

**Virginia Cave Board
Wednesday, September 30, 2026
Grand Caverns
Grottoes, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board took place at 12:08 p.m. on Wednesday, September 30, 2026, at Grand Caverns in Grottoes, Virginia.

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Andrea Futrell, Chair
Jacqueline Gooden-Seay
Carol Tiderman
Harriet Flynn
Graham Montrose

John H. H. Graves
Brendan Burke, DHR Designee (ex officio)
Andrea Reese
Robert Denton, Jr.
Austin Shank

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Stephanie Lillard

Angel Garcia

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION (DCR) STAFF PRESENT

Sarah Spota, DCR Deputy Director
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy, Planning, and Legislative Affairs
Breanne Lindsey, Board & Constituent Liaison
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator
Anne Chazal, Chief Biologist
David Neudeck, Public Communications and Marketing Director
Katarina Kosič Ficco, DCR Field, Cave, and Karst Scientist

OTHERS PRESENT

Terrell Smith, Student
Daisy Beathe, Grand Caverns Staff
Gregory Wilson, Grand Caverns Staff

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With nine members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Andrea Futrell called the meeting to order at 12:08 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Futrell called for introductions.

Members of the Board, DCR staff, and guests introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 24, 2026

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Graves moved to approve the April 24, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Shank seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Flynn, Futrell, Gooden-Seay, Graves, Montrose, Reese, and Shank.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Ms. Chazal presented the following financial information:

DCR - Natural Heritage (Cave Board)
Summary of Financial Activities
Fiscal Year 2027 (through September 30, 2026)

FY27 Beginning Cash Balance	<u><u>1,141.41</u></u>
Revenues	Amount
FY27 Revenues	-
Total Revenues	<u><u>-</u></u>
Expenses	Amount
FY27 Expenses	-
Total Expenses	<u><u>-</u></u>
Total Cash Balance (as of September 30, 2026)	<u><u>1,141.41</u></u>

DCR - Natural Heritage (Cave Board License Plates)
Summary of Financial Activities
Fiscal Year 2027 (through September 30, 2026)

FY27 Beginning Cash Balance	<u><u>1,480</u></u>
Revenues	Amount
FY27 Revenues	-
Total Revenues	<u><u>-</u></u>
Expenses	Amount
FY27 Expenses	-
Total Expenses	<u><u>-</u></u>
Total Cash Balance (as of September 30, 2026)	<u><u>1,480</u></u>

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE

Mr. Orndorff provided the Board with the following update from the DCR Karst Program:

DCR Natural Heritage Karst Team
Update to VA Cave Board
Wil Orndorff, 9/30/26

The final report was submitted for karst resource inventory at Natural Bridge State Park. Several previously undocumented small caves were identified and surveyed, and dozens of karst features were located and described using desktop analysis followed by field-based verification. The longest new cave was approximately 200 feet in length and was home to a couple of dozen hibernating *Perimyotis subflavus* (tricolored bats). The project expanded the documented significance of caves and other karst features at Natural Bridge.

DCR karst staff continues to work cooperatively with VDOT, DWR, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to minimize the impacts to Gray bats from proposed and extensive repairs to the Piedmont Avenue Bridge in Bristol, home to Virginia's largest maternity colony.

Karst Team staff continue to participate in the DEQ Technical Review Committee for the new (2024) Stormwater Management Handbook. However, a meeting to discuss revisions to Appendix E which details karst specific practices has yet to be scheduled. The handbook as it stands now can be viewed here: <https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/deq-va/doc-viewer.aspx?secid=1486#secid-1454>.

At the request of the Virginia Department of Energy's Division of Geology and Mineral Resources (DGMR) as part of their interstate 81 corridor karst mapping project, DCR karst staff created and supplied a GIS coverage (polygon) that overlies all known cave passage in the project area plus a buffer without disclosure of cave names or entrance locations. DGMR is nearing completion of the third and final phase of a karst map of the interstate 81 corridor that should aid in planning as the interstate is widened or otherwise improved, and as development proximal to the interstate continues.

Lead Cave and Karst Scientist, Tom Malabad, assisted American University faculty and students in performance of field work for a project to investigate the food webs of cave stream obligate animals in Tazewell County, VA using carbon and nitrogen isotope analyses. Isotopic ratios are a good indicator for where in the food web a particular organism falls, and understanding of cave food webs is essential in planning conservation.

