

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, September 7, 2019
Luray Caverns
Luray Virginia**

MINUTES

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board convened at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 7, 2019 at Luray Caverns in Luray, Virginia.

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Daniel H. Doctor, Chair
Steve Lindeman, Vice Chair
Anthony R. Bessette
Robert K. Denton, Jr.
John H.H. Graves
John Haynes
Mark Hodge
Rick Lambert
Meredith Hall Weberg

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

David Ek
Marian McConnell
Roger W. Kirchen

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Thomas Smith, Deputy Director of Operations
Isaac Sarver, Deputy Director for Boards and Constituent Services
Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage
Rob Evans, Natural Areas Protection Manager
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With nine (9) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER

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

TREASURER'S REPORT – *Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage, DCR*

Mr. Bulluck provided the treasurer's report. The current fund balance was \$952, reflecting a positive balance for the first time in quite a while. Mr. Bulluck noted the following:

- Ms. Weberg obtained a \$900 grant from the Robertson Association for funding the newsletter.
- Production costs for the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail signage was lower than projected.

Ms. Weberg expressed that the Robertson Association is very supportive of the work of the Virginia Cave Board. She noted that the Robertson Association has also provided an additional \$566.

Ms. Weberg also noted that she was elected to the board of the National Speleological Society (NSS) and will be serving on the development subcommittee. NSS has expressed a desire to fund upcoming issues of the *Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter*. The NSS logo should be included in the newsletter.

Ms. Weberg suggested that the Board consider the purchase of additional signs, expansion of the newsletter, or two issues each year.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM APRIL 20, 2019

Members noted corrections to the minutes as presented.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Lindeman moved that the minutes of the April 20, 2019 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as amended. Mr. Lambert seconded and the motion carried.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE

Report on Activities - Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Manager, DCR

Mr. Orndorff provided the following report:

Since the April 20 Cave Board meeting, Karst Program staff have been focused on the CCV funded project "Conservation Assessment of Natural Heritage Cave Resources in Virginia: Phase 1, New River Karst Region," which is nearing completion. We are holding a local government karst workshop for the New River region on November 7, 2019 in Dublin, VA.

Karst Program staff continues to maintain 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*.) Targeted mist netting efforts this year have produced two Gray bat captures outside of the Upper Tennessee River basin in the New River tributaries Reed and Wolf creeks, and acoustic data from our cooperators at Virginia Tech (funded by VDOT) has identified numerous Gray bat calls in the New River basin.

The joint DCR – Virginia Tech James Cave Epikarst Observatory is still shut down for maintenance of logging equipment. The goal is to have it back on line by late fall, 2019. Virginia Tech may have a new student working on this project starting later this fall.

DCR Karst staff has received a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to perform additional cave beetle surveys as recommended in 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 project is scheduled to start in 2020 and commence in early 2021.

Karst staff and cave board members took Cave Week 2019 to celebrate the life and legacy of John “Captain Karst” Holsinger. Events were held at Odgens Cave (Monday, June 3), Grand Caverns/Cave Hill (Tuesday, June 4), Natural Tunnel State Park (Thursday, June 6), and Unthanks Cave (Friday, June 7.) The week’s largest event was organized by Cave Board member Marian McConnell and held at the Western Virginia Science Museum all day on Saturday, June 8. Members of the Blue Ridge Grotto and other local cave clubs operated a display on caves and cave conservation, and multiple free screenings of the movie Catawba Murder Hole were held in the museum’s theater.

Three distinct paleontological projects are at various stages in Virginia cave. Dave Hubbard (Virginia Speleological Survey) continues to work with Fred Grady on excavations of pleistocene (Ice Age) vertebrate deposits in a Bath County Cave. Mike Ficco and Alex Hastings (formerly of VA Museum of Natural History) are working with the US Forest Service and the Virginia Museum of Natural History to excavate an essentially complete skeleton of a big cat from a cave in Lee County. Board member Rick Lambert (also VSS) has recognized and temporarily secured in place a fossil deposit in an Augusta County cave, and is working with DCR staff and Dave Hubbard to plan a trip to excavate. All projects are being performed with applicable state and federal permits.

