

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, February 1, 2020
Vinton Public Library, Vinton, Virginia**

MINUTES

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board convened at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 1, 2020 at the Vinton Public Library, in Vinton, Virginia.

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Daniel H. Doctor, Chair
Steve Lindeman, Vice Chair
Anthony R. Bessette
Robert K. Denton, Jr.
David Ek

John H.H. Graves
John Haynes
Rick Lambert
Marian McConnell
Meredith Hall Weberg (by telephone)

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Mark Hodge

Roger Kirchen

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Thomas Smith, Deputy Director of Operations
Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage
Rob Evans, Natural Heritage Protection Manager
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Katarina Kosič Ficco, Ph.D., Karst Protection Specialist

OTHERS PRESENT

Brian Bruckno, VDOT

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With eight (8) members of the Board present, a quorum was established. Ms. Weberg participated via conference call due to a family emergency.

CALL TO ORDER AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Doctor called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. and asked for Board member announcements.

Ms. Weberg reported that the Southeastern Cave Conservancy is hoping to purchase Cyclops Cave in Southwest Virginia. They need to raise \$150,000 by May 1, 2020.

Chairman Doctor noted that Dr. Kosič Ficco had taken the lead on the development of a modeling course prior to the UNESCO meeting in Kentucky. The course is free and the software is available online. The course will be presented to the USGS in Reston on May 20, and in Kentucky on May 22 following the symposium.

The Geological Society of America will meet in Reston on Marcy 19-22. This will include field trip to Trout Caves following the meeting.

The National Speleological Society will meet in Elkins, West Virginia later in the year. Mr. Lambert, Mr. Haynes, and Ms. Weberg will be attending. Ms. Weberg will presenting. Members will work on a display regarding the Cave Board and the Cave Conservancies in Virginia.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Bulluck provided the treasurer's report. The current fund balance was \$1,518. Mr. Bulluck noted:

- A donation of \$566 was received from The Robertson Association
- There is an outstanding expense of \$150 for the meeting at the Blacksburg Rescue Squad

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 7, 2019

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Weberg moved that the minutes from the September 7, 2019 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Haynes seconded and the motion carried.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Mr. Bulluck gave an update regarding the General Assembly session. One budget amendment patroned by Delegate Rodney Willett address karst land and water resource assistance for landowners.

Larry Smith provided a fact sheet to support the request and followed up with meetings with legislative staff and member of the finance committees.

The measure is currently not on the docket. Each chamber must deal with budget amendments prior to crossover on February 16.

Mr. Smith noted that two bills in the previous session dealt with revising the Cave Protection Act, and giving local authorities the authority to rezone. Both died in subcommittee. However, the Housing Commission has now expressed interest following comments from developers regarding sinkholes. Issues do not advance from the Housing Commission unless all members agree.

Mr. Smith advised that both pieces of legislation were not completely gone, but were not advanced last year or this year.

Chairman Doctor recommended that the Cave Board start now to prepare a model ordinance that legislators could reference to understand that this legislation might actually accomplish.

Mr. Bessette suggested that the Board address potential legislative proposals at the next meeting. He offered to research what other states had adopted.

Mr. Smith advised that the Board could develop proposed legislation and put that forward to the agency for submission as part of the DCR legislative package.

Chairman Doctor suggested that that the Board schedule a separate working session prior to the time when legislation needs to be proposed. This will follow the next meeting and will be for those members who wish to participate.

PRESENTATION ON WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS – *Anthony Bessette*

Mr. Bessette gave an overview of Watershed Improvement Districts and Groundwater Management Areas.

A Watershed Improvement District (WID) is a distinct entity from the soil & water conservation district (SWCD) or districts in which it sits. A WID has powers beyond those of the SWCD to:

- Directly carry out preventative and control measures.
- Give financial and other assistance for erosion control/prevention.
- Can acquire property, and collect a tax or service charge to fund itself, and can incur debt.
- Can use eminent domain to carry out its powers.

The following must occur to establish a Watershed Improvement District:

Local landowners have to petition the local SWCD.

- There must be notice and a public hearing.
- Next, a referendum is held.
- Finally, the SWCD has to make a finding that it would be “administratively practicable and feasible”.
- Referenda are necessary for the WID to tax, charge a service fee, or incur debt.

A Groundwater Management Area (GMA) allows the State Water Control Board (SWCB) to regulate the building of wells and extraction of groundwater in the GMA through a permitting process. It also allows the SWCB to:

- Enjoin (seek a court injunction) against violations.
- Seek civil penalties from violators.
- Require applicants to create a “water conservation and management plan”, and abide by it.

PRESENTATION ON VDOT WORK IN KARST AREAS – *Brian Bruckno, VDOT*

Mr. Bruckno gave an overview of current projects along the I-81 corridor. He advised the following with regard to VDOT projects in karst areas.

