

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, April 20, 2019
The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind
Stanton, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board convened at 11:08 a.m. on Saturday, April 20, 2019 at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Staunton, Virginia.

CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Daniel H. Doctor, Chair
Steve Lindeman, Vice Chair
Robert K. Denton, Jr.
Mark Hodge
Rick Lambert
Meredith Hall Weberg

CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Marian McConnell, Recording Secretary
Anthony R. Bessette
David Ek
John H.H. Graves
John Haynes

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Thomas Smith, Deputy Director of Organization
Isaac Sarver, Deputy Director for Boards and Constituent Services
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Doctor called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Weberg reported that the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail Brochures had been printed thanks to a generous contribution from Mr. Graves. A total of 250,000 brochures were printed. These are currently stored at the Luray Caverns facility.

Mr. Smith noted that Mr. Orndorff had received an award from the Karst Waters Institute at their March 30 meeting in Blacksburg. Names of previous winners are listed in the Institute website at karstwaters.org.

Mr. Orndorff noted that Tom Smith was awarded the Captain Erchul Environmental Leadership Award for his lifelong contributions to conservation of biodiversity in Virginia as well as across the country at the 30th Environment Virginia Symposium.

Mr. Denton advised that permission had been granted by Dominion Management to present dye test results on public waters. The hope is to have the presentation published.

Mr. Orndorff noted that the National Cave and Karst Management Symposium would be held October 7-11 in Bristol. DCR is a co-sponsor of the symposium.

TREASURER'S REPORT – *Tom Smith, Deputy Director of Operations*

Mr. Smith reviewed the Treasurer's Report. He noted there had not been much activity since the last meeting. A grant from the Robertson Association for \$900 had been pledged but not received. The fund currently has a deficit of \$175.00.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 26, 2019

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Hodge moved that the minutes from the January 26, 2019 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as submitted by staff. Mr. Lindeman seconded and the motion carried.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE – *Wil Orndorff, Karst Area Protection Manager*

Mr. Orndorff gave the following written report:

Since the January 26 Cave Board meeting, Karst Program staff in conjunction with Virginia DGIF, Radford University, and caver volunteers completed the 2019 threatened and endangered bat species hibernacula counts. Results were more or less as expected, with no major declines or increases for most species. Numbers of Virginia big-eared bats in Highland County roosts were significantly higher than normal. One bright spot was the discovery of two previously undocumented Indiana bat hibernacula, a colony of ~ 100 discovered by cavers in a small cave off of the Low Moor Quarry, Alleghany County, and a colony of 15-20 at Ferrell's Cave in Russell County. Ferrell's Cave is now the only Virginia cave known to be used by both Gray bats and Indiana bats.

Karst Program staff deployed bat call data recorders for the third consecutive season in the Upper Tennessee River basin to track summer use of caves by the Federally Endangered Gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*.) Data from the first two years suggest complex social behavior by the bats, who use a network of caves for various ecological functions over the course of the summer. Targeted mist netting efforts this year and next will help us to further understand the manner in which these bats rely on caves.

The joint DCR – Virginia Tech James Cave Epikarst Observatory has been temporarily shut down for maintenance of logging equipment. The goal is to have it back on line by late fall, 2019.

The DCR Natural Heritage Program hosted a meeting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for conservation planning pursuant to 17 cave beetle species (of 31 known in Virginia) included in the multi-

species listing petition filed in 2010 by the Center for Biodiversity. The meeting was a follow up to the following contract report:

Malabad, T.E., Orndorff, W.D. and K. Kosič Ficco, 2017, Status assessment of seventeen rare cave beetles of the genus *Pseudanophthalmus* in Virginia: Natural Heritage Technical Report 2017-16. Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage, Richmond, Virginia. 96pp including 3 appendices.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss conservation needs of each species and to provide information to the FWS team responsible for making listing recommendations (i.e. which species become listed.) Dr. Karen Ober of Holy Cross University was in attendance, and is the current world expert on *Pseudanophthalmus*. Under a grant from the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, Ober is currently describing an additional eight cave beetle species from Virginia that are new to science. Finally, the FWS team received a presentation on the state endangered Ellett Valley *Pseudotremia* millipede (*Pseudotremia cavernarum*) delivered by Wil Orndorff.