Despite the current shutdown in construction, DCR karst staff continues to address issues related to Mountain Valley Pipeline construction. With support from the company, DCR karst staff is working to install turbidity loggers on two karst springs along Sinking Creek Mountain, demonstrated by DCR dye tracing studies in 2017 to be connected to the construction corridor.

Terracon submitted a final, revised report (based on reviews by VDCR) on dye trace studies on the karst of Little Valley in Bath County, which is crossed by the proposed Atlantic Coast pipeline. Results revealed a complex system with flow speeds and directions largely dependent on water levels and dynamics of individual precipitation events. No significant caves are associated with the karst system in this area.

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. Early registration and field trip registration closes on Sept 20. Currently we have over 50 abstracts submitted for the meeting, which includes three days of optional pre-conference field trips and a mid-week field trip that will visit Natural Tunnel State Park, Gap Cave at Cumberland Gap National Historic Park, and the Gray Fossil Site just across the border near Johnson City, TN.

Congratulations to DCR karst protection specialist Dr. Katarina Kosič Ficco, who recently completed her doctorate in karstology from the University of Nova Gorica Slovenia. We don’t even have karstology at US universities. Katarina’s dissertation is on the development of a new framework for karst protection that can be used for land use planning and in response to proposed development projects. A link will be sent to Board members.

DCR staff is working with Shenandoah Soil and Water Conservation District staff and local citizens to provide guidance in respect to stormwater management issues in a karst area near Broadway in

Rockingham County. Nearly all drainage in the area of concern is to sinkholes, and stormwater discharge from current and proposed structures has the potential to induce subsidence (land surface collapse) and contaminate groundwater.

From August 18-24, staff coordinated installation of two cave gates to protection biologically significant caves subjected to unauthorized recreation use. The first was Church Mountain Cave on the US Forest Service in Rockingham County, a cave used by several bats species for hibernation and with signs of inappropriate visitation and vandalism. The second was Stay High Cave in Giles County on DCR's Clover Hollow Natural Area Preserve. Stay High is a dangerous, highly technical cave with multiple vertical drops and active water. It is also of high biodiversity significance with several globally rare cave invertebrates. Continued, unauthorized access by ill-prepared individuals has placed both themselves and the cave's inhabitants at risk. The cave was gated using leftover materials from Church Mountain and other projects at a fraction of the cost of a stand-alone project. Numerous volunteers from the caving community assisted agency and contractor staff in bringing these complex projects to successful completion.

Leadership within the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Division of Natural Heritage is working on a request that the Governor incorporate increased general funds for karst protection staff in the 2020 biennial budget. The requests for additional support for karst are part of a larger request for increased support to protect and conserve Virginia's natural resources.

Report on Status of Budget Request for Funding/Program Support – Jason Bulluck

Mr. Bulluck advised that the Division of Natural Heritage is in the process of developing the budget request to be submitted to the Governor. The preliminary package was submitted in May and was positively received. The current request is for 6 full-time staff, and 4 part-time staff. This would include karst protection staff for the Upper Tennessee, New River, and Chesapeake regions as well as a karst program lab coordinator, karst biologist, lab assistant, and a karst outreach staff. This is the proposal, plus the additional non-personnel costs that would be associated with supporting that staff. For the staff, this would be about \$650,000 and for non-personnel expenses this would be about \$170,000. This excludes year-one start-up equipment, which would likely be around \$150,000.

Chairman Doctor reported that he recently wrote a letter to legislators in the karst regions of the state, encouraging support for additional staff and monetary resources for DCR's karst program. He suggested that the Board might write to the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Governor in support of the financial package.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

The Nature Conservancy – Steve Lindeman

Mr. Lindeman reported the following:

- A grant for land associated with the entrance to the Thompson Cave in Lee County, home to the Lee County Cave Isopod, was not accepted. TNC will continue to work with landowners and will reapply in the next grant round.