- All are separate projects
- All are federally funded
- All go through the state environmental review process
- All go through the VDOT engineering process
- Before drilling, VDOT collects data regarding:
 - Soil
 - Geological data
 - Springs and wetlands
 - Karst
 - Terrain analysis
 - Geophysics

Mr. Bruckno noted that each project gets individual attention with regard to environmental and engineering review.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE - *Katarina Kosič Ficco, Ph.D., Karst Protection Specialist*

Dr. Kosič Ficco gave the following update.

The karst program continues working on reports for the project supported by the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias. The project is focused on updating biology inventory in significant caves in the New River Valley. During the project, several cave footprints and cave conservation sites and their management needs were updated, and several new species identified. We are now extending our research into the Highland Region, where biology inventory has started.

The program also started working on removing a dam located in Gibson-Fraizer cave, which is now owned and managed by the DNH. Removal of the dam will enable reestablishing natural hydrological conditions in the cave.

We also installed two loggers, which provide us with real-time data at two springs that are being monitored for potential anthropogenic impacts. The loggers were provided by the MVP pipeline and will increase our understanding of the hydrology in the area. Based on such understanding, it will be easier for us to evaluate potential changes to the springs and reasons for such changes.

Some exciting future projects in which the karst program is involved are the extraction of cat bones that were found in a cave in South-West Virginia, which will be going on in April 2020, and the KARSYS course. KARSYS course is offered free of charge for karst scientists of the USA and offers learning karst groundwater modeling. Both projects require cooperation among various federal, private, and state agencies. Besides, we continue with our day to day activities. Currently, we are focusing on bat counts in selected caves.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

The Nature Conservancy – Steve Lindeman

Mr. Lindeman noted that TNC had previously applied for a grant to fund cleanup operations on the Russell Sawmill property. Phase I and Phase 2 of the cleanup have been completed. However, there is

more work to do. TNC has applied for a grant of up to \$200,000 for additional cleanup. The grant process may take 2-3 years.

TNC recently closed on a property on Pine Mountain on the Kentucky boarder. This is an important forested corridor on the Appalachians that goes into Kentucky and Tennessee. Funding was from mitigation for the Coalfields Expressway.

Progress has been made on Clinch River State Park. A park manager has been hired. There are two or three more properties in play. The master planning process will begin in the fall. The Sugar Hill location at St. Paul is already open to the public.

DCR – Rob Evans

Mr. Evans reported that DCR recently closed on a property in the Grottos area. The area has historical connections as the site of an old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp.

DCR is actively working on about five parcels in the Salem area.

In the last year, eight tracts were completed and about 652 acres added to the state Natural Area Preserve system.

NEW BUSINESS

2021 will be the International Year of Caves and Karst as designated by the International Cave Society and the National Cave and Karst Research Institute.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter

Ms. Weberg advised that she would like to publish a newsletter prior to Virginia Cave week. She has an article from John Graves regarding the new accessible entrance to Luray Caverns. Mr. Orndorff was going to write an article on cave rescue, and Mr. Lambert about his new book.

Chairman Doctor will write a piece regarding the Cave Board message.

The goal is to have the newsletter in the mail by mid-May.

Mr. Bulluck advised that while Shelby Crouch is no longer with DCR, the Public Communications and Marketing Office would continue to do the layout and editing of the newsletter. Staff needs eight weeks for that production process.

Members were encouraged to get their submissions to Ms. Weberg by February 10.

Virginia Cave Week – Meredith Weberg

Virginia Cave Week is set for May 31 through June 6, 2020, which will lead up to National Cave and Karst Day. Cave Week will have a general karst landscape theme.

Members were encouraged to send events and locations to Ms. Weberg.

Virginia Cave and Karst Trail Signage and Brochures

Ms. Weberg keeps a running list of where the signs are located. A generous supply of brochures is stored at Luray Caverns.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline/Mountain Valley Pipeline

Chairman Doctor noted that at the Blacksburg meeting, Mrs. Sink expressed concerns regarding the Bottom Spring Area in Montgomery County. The MVP has stated that the problem is not coming from their activity. Chairman Doctor will follow up on this issue with Mr. Orndorff.

Mr. Denton said that the MVP project is still on hold. Karst areas are being monitored, predominantly in West Virginia.

Mr. Lambert noted that eight permits had been vacated and at least four more lawsuits had been filed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

DATE FOR NEXT MEETINGS

Chairman Doctor advised that it would be helpful to have a meeting prior to Virginia Cave Week to review event plans. He also noted that he would like to schedule a working session to discuss the legislative option and proposals regarding local authority.

Staff will poll for the following dates:

Regular Board Meeting: April 11 through May 23

Working Session: July 11 through August 22

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.