

**Virginia Cave Board  
Friday, April 24, 2026  
Luray Caverns  
Luray, Virginia**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board took place at 11:05 a.m. on Friday, April 24, 2026, at Luray Caverns in Luray, Virginia.

**VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Andrea Futrell, Chair  
Jacqueline Gooden-Seay  
Allen L. Louderback  
Carol Tiderman

John H. H. Graves  
Andrea Reese  
David Hubbard  
Austin Shank

**VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT**

Stephanie Lillard  
Angel Garcia

Roger W. Kirchen (ex officio)

**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION (DCR) STAFF PRESENT**

Sarah Spota, DCR Deputy Director  
Breanne Lindsey, Board & Constituent Liaison  
Paul G. Saunders, III, Senior Policy Analyst  
Wil Orndorff, Kart Protection Coordinator  
Anne Chazal, Chief Biologist  
Emi Endo, Senior Public Relations and Marketing Specialist

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Chad Harrold

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM**

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

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Andrea Futrell called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Chair Futrell called for introductions.

Members of the Board and DCR staff present introduced themselves.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 4, 2026**

**BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Shank moved to approve the December 4, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Graves seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Futrell, Gooden-Seay, Graves, Hubbard, Louderback, Reese, Shank, and Tiderman.

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

Ms. Chazal presented the following financial information:

**DCR - Natural Heritage (Cave Board)  
 Summary of Financial Activities  
 Fiscal Year 2026 (through April 15, 2026)**

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>FY26 Beginning Cash Balance</b>               | <b><u><u>1,141.41</u></u></b> |
| <b>Revenues</b>                                  | <b>Amount</b>                 |
| FY26 Revenues                                    | -                             |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                            | <b><u><u>-</u></u></b>        |
| <b>Expenses</b>                                  | <b>Amount</b>                 |
| FY26 Expenses                                    | -                             |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>                            | <b><u><u>-</u></u></b>        |
| <b>Total Cash Balance (as of April 15, 2026)</b> | <b><u><u>1,141.41</u></u></b> |

*Baily Printing - VCON 2026 - payment pending \$1,175 expected to post in May*

**DCR - Natural Heritage (Cave Board License Plates)  
 Summary of Financial Activities  
 Fiscal Year 2026 (through April 15, 2026)**

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| <b>FY26 Beginning Cash Balance</b>               | <b><u><u>1,480</u></u></b> |
| <b>Revenues</b>                                  | <b>Amount</b>              |
| FY26 Revenues                                    | -                          |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                            | <b><u><u>-</u></u></b>     |
| <b>Expenses</b>                                  | <b>Amount</b>              |
| FY26 Expenses                                    | -                          |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>                            | <b><u><u>-</u></u></b>     |
| <b>Total Cash Balance (as of April 15, 2026)</b> | <b><u><u>1,480</u></u></b> |

*Prepared by Jonathan Jackson, Natural Heritage Business Manager*

## **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, 4/24/26

Karst resource inventories were completed 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 ~ 200' in length and was home to a couple of dozen hibernating *Perimyotis subflavus* (tricolored bats).

DCR karst staff continues to work cooperatively with VDOT, VDWR, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to minimize impact on Virginia's largest Gray bat maternity colony from extensive repairs to the 3/8 mile wide Piedmont Avenue Bridge in Bristol, Virginia, which conveys Beaver Creek south beneath downtown Bristol before emerging in Tennessee. Since the last Cave Board meeting, DCR karst team has installed bat call data recorders for the 2026 season and also downloaded and serviced temperature-relative humidity recorders distributed through the bridge. Data from ~ 4 years of T-Rh logging has been provided to VDOT for consideration in design and timing of bridge repairs.