- Since the last meeting, the Sugar Hill parcel has been purchased as part of Clinch River State Park. The parcel is located adjacent to the Town of St. Paul near the Wise/Russell County line.
- DCR is currently in the process of hiring a park manager for Clinch River State Park.
- TNC has also worked with partners to acquire land in Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia.

DCR – Tom Smith, Deputy Director of Operations, DCR

Mr. Smith noted that DCR views the opening of Clinch River State Park as an opportunity for the Virginia Cave Board to work to tell the story of karst and biodiversity in the region through interpretive programming and literature.

Legislative Update – Tom Smith

Chairman Doctor asked Mr. Smith to provide an update regarding karst-related legislation before the General Assembly.

Mr. Smith noted that legislation in the 2019 session would have required disclosing the location of karst during real estate transactions. The legislation was referred to the Housing Committee for further study. The Housing Committee will begin discussion regarding this issue on September 18.

Chairman Doctor indicated that he would write to the chair of the Committee and express the Board's support for including the disclosure requirement.

Daniel Doctor indicated that he would write a letter supporting the disclosure requirement and send it to the chair of the Housing Commission for the bill.

NEW BUSINESS

Seawright Spring Commercial Development

Chairman Doctor addressed a recent economic development project at Seawright Springs in Augusta County. A Canadian water bottling company has located outside of Fort Defiance and Stuarts Draft. In Virginia, water rights are considered "riparian." The rights of the individuals downstream on a body of water are dependent upon what happens upstream. Chairman Doctor advised that it might be prudent to consider a groundwater management district or some other management authority for those businesses that make large water withdrawals.

Mr. Orndorff noted that under the Dillon Rule, it was unclear whether localities could regulate or prohibit well drilling and water withdrawals.

Mr. Bessette offered to research how groundwater management districts are created and founded, as well as their powers in the Commonwealth.

Chairman Doctor noted that this might be an opportunity to open up communication with the State Water Control Board.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter

Ms. Weberg noted that the newsletter went out prior to Virginia Cave Week. She advised that members wishing to contribute should have articles to her by the end of November. She also noted that with the funding provided by the National Speleological Society that there may be a way to save on postage.

Virginia Cave Week

Chairman Doctor noted that Mr. Orndorff provided an update during his report.

Ms. Weberg noted that the Town of Berryville hosted an event called Wildfest on June 1st. Janet Tinkham and Ms. Weberg attended. WINK FM devoted a minute of air time to advertise Virginia Cave Week.

Virginia Cave and Karst Trail Signage and Brochures

Chairman Doctor noted that the VCKT brochures have been sent to all state legislators who have karst in their districts.

Chairman Doctor shared an interview with Delegate Ken Plum. That interview is available for viewing on YouTube.

Members were encouraged to take brochures to distribute.

2019 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium

In addition to Mr. Orndorff's report, Chairman Doctor noted that he, Ms. Weberg, and Mr. Lindeman would be presenting regarding the Virginia Cave Board.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline/Mountain Valley Pipeline – Update on Activities

Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP)

Chairman Doctor shared a presentation regarding his visit to the Mountain Valley Pipeline site on July 22-23. Mr. Hodge and Mr. Orndorff also participated.

Chairman Doctor inquired regarding the stop work order on the MVP issued by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

Mr. Orndorff noted that there are several different stop work orders impacting the MVP at the present. Some are from DEQ related to discreet incidents. There is a voluntary stop work order from MVP related to the current lawsuit by the Sierra Club.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP)

Chairman Doctor noted that there was no update for the ACP. There is currently no work taking place in Virginia.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING

Staff will poll the Board regarding a meeting date in January, either January 11 or 25. The Board expressed a preference to meet in the Roanoke or New River Valley area.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.