While staff is making great progress on the CCV funded project ““Conservation Assessment of Natural Heritage Cave Resources in Virginia: Phase 1, New River Karst Region,” we nevertheless requested and received a three month extension from CCV based on fiscal challenges at DCR. The project is slated for completion in September, 2019 and represents year 1 of a five year effort to greatly enhance and equalize our knowledge of cave and karst related biological resources in designated significant caves across Virginia.

Karst protection staff has developed programs for each evening of Cave Week 2019 that celebrate the life and legacy of John “Captain Karst” Holsinger. These events will be held at Odgens Cave (Monday, June 3), Grand Caverns/Cave Hill (Tuesday, June 4), New River Cave (Wednesday, June 5), Rye Cove (Thursday, June 6), and Unthanks Cave (Friday, June 7.)

DCR Protection and Management staff made significant updates to the DCR Karst Program website - <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/karsthome>. Webmaster Megan Rollins welcomes Board input on revising its DCR hosted site, and on how to make the Cave Board and Karst Program websites complement one another more seamlessly.

Despite the current shutdown in construction, DCR karst staff continues to address issues related to Mountain Valley Pipeline construction. Karst Protection Coordinator Orndorff was the subject of a complaint to Senator Mark Warner’s office in regards to the state response to karst impacts from the pipeline. Details are available upon request, and copies of the letter of complaint and DCR’s response will be sent to Cave Board members. In early March, Orndorff visited the site of sinkholes above a blasted area in karst reported to him by Draper Aden associates (karst consultants to MVP.) These were a series of small sinkholes, generally less than 10’ in diameter and less than 5’ deep likely due to raveling of material into voids created by the blasting or into karst features beneath the bottom of the blasted zone (~ 8 – 10’ depth.) Orndorff concurred with Draper Aden’s recommendation to simply monitor the features for now rather than disturb ~1 mile of stabilized right-of-way, increasing surface erosion. A complaint about these same sinkholes was lodged by a citizen on April 10. Orndorff visited the site on April 18 and observed no significant change to the features, which are in close proximity but do not drain (overland, at least) to a nearby sinking stream traced to a water supply spring to the east/northeast. At the request of the landowner, karst staff investigated the vicinity of the stream sink for possible cave entrances. Two very small (< 20’) caves were identified. Both ended in fissures to tight to traverse, each emitting air indicating the presence of additional significant cave passage beyond. Wil Orndorff received the 2019 Karst Award from the Karst Waters Institute on March 30 in Blacksburg (<https://karstwaters.org/awards-and-scholarships/kwi-karst-award/>). Orndorff was invited to join KWI as an associate member and he graciously accepted this invitation.

Plans for the 2019 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium, hosted by VDCR in Bristol, VA from October 7 – 11, are coming along nicely. Please come join us if you can – www.nckms2019.org.

Katarina Kosič Ficco led a two-day outreach event explaining karst waters to middle school students as part of the Montgomery County Public School's stormwater awareness day program. In addition, Orndorff delivered an address on bats to the Roanoke Valley Master Gardeners.

The karst program is approaching a budget crisis. An attempt to introduce a budget amendment providing general fund support for karst staff in the 2019 General Assembly Session failed, leaving the program continuing to depend on increasingly difficult to obtain grant and contract funding. The karst program currently has sufficient funding through fall, 2019, and anticipates sufficient funding through the end of state fiscal year 2020 (June 30, 2020.) Support for the program beyond this point is extremely uncertain. Layoffs and a corresponding reduction in our capacity to serve Virginia's cave and karst needs are likely unless more secure and stable funding is found.

Chairman Doctor asked what was currently happening with the shutdown.

Mr. Orndorff replied that a number of lawsuits have been filed as ways to halt construction. None of these lawsuits are specific to karst.

Mr. Denton noted that while there has been no Atlantic Coast Pipeline excavation in Virginia yet, the worst case scenario is to have the job half done. The land needs to be stabilized the vegetation reestablished.

Chairman Doctor will write a letter to the appropriate pipeline contacts asking that the Cave Board be allowed to visit the current right of way and view what has been stripped and grubbed along the pipeline trail. Mr. Orndorff will assist with the letter.

Mr. Orndorff discussed funding for karst programs. He noted that money for the karst program previously came from non-point source funding through the Department of Environmental Quality. The karst program began with that funding. When those funds were reduced, the funding for karst issues was eliminated.

Mr. Smith noted that the first challenge was to get funding for karst issues included in the governor's budget. He added that proposed amendments would have added four positions to the karst program.

