

**Virginia Cave Board  
Saturday, September 9, 2023  
Luray Caverns, Luray, Virginia**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board took place at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 9, 2023, at Luray Caverns in Luray, Virginia.

**VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Robert K. Denton, Chair	John T. Haynes
Dr. Daniel H. Doctor, Vice Chair	Allen L. Louderback
Jason H. Carter	Russell Kohrs
John H.H. Graves	Meredith Hall Weberg

**VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT**

Rick Lambert	Roger W. Kirchen ( <i>ex officio</i> )
TWO VACANCIES	

**Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) STAFF PRESENT**

Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director  
Anne Chazal, Chief Biologist  
Emi Endo, Senior Public Relations and Marketing Specialist  
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison  
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Craig Hindman  
Carol Tideman  
Austin Shank, Grand Caverns

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM**

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

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Denton called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Chairman Denton asked for introductions and announcements.

Dr. Haynes reported that he recently visited the Steamer Hole on the Butler Cave Conservation Society property on the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail. He complimented the work and boardwalk.

Mr. Orndorff noted that there is an environmental exhibit on the site and it appears that there is an active dig in the bottom of the sinkhole that may be confusing to visitors.

Ms. Weberg offered to contact those connected with the site regarding the concerns.

Mr. Kohrs reported that there is a foundation crack in a middle school in Shenandoah County. The issue may be karst related.

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

Ms. Chazal reported the following fund balances.

**DCR – Natural Heritage (Cave Board)  
Summary of Financial Activities  
Fiscal Year 2024**

<b>FY24 Beginning Cash Balance</b>	<b><u>2,148</u></b>
<b>Revenues (by Fiscal Year)</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Prior Year Revenues	9,348
FY24 Revenues	<u>1,130</u>
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b><u>10,478</u></b>
<b>Expenses (by Fiscal Year)</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Prior Year Expenses	6,992
FY24 Expenses	<u>1,107</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b><u>8,099</u></b>
<b><u>Total Cash Balance (as of August 31, 2023)</u></b>	<b><u>2,171</u></b>

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MAY 13, 2023**

Ms. Weberg moved that the minutes from the May 13, 2023, meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Kohrs seconded and the motion carried.

**DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE**

Mr. Orndorff gave the DCR Karst Program Update.

The revision to the *Stormwater Management Handbook* continues. Mr. Orndorff serves on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. A revision to the karst section was submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in June. Comments were received over the summer. The suggested revisions will come back to the entire committee for review before the document is released for public comment. The intent is to release the final document in the spring of 2024.

Chairman Denton noted that the document has not been officially revised since 2011. He encouraged members to comment when the document is released for public review.

Mr. Orndorff reported that DCR held a biology workshop in conjunction with the Karst Waters Institute prior to the National Speleological Society (NSS) Convention. Space was limited because of the field work, but thirteen people attended. The workshop visited Skyline Caverns.

Mr. Orndorff noted that the Allegheny Highlands Karst Workshop was held on September 7–8 in Clifton Forge.

Mr. Orndorff advised that the DCR process for applying for cave collection permits is changing and moving to a computerized system. He advised that input from the Board would be welcomed.

Mr. Smith noted that the intent is for the process to be more transparent and efficient.

The *Great Isopods of Virginia Monograph* is currently with the printer. The hope is to have an event to release it later in the year or early in 2024.

Ms. Weberg and Zenah Orndorff submitted a proposal to the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias (CCV) to bring CaveSim to Virginia next year in conjunction with the NSS convention.

Chairman Denton reported that Fred Grady, who worked for twenty-eight years at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and later as a volunteer, recently passed away.

#### **LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE**

Ms. Chazal reviewed the following Land Conservation Update.

#### DIVISION OF NATURAL HERITAGE (DNH) LAND PROTECTION REPORT (09/2023)

##### Summary:

DCR closed one acquisition project since the last report. Numerous projects are ongoing across the Commonwealth with the help of the Real Property Office, Office of the Attorney General, Department of General Services, and occasional land conservation partners. As the report indicates, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) is a key funding source supporting most active Natural Area Preserve projects. For more information on anything in this report, project suggestions, etc. please contact [Rob.evans@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:Rob.evans@dcr.virginia.gov) or (919)748-0225.

#### CLOSED PROJECTS

Cowbane Prairie (Augusta Co): DCR consumated acquisition of the so-called Wood tract adjoining both the existing Preserve boundary and the South River. The property includes a globally rare herbaceous wetland community. Funds were provided by the DuPont Settlement.

