site. The New River Cavers will offer a guided tour of New River Cave.

Mr. Lindeman said that he would distribute a copy of an article concerning Cave Week that appeared in the *Bristol Herald-Courier*.

Mr. Orndorff said that he was developing a portfolio of events and hoped that next year would result in better geographic coverage. The intent is that each Virginia citizen be within one hour of a Cave Week event.

Ms. Weberg said that the Cave Board web presence was expanding. She thanked members for adding to the Facebook page.

Mr. Graves said that the Department of Defense had been at the Caverns earlier in the week to test their canine surveillance program. Cameras are attached to the dog and the dog goes into tunnels or caves instead of a human. The program worked well in the caverns.

Regarding the Dominion Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline, Mr. Doctor led a discussion regarding letters of comment to be sent to FERC on behalf of the cave board.

Deadlines for submitting the letters were announced as April 29 for the Dominion Atlantic Coast Pipeline and April 17 for the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

The letters were edited for presentation and approval of the Board. The committee discussed requesting quarterly reports and offering for the Cave Board to be a cooperating entity.

Mr. Orndorff said that DCR would likely be a cooperating agency and that the Cave Board could be a part of that.

The committee worked through the text and recommendations for the two letters.

Virginia Cave Board Meeting

Chairman Weberg called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. She thanked everyone for coming and asked for introductions.

Chairman Weberg thanked Mr. Graves for hosting the meeting. She expressed thanks to the Pipeline Letter Committee, the Virginia Cave Week Committee and the Karst Workshop Committee. Thank you to John Graves for hosting the meeting.

Approval of Minutes from the November 22, 2014 Virginia Cave Board Meeting

MOTION: Dr. Doctor moved that the minutes of the November 22, 2014 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as amended.

SECOND: Mr. Denton

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

DCR Karst Program Update

Mr. Orndorff gave the following report:

Staff

Ellen Koertge Crowder completed her term as the “karst intern” at Natural Heritage, and has not been replaced to date. Multiple staffing options are under consideration to address the staffing needs created by her departure.

Bat hibernacula counts

Hibernacula counts for 2015 were completed in early March. A detailed compilation table is not available. Overall, there was no evidence for recovery among little brown or tricolored bats, whose numbers range generally range from 1% to 5% of their pre-WNS populations. Two notable exceptions for little brown bats are Peery Saltpetre Cave in Botetourt County (up 10% from 2014 to over 200 individuals this year) and the Cudjo’s Cave section of Gap Cave in Lee County, where a few hundred individuals persist. However, Gap Cave was only confirmed + for WNS in 2013, so the decline may not be complete. Indiana bat numbers are within the same ball park as the 2013 counts. More detailed analysis will be necessary to determine if there is a trend. Virginia big-eared bats continue to appear unaffected by WNS. We were unable to perform hibernacula counts at Higgenbotham Cave in Tazewell County due to hazardous conditions (excessive ice buildup over pit and block of ice encasing gate and lock.)

Environment Virginia Workshop

Staff collaborated with Cave Board member David Ek to coordinate the “Building on karst” workshop held in conjunction with the Environment Virginia Symposium at VMI on March 31, 2015. Nearly 50 participants were registered, with additional folks in the back of the room. In addition to David Ek and DCR Karst Protection coordinator Wil Orndorff, Virginia Cave Board member Bob Denton presented on standards for site assessments in karst. David Ek has supplied further detail to the Board via electronic communications.

Cedars Conservation Planning Retreat

Staff participated in a Nature Conservancy hosted retreat for conservation planning in regards to the Cedars area of Central Lee County, one of the state’s 7 designated significant karst areas.

Cave Week

DCR staff will host guided tours of New River Cave in honor of Virginia Cave Week, on April 22 (Under the Earth Day) and April 23.

Treasurer's Report

As Mr. Smith was not in attendance, Ms. Weberg reviewed the information from the previous meeting.

Mr. Larry Smith said that the account balance was approximately \$463. With anticipated grant monies the balance should raise to about \$2,000, which would cover two more newsletters.

Land Conservation Update

Mr. Lindeman gave the land conservation update. He said that he had previously discussed the conservation planning efforts for The Cedars. He said a comprehensive group and a large contingent from DCR. Mr. Tom Smith was in attendance as well representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS, and the Daniel Boone Soil and Water Conservation District.

The area includes a biologically significant cave and globally rare plants. In addition the Powell River includes federally endangered freshwater fish and mussels.

The group will continue to meet on a semi-annual basis. They will try to engage other partners such as the Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail Association, the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park and the DCR Division of State Parks.

Mr. Lindeman noted that there is a new land steward at DCR for Southwest Virginia. He will work to put together a conservation plan for the Cedars Natural Area Preserve.

Board Appointments and Vacancies

Chairman Weberg noted that terms for four members expire at the end of June, 2015. All four have resubmitted their information but none have yet been contacted regarding reappointment. DCR staff did not have additional information at this time.

Old Business

Virginia Cave Owners Newsletter

The Virginia Cave Owners newsletter has been mailed or will be soon. It has been sent by email. The newsletter fulfilled the obligation to mention the Cave Conservancy of Virginia. Two grants were recently received to allow publication to continue.

Environment Virginia Karst Workshop

The Environment Virginia Karst Workshop was well attended and well received. There were a variety of participants with about a 50/50 split between local government and the consulting industry.

There had been previous discussion among the Cave Board regarding expanding a library to make presentations available via the Internet and posted on the Cave Board website. The specific interest seems to be for the Cave Board to expanding the reference materials specific to karst.

Mr. Orndorff said that Mr. Ek's efforts were instrumental in the success of the workshop.

Mr. Denton said that it would be helpful to compile a list of mailing addresses for county engineering staff. He said it would be helpful to inform them of the minimum standards.