Work is proceeding as planned on the ten-year "Good Neighbors Agreement" between the U.S. Forest Service and the Virginia DCR Division of Natural Heritage, a substantial portion of which is karst resource inventory and monitoring led by lead karst field scientist, Katarina Kosič Ficco, with teammates - geologist, Hunter Campbell, and biologist, Sophia Remhof. Three quarterly reports have been submitted on this project and a fourth is near completion, documenting work on priority areas of the Forest where proposed and/or planned management actions may impact natural heritage karst resources. Dozens of karst features including sinking streams, sinkholes, caves, and springs have been identified. Of the areas assessed to date, the Hunters Valley area of Scott County (Clinch Ranger District) has turned out to be rich in undocumented caves, springs, and karst features. Dye tracing studies were performed and partially

delineated the recharge areas of two large, previously undocumented springs in the Hunters Valley project area.

Exploration and biological inventory of newly discovered caves is underway. October marks the completion of year 1 of the 10-year agreement with the Forest Service.

There are no significant incidents to report regarding the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP), which is in service and nearing final stabilization (as determined by DEQ). MVP's consultants (WSP Global, formerly TRC formerly Draper Aden Associates) have continued to coordinate with DCR when minor possible subsidence issues along the pipeline right-of-way are investigated.

The DCR Natural Heritage Karst Team was awarded a three-year, approximately \$100,000 grant, by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation National Species Recovery Grant Program for a three-year project to perform quarterly monitoring of populations of the federally endangered Lee County cave isopod (*Lirceus usdagalun*). Thanks to decades of effort, initiated by the Virginia Cave Board, this species is now well protected and is a candidate for downlisting or delisting. The results of the proposed monitoring project will inform any decisions made by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Project work begins October 1, 2026 and will continue for three years.

DCR karst team staff assisted the Virginia Cave Board with Cave Week events from June 1 through June 6, 2026, including the Ogdens Cave Natural Area Preserve Open House, the Grand Caverns Cave and Karst Expo, and two additional events at Grand Caverns. These events also celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, the 90th Anniversary of Virginia State Parks, and the 100th anniversary of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Events were well attended by a highly engaged audience.

Several staff represented the DCR Natural Heritage Karst Program in July at the National Speleological Society Convention held in Corydon, Indiana.

In early September, Lee Anne Bledsoe, manager of the Crawford Hydrology Laboratory at Western Kentucky University, came to Blacksburg to help set up a dye tracing lab for the DCR karst program, housed on the Virginia Tech campus. The DCR karst team now has in-house capacity to perform dye tracing analyses for conservation planning and response.

Katarina Kosič Ficco delivered a well-received presentation entitled "INTEGRATION OF KARST-SPECIFIC APPROACHES IN EXISTING CONSERVATION FRAMEWORKS THROUGH COOPERATION" on September 13th at the International Day of Caves and Karst Celebration held in Postojna, Slovenia. The presentation highlighted the cave and karst conservation, science, and management efforts of the Virginia DCR Division of Natural Heritage Karst Program. Katarina was in Slovenia visiting family on annual leave at the time, so this representation of our program at such a significant international forum occurred at no cost to the Commonwealth. Thanks to Katarina for volunteering to represent us.

Karst staff convened a special break-out session on cave and karst at the 2026 Northeast Regional Meeting of the Natureserve Network, held September 21 through 25, 2026, in Marlboro, Vermont. Participants from several states exchanged ideas on how to best generate meaningful cave and karst data and integrate it into the Natureserve methodology for tracking rare plants, animals, and natural communities.

ARRIVAL OF BOARD MEMBER

Mr. Denton arrived at the meeting and introduced himself to the Board.

LAND CONSERVATION REPORT

There have been no new updates since the April 2026 meeting.

FOIA TRAINING

Ms. Lindsey, in collaboration with Ms. McGee, provided FOIA training to the Board. During the presentation, the Board engaged in extensive discussion to ensure a clear understanding of FOIA requirements and to reinforce the importance of maintaining appropriate transparency.

BREAK AND ARRIVAL OF BOARD MEMBER

The Board recessed at 12:59 p.m. and reconvened at 1:49 p.m. During the recess, Ms. Tideman arrived. Ms. Montrose did not return immediately following the conclusion of the break.

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD RESOLUTION FOR PHILIP C. LUCAS

The Board considered the resolution for Philip C. Lucas.