Bull Run Mountain NAP (Prince William Co): The Virginia Outdoors Foundation closed on an ~ 10-acre tract that will be dedicated as part of this NAP in the future, along with other acreage nearby.

#### NEW GRANT SUBMISSIONS

Grassy Hill NAP (Franklin Co): DNH submitted a VLCF grant request to purchase a +/- 48-acre parcel with a globally rare plant and natural community.

Buffalo Mountain NAP (Floyd Co.): DNH submitted a VLCF grant request needed to complete an approximately ~ 1,000-acre expansion of this Preserve as well as a large future state park nearby

Pedlar Hills NAP (Montgomery Co): DNH submitted a VLCF grant request to seek additional funds for the project mentioned below.

Difficult Creek NAP (Halifax Co): DNH submitted a VLCF grant request to seek funds for purchase of conservation easement on a key parcel adjoining this NAP. The tract includes several rare plant species and a high quality natural community, and will enhance DCR's ability to prescribe burn portions of the existing NAP.

South Quay Sandhills NAP (City of Suffolk): DNH submitted a grant request for federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Money to support purchase of ~ 1,900 acres east of the existing NAP. Funds would also support significant dialogue and engagement with Indian Tribes.

#### ONGOING PROJECTS

Cedars (Lee Co): DCR continues to work toward fee-simple purchase of an approximately 60-acre parcel adjoining Dry Creek Barrens, with at least one known cave entrance. An existing agricultural lease has held up progress until recently. Funding support from a VLCF grant.

Folly Mills Fen NAP (Augusta Co): DCR continues to work toward fee-simple acquisition of ~58 acres featuring a globally rare calcareous wetland with numerous rare plant species and a purported spring feeding the wetlands. The landowner has entered a rest home and her attorney has not been engaged, dramatically slowing progress on this transaction. Funding is being provided by DuPont mitigation/settlement funds.

Cowbane Prairie NAP (Augusta Co): DCR continues to make progress on the impending transfer of ~14-acre parcel currently owned by TNC. This tract has numerous rare plants, "Shenandoah Valley Prairie Fen", and has focus of joint restoration and management activities for many years. Funding is being provided by DuPont mitigation funds.

Lyndhurst Ponds NAP (Augusta Co): DCR has been working on 3 adjacent parcels at this Preserve. Two of the parcels support sinkhole ponds/related wetlands. However, one recently sold and may now be lost. The second, we have achieved verbal agreement on purchase terms. The third parcel has been hung-up over appraised value. Funding is being provided by DuPont mitigation funds.

Pedlar Hills NAP (Montgomery Co): DCR continues to work toward fee-simple purchase of ~ 203 acres in 3 adjacent co-owned parcels. Title issues on one of the parcels have plagued the transaction. Appraisals also came in higher than expected and DCR needed to seek additional funds. Funding provided by a Virginia Land Conservation Fund grant.

Chestnut Creek Wetlands (Floyd Co): DCR continues to pursue a key adjoining wetland parcel with an existing abandoned farmstead with support of a Virginia Land Conservation Fund grant. Significant progress has been made since last report. Verbal agreement has finally been achieved with landowner and internal partners have agreed on a purchase strategy.

Difficult Creek NAP (Halifax Co): DCR continues to work on a small tract along the southern boundary of this preserve with funding provided by a grant awarded to DNH through the Virginia Land Conservation Fund.

Brocks Gap (Rockingham Co): This project will result in establishment of a new NAP along the North Fork Shenandoah River along the North Mountain fault. Negotiations continue with the private landowners supported by an existing VLCF grant.

Pinnacle NAP (Russell Co): DCR will be accepting donation of 4 contiguous TNC-owned parcels along the north bank of the Clinch River.

Camp Branch Wetlands (Floyd Co): DNH will be working to purchase ~ 56-acres adjoining the existing NAP from The Conservation Fund using an existing VLCF grant.

Crows Nest (Stafford Co): DCR continues to work on probable purchase of ~220 acres along Accokeek Creek, along the western flank of the Preserve, with financial support of an existing grant from Virginia Land Conservation Fund.

Deep Run Ponds (Rockingham Co): DCR has obtained verbal agreement on fee-simple acquisition of approximately 110 acres adjoining the existing Preserve boundary that supports at least one intact, high-quality sinkhole pond, using DuPont mitigation/Settlement funds.