Karst Team staff continue to participate in the DEQ Technical Review Committee for the new (2024) Stormwater Management Handbook. the seventh meeting of the Technical Review Committee (TRC) for the Virginia Stormwater Management Handbook, Version 1.3 will be held on Thursday May 28, 2026, and will be attended by Karst Protection Coordinator Wil Orndorff. DEQ continues to work through a backlog of comments on Appendix E (karst provisions) dating back to review of the draft document in the first quarter of 2024. The handbook as it stands now can be viewed here: <https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/deq-va/doc-viewer.aspx?secid=1486#secid-1454>. Many karst-specific comments still need to be addressed.

Karst staff is working with the Virginia Department of Energy Division of Geology and Mineral Resources (DGMR) to include geospatial cave data on digital mapping projects without disclosure of cave names or entrance locations. DGMR is nearing completion 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.

Karst staff assisted the National Cave Rescue Commission in instruction and operations of the weeklong Level 1 Cave Rescue Seminar taught in March at the Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad. Southwest Virginia DNH Natural Area stewards Laura Young and John Hartley also helped with the class, which nineteen participants completed.

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. Extensive procurement tasks are mostly completed, and two wage staff – geologist Hunter Campbell and biologist Sophia Remhof have been hired. Campbell started in February, while Remhof will join the team in early June. Two quarterly reports have been submitted on this project, documenting work on priority areas of the Forest

where proposed and/or planned management actions may impact natural heritage 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) exhibits high potential for previously undocumented and significant karst development. Exploration and biological inventory of newly discovered caves is underway.

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

Bat hibernacula counts were the primary karst staff activity during January and February. Approximately 30 caves were visited, concentrating on known locations of the endangered Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*). Occurrences of the species recently reported in two caves on the US Forest Service were confirmed. Overall results of the counts were mixed. Some sites continue to suggest a slow decline, while have stable or increasing numbers. Staff assisted the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources in hibernacula inventory of Hellhole Cave, the world's largest known hibernacula for the Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*).

Karst team staff submitted a proposal to 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.

DCR karst team staff will be assisting the Cave Board with Cave Week events from June 1 through June 6, including the Ogdens Cave Open House and the Grand Caverns Cave and Karst Expo. These events will also celebrate 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.

### **LAND CONSERVATION REPORT**

Ms. Chazal presented the following update:

#### **Selected Natural Area Protection Updates (April 2026)**

Submitted to the Virginia Cave Board

Rob Evans, Natural Area Protection Manager

Department of Conservation & Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage (DCR-DNH)

**DCR has closed two projects since last report, has active real-estate projects at 12/67 existing Natural Area Preserves (NAP), and continues work on projects that will result in the establishment of 2 new NAP.**

Closed:

- **Buffalo Mountain NAP (Floyd Co):** DCR completed transfer of an additional 975-acres from The Conservation Fund in middle November.
- **Brocks Gap (Rockingham Co):** Acquisition of this new NAP was completed in middle December. DCR acquired two separate interests: 180.5-acres in fee-simple and 34.3-acres under Open Space Easement.
- **Cleveland Barrens NAP (Russell County):** DCR completed this deed of dedication on March 26, with the Town of Cleveland, adding approximately 5 acres to this NAP bordering Tank Hollow Falls.
- **Lyndhurst Ponds NAP (Montgomery Co.):** On Feb 24, DCR signed a deed of release and termination of easement agreement across an-owned parcel that was previously encumbered by an Atlantic Coast Pipeline easement.

New NAP project (underway):

- Spineless Cave – prospective new NAP: **Virginia Institute for Invertebrates (VII) applied for and received a grant from the Virginia Outdoor Foundation to acquire approximately 222.21 acres in Giles County.** The property is known to support a new species of millipede (*Nannaria* sp. nov.), a new genus of spider in the family Linyphiida, and a rare cave-dwelling spider (*Nesticus mimus*). *DCR has agreed to dedicate this site as a new NAP if the acquisition process is successful.*

Active Projects (existing NAP): (THESE NOTES ARE BASICALLY THE SAME AS PREVIOUS UPDATE)