Resolution to

Philip C. Lucas

WHEREAS, the Virginia Cave Board and the broader cave and karst community lost a valued member on April 19, 2026, with the passing of Philip C. Lucas; and

WHEREAS, Philip C. Lucas donated generously of his time, talent, and leadership to the Board and to countless members of the caving community throughout the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, Philip C. Lucas served as the founding president and database manager of the Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS) for over 30 years, managing a database of several thousand caves and making the database available for science, conservation, and exploration while respecting the privacy of cave owners; and

WHEREAS, Philip C. Lucas contributed significantly to the understanding and preservation of Virginia's cave and karst resources through decades of service, research, education, exploration, and stewardship; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Cave Board wishes to acknowledge its gratitude and deepest appreciation for devoted service of a person held in high esteem by the members of the Board and the citizens of the Commonwealth.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Virginia Cave Board honors the memory of Philip C. Lucas, celebrates his legacy of commitment to cave and karst conservation and remembers his service to the Board and the broader caving community on this 30th day of September in the year 2026; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be made a part of the official minutes of the Board so that all may know the Board gratefully acknowledges his many contributions to the cave and karst community.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Tiderman moved to approve the resolution as presented. Mr. Graves seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Denton, Flynn, Futrell, Gooden-Seay, Graves, Reese, Shank, and Tiderman.

The Board discussed additional options to recognize Mr. Lucas, including the possibility of asking a legislator to submit a resolution to the General Assembly. Ms. McGee will research the required process and provide the information to Chair Futrell. Ms. Spota also shared information regarding requesting a letter from the Governor for the family.

VIRGINIA CAVE OWNERS NEWSLETTER

Chair Futrell informed the Board that the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias (CCV) awarded a \$1,500 grant to support development of the Virginia Cave Owners Newsletter. She noted that the Board's goal is to request multi-year funding in future applications, if CCV is amenable.

Chair Futrell also shared that former Board member David Hubbard previously served as the newsletter's editor, providing guidance on content for each issue. She requested volunteers to assume this role moving forward. She added that she will assist with the upcoming issue and intends to include Mr. Lucas's resolution in the newsletter. Ms. Reese volunteered to support the newsletter's editing responsibilities going forward.

ARRIVAL OF BOARD MEMBER

Ms. Montrose returned to the meeting.

VIRGINIA CAVE WEEK

Chair Futrell provided an overview of Virginia Cave Week, explaining that it is an educational initiative designed to promote public outreach and interest in caves. Ms. Tiderman served as the point of contact for Cave Week this year. Events were held at Luray Caverns, Grand Caverns, and Dixie Caverns, and DCR opened the Natural Area Preserve containing Ogdens Cave specifically for the occasion. Chair Futrell noted that Virginia Cave Week is scheduled annually during the week of June 6, aligning with National Caves and Karst Day. Ms. Montrose volunteered to assist with planning and coordination for Virginia Cave Week 2027 in support of Ms. Tiderman.

CAVESIM IN VIRGINIA

CaveSim was featured at Pocahontas State Park in September 2026 and is scheduled to appear at Massanutten Resort and Luray Caverns on various dates in October 2026. Mr. Orndorff provided an overview of CaveSim for the Board's information.

DEPARTURE OF BOARD MEMBER

Mr. Shank departed the meeting prior to adjournment.

NSS 2026 CONVENTION

Chair Futrell provided an update on attending the NSS 2026 Convention, noting that DCR Cave Bandanas were once again distributed and were well-received by attendees. She also highlighted the educational value of the convention, including participation by members of the Junior Speleological Society.

VIRGINIA STORMWATER MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

Mr. Orndorff provided an update on this topic during the Karst Program Update. He reminded the Board that they may attend the DEQ Technical Review Committee as private citizens, but not in their capacity as Board members. He also noted that Appendix E of the Stormwater Management Handbook was revised by him and Mr. Denton to strengthen consideration of caves and karst features in the future.

The Board engaged in an extended discussion regarding data centers and their potential impacts, or lack thereof, on caves and karst systems. Mr. Orndorff encouraged members to review data center proposals on a case-by-case basis should any be brought to their attention in relation to potentially affected karst features. Chair Futrell further recommended that members consult the 2024 JLARC report on data centers for additional background information.

Ms. Montrose requested that DCR staff provide information at a future meeting regarding groundwater protection measures and any water-management concerns in specific areas, so the Board may consider these factors moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on December 1, 2026, and the location is to be determined.

The Board discussed the possibility of holding a retreat during one of the 2027 meetings to incorporate additional professional development and engagement opportunities for both staff and Board members.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.