Ellets Escarpment (Montgomery Co): DNH continues to target an initial acquisition of ~ 33 acres that will result in establishment of a new NAP designed to protect the Ellett Valley Millipede (*Pseudotremia cavernarum*) and the entrance to the globally significant cave with an existing VLCF grant.

#### PROSPECTIVE PROJECTS

Grassy Hill NAP (Franklin Co): We continue to seek a path toward acquisition of ~ 235 acre parcel that would provide a land connector between the existing Preserve boundary and the above mentioned tract.

Pinnacle NAP (Russell Co): At Honaker. TNC has agreed to purchase key tract along Clinch River and eventually transfer to DCR as part of Clinch River SP.

Vickers Cave (Washington Co.): DCR has met the landowner to discuss possible acquisition of this significant cave property. NO PROGRESS

Cleveland Barrens (Russell Co.): DCR is working to add a small adjacent parcel in the Town of Cleveland, several escheated parcels to the Commonwealth, and is contemplating dedication of Town-owned land including Tank Hollow Falls.

Lucketts Meadow (Loudon Co.): DNH staff had been contemplating a project to protect one essential plant population, one significantly rare plant, along with significant geologic outcrops of "Potomac Marble". Rather than dedicating an NAP, DNH has connected NVCT and NRCS with the key landowners in hopes of a productive conservation solution.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Denton reported that the 25<sup>th</sup> National Cave and Karst Management Symposium, will be held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, November 6–10, 2023. Chairman Denton and Ms. Weberg plan to attend.

Chairman Denton advised that he would like the Board to pro-actively address updating the significant cave listing. The listing is maintained by the Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS) in a cooperative agreement with the Board. Many of the caves received a ranking of significant based on geology, history, or biological resource. However, not all on the list should necessarily be ranked as significant. He advised that he would like the Board to address the criteria used to designate a cave as significant.

At this time, the Board recessed for lunch.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Orndorff reported that DCR once again has an Environmental Education office. He suggested that this would be a good resource for Project Underground. Mr. Kohrs will follow up regarding the education component.

Ms. Weberg noted that David Socky manages the Virginia Cave Week website at <https://vacaveweek.com>. He also owns the domain [virginiacaveandkarsttrail.com](http://virginiacaveandkarsttrail.com). This may be a resource for the Board.

Chairman Denton asked that this discussion be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

#### *Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter*

Ms. Weberg expressed appreciation to DCR staff who assisted with the production and mailing of the newsletter. She noted that the next newsletter would be targeted for early May 2024. Materials should be submitted by February 2024.

#### *Virginia Cave Week*

Ms. Weberg reported that there were only three events registered in 2023. They were at Luray Caverns, Grand Caverns, and Ogden's Cave Natural Area Preserve.

Mr. Shank noted that Grand Caverns hosted their first Cave and Karst Expo. Around four hundred people attended.

Chairman Denton reported that the ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) "Standard Practice for Karst Surveys for Development" is currently in the third round of balloting.

#### *Mountain Valley Pipeline*

Mr. Orndorff reported that the Mountain Valley Pipeline construction has resumed after four and a half years. No significant karst issues have been reported to date. Most of the work remaining involves stream crossings. The intent is to complete the work by the end of the year.

Mr. Orndorff reported that a visit to the Calcite Turtle Cave in Giles County showed that the cave is over 500 feet deep vertically.

*2023 National Speleological Society Convention, Elkins, West Virginia*

Ms. Weberg reported that the convention was a success and had over a thousand registrants. She thanked DCR and Ms. Endo for the Virginia Cave Board display posters. She also thanked Mr. Graves for Luray Caverns' sponsorship. Preregistration is available for the 2024 convention.

Mr. Orndorff led a pre-convention biology field camp near Front Royal, Virginia. Mr. Orndorff and Tom Malabad from DCR gave presentations regarding biodiversity implications for natural history.

Mr. Orndorff gave an update concerning the pump station in Blacksburg. The Town has contracted for a survey to determine corrosion potential for the pipe. After that they intend to invest the necessary funds to replace it.

Dr. Doctor asked if the cave maps that were produced by VSS or other grottos were considered official for the purpose of administering decisions. He cited a case in Florida where cavers wanted to make the town aware of caves because of impending development. The maps were not considered official. He asked if there was a way to verify the accuracy of maps.

Dr. Doctor also noted that there are no verifiable maps for sinkhole locations.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Virginia Cave Board will be Saturday, February 3, 2024. Chairman Denton and Mr. Hanes will work on a Charlottesville location.

**ADJOURN**

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.