- **Eastern Divide (Montgomery Co):** two significant acreage tracts have been funded, have an acquisition partners TCF), and the transfer process is underway; both have been discussed previously. Prospective Phase IV is still TBD.
- **Chestnut Creek Wetlands (Floyd County).** DCR's acquisition progress has ground to a halt, key landowner paperwork appears to be lost due to a fire and death in the family.
- **Mill Creek Springs NAP (Montgomery Co):** Landowner negotiations toward this prospective inclusion of a conservation easement (discussed in last package) are still underway.
- **Crows Nest NAP (Stafford Co):** DCR is working on multiple projects in conjunction with Stafford County and the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust. that will result in additions to this Preserve.
- **Folly Mills Fen NAP (Augusta Co):** Progress stalled as reported previously.
- **The Cedars NAP (Lee Co):** several parcels owned by TNC have been planned for donation to DCR; these have taken a back seat to a host of higher priority projects.
- **Chestnut Ridge NAP (Bland Co.):** DCR is working with TNC to accept donation of ~ 2,300 acres.

Projects In need of funding:

**Grassy Hill NAP (Franklin Co.):** ~ 5.2 acres adjoining the NAP in partnership with private conservation buyer.

**Piney Grove Flatwoods NAP (Sussex Co.):** ~ 23 acres adjoining the NAP in partnership with TNC.

**Lyndhurst Ponds Tract (Augusta Co.):** several adjoining parcels are available for purchase.

**Mutton Hunk Tract (Accomack Co.):** existing DCR-held conservation easement listed on active real-estate market

**Back Creek Tract (Frederick Co.):** The Potomac-Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) parcel donation, but due-diligence funds needed.

### **CAVE BOARD VACANCY**

Chair Futrell provided the Board with an update on the appointment process and encouraged members to identify and reach out to individuals who may be qualified candidates for Board service and encourage them to apply. Ms. Spota advised that she is available to answer questions from prospective applicants regarding the responsibilities and obligations associated with Board membership or the process of being appointed.

### **VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBER ABSENCES**

Ms. Spota provided an overview of the annual reporting requirements agency staff are required to submit to the Governor's Office regarding boards under each agency's purview. She explained that the information provided includes details such as current board membership, term expiration dates, members' meeting attendance records, etc. Ms. Spota noted that this information assists the Administration in making appointment decisions and, in some cases, evaluating whether board members are fulfilling their responsibilities. She emphasized the importance of regular attendance and active participation in Board meetings. Ms. Spota further explained that, pursuant to the Board's Bylaws, the Chair may notify appropriate DCR staff of member absences, and staff are responsible for elevating that information to the Administration for its consideration.

### **NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY (NSS) CONVENTION**

Chair Futrell informed the Board that the NSS Convention is scheduled to take place in July 2026 in Indiana. Chair Futrell, Ms. Tideman, and Mr. Hubbard plan to attend and host an informational display regarding the Board. Chair Futrell also provided an overview of prior NSS Convention experiences, noting that Board representatives received inquiries regarding the Virginia Cave Board and its activities.

### **VIRGINIA CAVE LICENSE PLATE UPDATE**

Mr. Saunders provided a memo to the Board and provided the following background information and recommendation:

#### **Background:**

The Virginia Cave Board partnered with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to establish a specialty "Explore Virginia Caves" license plate to promote cave conservation and public awareness. DMV policy requires a minimum of 450 prepaid applications must be received before a specialty plate can be produced. The plate was also intended to become a revenue-sharing plate to support the activities of the Cave Board once 1,000 plate applications were received. To date, only 55 applications have been received. All application fees collected were placed in escrow, where they must remain unless the 450-application threshold is met and the plate is produced.

At its May 2025 meeting, the Board agreed to reevaluate the program at its first meeting in 2026 and to consider discontinuing the program if at least 100 total applications were not received by December 31, 2025. No additional applications were received between May 2025 and December 31, 2025. The total

number of applications remains 55, well below both the DMV-required minimum of 450 applications and the Board's interim benchmark of 100 applications. The application fees continue to be held in escrow.