Chairman Doctor advised that it would be helpful for the Board to establish what the programmatic needs for karst are. It is important to note how karst resources may have been compromised that could have been impacted by appropriate levels of budget and staff.

Mr. Smith reported that Governor Northam has made a commitment to increase funding for natural resources in the commonwealth. The challenge is to think smartly regarding critical needs. Agencies will begin submitting budget requests in the last summer to their respective cabinet secretaries.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATES

The Nature Conservancy – Steve Lindeman

Mr. Lindeman reminded the Board that at the January meeting he mentioned that The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is working on an EPA grant applications for brownfields cleanup for a piece of the Russell Sawmill property. DCR is also working on this project. The process stalled during the government shutdown. The hope is that there will be an answer prior to the next Board meeting.

TNC is also working with DCR regarding the development of Clinch River State Park. The first piece of property with a boat launch was successfully transferred to DCR and Virginia State Parks. The hope is to close soon on additional parcels along the Clinch River to provide access in at least three counties.

Department of Conservation and Recreation – Wil Orndorff

Mr. Orndorff noted that DCR is pursuing additional tracks around the Cedars Area Natural Preserve. Limits have been placed by the General Assembly regarding the acquisition of additional lands.

The Department of Forestry Core Mitigation Fund will have another round of grants opening July 28.

NEW BUSINESS

Update on karst protection efforts/information needs

Chairman Doctor reported that he had spent time during the General Assembly session working to gain support for karst protection needs. Two bills proposed, one each in the House and in the Senate, did not go forward. The bill was withdrawn to take time to review the approach.

Mr. Smith reviewed Senate Bill 1478 regarding the regulation of development in karst. This bill was proposed by Senator Creigh Deeds. Concern from the farming community was the definition of a karst feature. The bill passed the Senate, but was voted down in the full House committee.

Mr. Smith added that he had been asked to address the Virginia Housing Commission regarding the legislation.

Ideas for Future Board Initiatives

Chairman Doctor asked Board members to provide input regarding member involvement and initiatives the Board could move forward. Board members gave the following comments and suggestions.

- Give better website prominence and visibility to the guidelines created by the Board. On the DCR website, these guidelines are behind three links.
- The American Society for the Testing of Materials (ASTM) is working to develop a karst standard practice that could be codified.
- The Virginia Cave Board should be:
 - Maintaining a complete file on cave resources (currently done with the Virginia Speleological Society (VSS) under a Memorandum of Understanding with the VCB.
 - Providing information to the public regarding caves
 - Advising and assisting public landowners
 - Studying aspects of cave owner management by public policy

- The VCB should continue working on a legislative approach to strengthen the current law in Virginia.
- Work to do more outreach and education. Develop a standardized set of presentations that members can use.

Chairman Doctor asked each Board member to come up with ideas that could be shared with slides or via a Word document and compiled into a presentation regarding Virginia karst. This presentation would then be available for members to use.

CAVE BOARD COMMUNICATIONS – Dave Neudeck, Director, DCR PCMO

Mr. Neudeck commented that the meeting had been very informative. He noted that he would continue to work with Shelby Crouch, the Senior PR Specialist who works directly with the Virginia Cave Board. He recommended that the suggestions from the Board could be developed into individual message points.

Mr. Neudeck also advised that he would work with PCMO staff to determine how best to promote Virginia Cave Board activities via social media. He noted that the DCR website is undergoing some additional modifications.

A blog is being developed for DCR similar to the blog that is being used by Virginia State Parks. This will help provide an awareness for DCR activities.

Mr. Neudeck offered to help the Board determine the best way to distribute the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail Brochures.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter

The current plan is to produce one newsletter a year, based on funding.

Chairman Doctor will send a letter of thanks to the Robertson Association.

Ms. Weberg thanked Ms. Crouch for continue support of the Virginia Cave Board and the publication of the newsletter.

Virginia Cave Week – Theme “In John Holsinger’s Steps”

Mr. Orndorff noted that he had sent out a list of Cave Week activities. The information will be placed on the Virginia Cave Week website.

DCR staff will work with Mr. Neudeck regarding additional promotional opportunities.

Virginia Cave and Karst Trail signage and brochures

Chairman Doctor will write a cover letter and Ms. Weberg will send the brochure to the members of the Virginia General Assembly.

2019 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium

The website is up and running. The deadline to submit abstracts for presentations is July 1.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING

Staff will poll the Board regarding a date in late August or early September.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.