

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, February 25, 2017
Bear Creek Lake State Park
Cumberland, Virginia**

MINUTES

PLACE AND TIME

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board convened at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 25, 2017, at Bear Creek Lake State Park in Cumberland, Virginia.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Steve Lindeman, Chairman
Michelle Baird
Robert K. Denton, Jr.
David Ek

John T. Haynes
Rick Lambert
Janet Tinkham
Meredith Weberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Daniel H. Doctor, Vice Chairman
John H.H. Graves

Roger W Kirchen, Department of Historic Resources
Marian McConnell, Recording Secretary

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Rochelle Altholz, Deputy Director of Administration and Finance
Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy and Planning
Sharon Partee, Finance Director
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT

Alan Gernhardt, FOIA Council

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM: With eight (8) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Lindeman called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. and asked members and staff to introduce themselves.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Board considered the following slate of officers:

Chairman: Steve Lindeman
Vice Chairman: Daniel Doctor
Recording Secretary: Marian McConnell

There were no additional nominations and the slate of officers approved unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT – *Jason Bulluck, DCR*

Mr. Bulluck reported that the Cave Board account balance remains the same as reported in September. He advised that it was not likely there would be adequate funding to cover a Cave Board newsletter mailing. The Cave Board has typically received funding from the Cave Conservancy of Virginia for the newsletter.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of June 11, 2016

Ms. Weberg noted typographical errors and asked for an amendment to the wording regarding graphic design for the newsletter.

Dr. Haynes moved for the approval of the June 11, 2016, Cave Board meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Weberg seconded and the motion carried.

Minutes of September 17, 2016

Mr. Ek asked for an amendment to the wording regarding the discussion about sinkhole insurance.

Ms. Baird moved for the approval of the September 17, 2016, Cave Board meeting minutes as amended. Dr. Haynes seconded and the motion carried.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE – *Wil Orndorff, DCR*

Mr. Orndorff presented the following prepared remarks:

Peery Saltpetre Cave, Botetourt County, was gated in October 2017 in cooperation with DCR Natural Heritage, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and numerous volunteers from the caving community. Peery hosts one of the three largest known remaining little brown bat hibernacula in Virginia, and also hosts a small group of federally endangered Indiana bats. Prior to gating the cave, there was sign of extensive unauthorized visitation to the cave. The cave gate was designed and project led by Jim Kennedy of Kennedy Above/underground, Austin, TX.

Katarina Kotic-Ficco joined DCR Natural Heritage as Karst Protection Technician in December 2016. Katarina is a doctoral candidate in "karstology" from Postyana University in Slovenia, and brings a fresh, international perspective to DCR's karst protection efforts.

Karst staff has been active reviewing easement projects for the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and local land trusts. A recent property visit for the New River land trust resulted in the identification of a new location for the state listed endangered Ellett millipede (*Pseudotremia cavernarum*.) This species is the single most at-risk cave invertebrate species in Virginia, and is in imminent risk of extinction unless action is taken soon. Its range lies entirely within a rapidly expanding residential area along the eastern boundary between the town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County. This species would be appropriate for listing under the US endangered species act as endangered, but needs an advocate to petition the US Fish and Wildlife Service for listing.

VA DGIF and DCR Natural Heritage staff have nearly completed the 2017 bat counts. Indiana bat and Virginia big-eared bat caves are counted in odd years. There is no evidence of recovery in bat

populations in large cave hibernacula decimated by White Nose Syndrome (WNS) since 2009, although the decline appears to have more or less leveled off.

Little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) and tricolored bats (*Perimyotis subflavus*) continue to be present at <<5% of pre-WNS numbers in formerly large hibernacula. Northern bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*) were not observed this year. Big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and Eastern small-footed bats (*Myotis liebii*) appear to be relatively stable, with numbers comparable to pre-WNS.