**Recommendation:**

Given the inability to meet DMV production requirements and the continuing administrative obligations associated with escrowed funds, staff recommends that the Board direct staff to formally discontinue the Explore Virginia Caves license plate program with the DMV. Staff further recommends that the Board authorize staff to coordinate with DMV on the release and return of all fees held in escrow to the individuals who previously applied for the specialty plate.

**BOARD ACTION:**

After discussion, Ms. Tiderman made the following motion: After reviewing the updated status of the Explore Virginia Caves license plate program, I move that the Board direct staff to discontinue participation in the specialty plate program with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and to coordinate with DMV on the return of all escrowed application fees to the individuals who submitted applications.

Mr. Shank seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Futrell, Gooden-Seay, Graves, Hubbard, Louderback, Reese, Shank, and Tiderman.

**PASSING OF PHIL LUCAS, EXPERIENCED CAVER AND SUPPORTER OF THE BOARD**

Chair Futrell informed the Board of the passing of Phil Lucas, an experienced caver and longtime supporter of the Board. The Board discussed Mr. Lucas's significant contributions to the caving community, including his legislative advocacy and scientific work in support of the Board and cave conservation efforts. The Board agreed that a memorial resolution would be drafted for consideration at the next meeting. Chair Futrell also volunteered to research and pursue the process for potentially obtaining a resolution from the General Assembly in 2027 recognizing Mr. Lucas's contributions and impact on the caving community.

**VIRGINIA CAVE WEEK**

Ms. Tiderman, serving as the lead of planning Virginia Cave Week, provided an update indicating she's contacted volunteers from previous years to assist with this year's program. During Virginia Cave Week there will opportunities for the general public to explore Luray Caverns, Grand Caverns, Ogden's Cave, Dixie Caverns, etc. Chair Futrell encouraged the Board to ask for more volunteers for this event.

**VIRGINIA CAVE OWNERS NEWSLETTER, 2026 AND 2027**

Chair Futrell provided an update regarding the 2026 and 2027 editions of the Virginia Cave Owners Newsletter. She informed the Board that Mike Futrell, a caver and supporter of the Board, assisted with the Virginia Speleological Survey by updating landowner mailing addresses for individuals who wish to receive the newsletter. Chair Futrell also expressed appreciation to those who contributed articles for the 2026 edition.

The Board discussed anticipated mailing costs associated with the 2027 newsletter and considered potential grant opportunities or other funding sources that may be available through DCR to support publication and distribution efforts.

### **CAVESIM**

Mr. Orndorff provided an overview of the CaveSim program to Board members and staff. He explained that CaveSim is a mobile trailer exhibit designed to simulate the experience of traveling through a cave and noted that the program was developed by an individual in another state who uses it as an educational outreach tool to promote cave awareness and education. Mr. Orndorff also discussed the educational benefits the program provides, particularly for children learning about caves and cave conservation.

Mr. Orndorff informed the Board that advocacy with the General Assembly during the 2027 session will likely be necessary to support efforts to establish a CaveSim program in Virginia. Ms. Gooden-Seay expressed interest in assisting with the project, noting that any Virginia-based CaveSim program would need to be tailored to reflect Virginia's caves and karst resources, which may require a work group of subject matter experts. The Board also discussed that CaveSim is scheduled to be featured at Luray Caverns in October 2026.

### **STORMWATER MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK – TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Mr. Orndorff informed the Board that there were no significant updates beyond the information previously provided and noted that revisions to the handbook are still ongoing. Chair Futrell encouraged Board members to attend committee meetings in their capacity as private citizens to provide feedback and input during the revision process.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

### **DATE FOR NEXT MEETING**

As is customary, DCR staff will poll the Board for the date of the next meeting which will likely be held in September of 2026. Mr. Shank volunteered Grand Caverns as the site of the next Board meeting.

### **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.