Mr. Ek said that a mailing list of approximately 180 individuals had been developed in preparation for the workshop. He suggested that the list be maintained on an ongoing basis for karst related entities.

Virginia Cave Week

Ms. Tinkham said that Virginia Cave week is April 19-25. The theme for the week is Bat Conservation.

There will be a kickoff event at the Front Royal Grotto. The Save Lucy Campaign will participate.

Mr. Canike said that the Virginia Cave Conservation Society would like to be supportive of Cave Week.

Ms. Tinkham said that two projects are already in development for Virginia Cave Week in 2016.

Mr. Orndorff said that the New River Cave Club expected to have some 40-45 people over the course of three events.

Mr. Lindeman said that he had been considering how to connect people to the karst features in the Cedars in Lee County. He said that it would be helpful to have the location on the Cave and Karst Trail Map.

Mr. Orndorff said that former Cave Board member Roy Powers had passed away a few weeks prior. A memorial will be held on April 18 at Big Stone Gap.

Website and Web Presence

Ms. Weberg said that the website was looking good. She said that there had been some traffic and interest to the Facebook page.

The FAQs will soon be posted on the website. The website will contain links to press releases and a library of resources.

Mr. Lindeman asked if there was a place to query on the website.

Mr. Orndorff said that requests for information would come back to DCR.

Ms. Weberg asked that Board members routinely view the website and suggest updates. She also asked that DCR provide tracking information for the website.

Review and approval of letters to FERC

Dr. Doctor reviewed the proposed letters to FERC regarding the proposed Mountain Valley and Dominion Atlantic Coast Pipelines.

The draft letter includes concerns regarding specific cave and karst features known to DCR and as part of the Highland County Cave Survey. Those details were included in the draft letters. The letters also contain general recommendations regarding the routing of pipelines through karst terrains.

The letters will be posted on the website and sent to relevant companies.

Ms. Weberg thanked the committee and asked for comments.

Mr. Bisha from Dominion Power thanked the Board for the opportunity to comment. He noted that he had not yet seen the letter and had been unable to attend the Environment Virginia Conference. He said that there continues to be a misunderstanding of the facts. He said that hopefully some of that misunderstanding would be cleared up by the letters.

Mr. Bisha said that Dominion would very much like to stay in coordination with the Cave Board. He said that a lot of adjustments to the plans will be made as details are worked out. He said that he looked forward to reading the letters and the associated FAQs.

Dr. Doctor asked what specific things were being misunderstood.

Mr. Bisha said that there had been open houses in several of the counties. He said that there was a concern that the flow of groundwater would be changed or that there would be contamination. He said there were fears that karst is unsafe or that the pipeline might rupture due to some fault in the rock. He said none of those concerns were surprising, but that residents were afraid.

Mr. Bisha said that Dominion was reaching out to tell residents how the pipeline was being approached. Geotechnical experts have been retained. VDOT standards must be met for safety. He said that Dominion was looking to other experts to get the truth out and to address the concerns.

Dr. Doctor said that the general thought of the letters was to bring information to light to allow Dominion to do the job well. He said that the letters include general recommendations regarding best practices for construction and environmental protection.

Mr. Orndorff noted that most projects handled by DCR are not FERC projects. He said that there is a concern that the best interests are not being addressed by state and local governments.

Mr. Bisha noted that the ultimate approval will come via a FERC certificate. He said that all of the details are not currently available but that they will be provided as the proposal moves forward. He said that the input was very helpful.

Dr. Doctor said that in the course of drafting the letters the possibility of alternate routes had been discussed.

Mr. Bisha said that was the value of having the discussions with the Cave Board. He said that a possible workshop might be helpful to look at the maps together. He noted that some surveys were still waiting for landowner access.

Dr. Doctor asked if that could occur prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Bisha said sooner would be better, but after the April 28 comment filing would be best.

Dr. Doctor and Mr. Lambert will work with Mr. Bisha regarding this meeting and discussion.

Copies of the letters are available from DCR.

State response to citizen inquiries about sinkholes

Mr. Orndorff said that there had been no substantive progress regarding inquiries about sinkholes. He said that the requests typically come to him but that sinkholes were not in his area of responsibility. He noted that DCR is not a regulatory agency. He said that the karst FAQ on the website will be helpful but that citizens have no direct point of contact for additional information.

New Business

Virginia Karst Map

Dr. Doctor said that a map showing karst areas coded by geologic formation will be posted on the website. This will include an overlay to Google Earth maps. The map will include sinkhole information as provided by DMME.

License Plates

Ms. McConnell said that she is preparing a mockup of a design and will be doing a survey of interest prior to the next meeting.

Town of Monterey Municipal Wells

Mr. Lambert said that the Mayor of Monterey had asked him attend a meeting with Dominion Power. He said that the Town was not satisfied with the information provided. He said that the Town wants a bond from Dominion that would cover responsibility should there be any damage to the wells. Dominion said that they would not be doing anything not required by FERC. The Town has measured the distance from the pipeline to each well in the Town.

Mr. Orndorff said that the problem was the lack of existing data. He said that the town needs to compile background data on the wells so that in the event of an incident the damage or change could be assessed and compared to that data.

Public Comment

Dr. Doctor said that the Geological Society of Washington is holding a field trip focused on karst on Saturday, May 2nd. The field trip will cover parts of Frederick County along the C and O canal and will end at Antietam Battlefield.

Mr. Canike said that the Virginia Cave Conservation Society was looking forward to working with the Virginia Cave Board in particular with regard to supporting Virginia Cave Week.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Virginia Cave Board will be Saturday, June 6 in the Roanoke area.

Adjourn

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned at 3:44 p.m.

Submitted by Michael Fletcher, DCR