Declines in Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalis*) are quite variable across sites, with the species absent from several sites, but remaining at or near pre-WNS numbers at others, with several sites exhibiting moderate population reductions. Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*) numbers were down this year, but most likely due to the abnormally warm conditions. They had moved their roost sites and were quite active upon arrival.

Indiana bat roosts were also abnormally active this year, presumably due to the weather as well. There are some favorable observations for the most affected species. Little brown bat populations appear healthy at two sites where pre-WNS numbers are not known. However, at each of these sites populations exceed 200 individuals.

At Peery Saltpetre Cave in Botetourt County, numbers of little brown bats have increased over 10% in the last few years, and increase occupation by Indiana bats also appears to be taking place. Tricolored bats continue to be quite common in smaller caves, suggesting the animals using these small caves may have less exposure to the pathogen causing WNS (*Pseudogymnascus destructans*) than those using what were major hibernacula. While all but absent in karst areas, Northern bats continue to be captured during summer mist net studies in non-karst areas. Finally, Gray bats (*Myotis grisescens*) are not known to hibernate in Virginia to a significant extent, but the numbers at their summer colonies appear stable and the animals healthy.

Following Mr. Orndorff's remarks, the Board discussed the petitioning of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add the Ellett millipede species to the endangered species list. The Board agreed by consensus to pursue this action. Dr. Haynes will work with staff to draft an appropriate letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

The Nature Conservancy – Chairman Lindeman

The Nature Conservancy continues to work on three properties related to the Lee County Cave Isopod. TNC is within a couple of months of closing on two of the properties and is in strong negotiations regarding the third. These are located in Scott and Wise Counties and have high biodiversity, including cave features.

Ronald Lambert with The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee is working to create the Powell River Blueway along the Powell River. This will provide new recreational access points for ecotourism. He is working to expand this into Virginia at Big Stone Gap.

The Cedars partnership meeting is approaching. The group typically meets in April for a day of indoor meetings and a day of outside stewardship work.

Department of Conservation and Recreation – Jason Bulluck, DCR

Hupmans Saltpetre Cave – Protection staff have had limited conversations with DGIF about this 61 acre tract with an entrance adjoining one of their Wildlife Management Areas. This is an important bat site. DGIF is working through internal acquisition procedures necessary to acquire the property and has had some conversations with The Nature Conservancy.

Cave Hill – DCR has recently communicated with four active members of the controlling Cave Hill, LLC in regards to potential acquisition of two tracts. Although significant details remain to be ironed out, they have shown more interest than at any previous time in the past. An additional landowner who owns an important part of the larger conversation site has also expressed willingness to sell a conservation easement on the most important portions of his property.

Cedars, Giles tract – This tract has numerous cave and karst features as well as significant frontage on the Powel River. DCR has secured partial funding for purchase of this 504 acre tract through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, and is currently working on a federal funding application to secure matching funds needed that will be submitted through DGIF.

DCR is nearing the completion of the existing Natural Area Preserves “build-out” plan that will clarify acquisition priorities statewide at existing preserves. A companion plan is also in development to identify the most critical conservation priorities outside the Natural Area Preserve system.

BOARD MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Lindeman reported that Michael Lipford, Executive Director of the Virginia chapter of The Nature Conservancy, is the organization’s new Southern U.S. Division Director.

NEW BUSINESS

Staunton Quarry Cave/Staunton Caverns – Rick Lambert

Mr. Lambert provided an overview of the Staunton Quarry Cave/Staunton Caverns. He noted that in 1995 the City of Staunton and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) reached an agreement that VDOT would work to protect this cave when widening Middlebrook Avenue in Staunton. VDOT designed a wall and moved the right of way away from the cave. However, since 1995 no one from VDOT, the City of Staunton, or the Cave Board has attempted to visit the cave.

Mr. Lambert asked the Cave Board to consider writing the City of Staunton to request an opportunity for the Cave Board to visit the cave and see if there was any actual damage. He will look into the possibility of obtaining permission for a Cave Board and DCR karst staff visit. If possible, a visit could be scheduled in conjunction with a future Board meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion of Cave Board roles and responsibilities outlined in §10.1-1002 – Michael Fletcher

Mr. Fletcher led an overview discussion of the Cave Board roles and responsibilities as defined in the Cave Protection Act.

Mr. Ek noted that there are twelve agencies with some relationship to karst. He suggested the Board look at strategies to engage with them.

Chairman Lindeman added that Dr. Doctor had previously suggested reaching out to municipalities in terms of education, particularly when the Cave Board was meeting in their respective area. When meetings are in a particular area, the local officials should be invited to attend. He also suggested that the Cave Board should establish a stronger relationship with the State Water Control Board. He agreed to reach out to a member of that Board.

Proposed Bylaws for the Virginia Cave Board – Lisa McGee

Ms. McGee reviewed drafts of the proposed Virginia Cave Board Bylaws.

BOARD ACTION

Dr. Haynes moved for the approval of the proposed Virginia Cave Board By-laws. Ms. Baird seconded, and the motion carried with Ms. Weberg abstaining.

Citizen's Guide to Sinkholes – David Ek

Mr. Ek reported that the Citizen's Guide to Sinkholes is complete with all necessary edits.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Denton moved for the approval of the Citizen's Guide to Sinkholes and to authorize DCR staff to include the information on the Cave Board website. Chairman Lindeman seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Sinkhole insurance update – David Ek

Mr. Ek reported that he reviewed insurance companies who provide sinkhole insurance. It was recommended that property owners with sinkholes and karst land be advised to check with their insurance companies. Mr. Ek will prepare a narrative description to be included in the next Cave Owner's Newsletter.

Virginia Cave Owner's Newsletter – Meredith Weberg

The Board reviewed the designs prepared by DCR's Public Communication Office (PCO) and made some recommendations for changes. Mr. Bulluck forwarded these recommendations to PCO. The intent is to try to get the newsletter published and mailed in time for Virginia Cave Week, scheduled April 16 through April 22, 2017. Ms. Weberg requested that Board members submitting articles forward them to her as soon as possible.

Virginia Cave Week – Janet Tinkham

Virginia Cave Week is scheduled for April 16 through April 22, 2017. It was acknowledged that April 16 is also Easter. The theme for Cave Week is karst springs. Several members agreed to try to arrange tours of karst springs in their respective areas during Cave Week.

Virginia Cave and Karst Trail and signage

The Board deferred this discussion until the next meeting.

Appalachian Karst Symposium 3 & Sinkhole Conference – Wil Orndorff

The Appalachian Karst Symposium 3 & Sinkhole Conference will be held in April 2018. The Cave Board will be a conference sponsor working through DCR. Dr. Doctor is actively involved in the planning of this conference and Mr. Denton is on the general committee. The Board agreed that this item will need significant discussion at the next Board meeting.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline/Mountain Valley Pipeline – John Haynes

Mr. Denton recused himself from the Pipeline discussion.

DCR submitted Cave Board comments on the Mountain Valley Pipeline to FERC. DCR and the Division of Natural Heritage continue to refine department comments based on information received from Dominion and consultants. DCR submitted Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) comments to DEQ on February 16, 2017. Comments from the Cave Board are due to DCR on March 15, 2017, DCR will attempt to review by March 22, 2017. The deadline for submitting DEIS comments to FERC is April 6, 2017. DCR's Division of Natural Heritage was asked to review the Karst Mitigation Plan and Cochran's Cave Conservation Site report. The report was reviewed and submitted on February 23, 2017.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There have been repeated incidents of vandalism at New River Cave. The situation is being monitored. When these incidents arise, Board members local to a particular area are encouraged to contact law enforcement to raise the level of concern.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is expected to be scheduled in July. Staff will poll members for the best date option.

ADJOURN

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Lindeman, Chairman

Marian McConnell, Recording Secretary