

Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, January 26, 2019
The Nature Conservancy, Charlottesville, Virginia

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board convened at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 20, 2018 at The Nature Conservancy offices, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

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

CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Roger 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
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Wil Orndorff, Karst Protection Coordinator

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With eleven (11) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lindeman called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. and welcomed members and staff to The Nature Conservancy.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Weberg noted that Glade Cave has a new owner. This has not yet been announced to the caving community.

Mr. Orndorff will receive an award from the Karst Waters Institute at their March 30 meeting in Blacksburg. Members are encourage to attend.

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

Mr. Bulluck reviewed the fund balance. Once the invoice has been processed for the Cave and Karst Trail signs, the fund balance will be a negative \$293.00.

Mr. Evans reported that contributions to the Holsinger Conservation Fund currently total \$400.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 20, 2018

Ms. Weberg suggested that future versions of the minutes spell out acronyms with their first usage.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Lambert moved that the minutes from the October 20, 2018 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as submitted by staff. Ms. Weberg seconded and the motion carried.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – *Tom Smith, Deputy Director for Operations*

Mr. Smith reviewed two karst related bills introduced in the General Assembly.

Senate Bill 1479 would give localities the authority to develop karst related ordinances for their community. Mr. Smith noted that the bill would be considered in committee on the following Tuesday.

Dr. Doctor observed that it was important to educate the public regarding karst and why it needed to be protected.

DCR (Department of Conservation and Recreation) staff will update the Board at the next meeting.

House Bill 2761 would have amended the “Cave Protection Act” to be the “Cave and Karst Protection Act.” This bill was stricken from the docket and the Committee Chair will write a letter to the DCR Director asking the Agency to work with interested parties to develop a new proposal for next year.

Mr. Smith noted that the bill could be introduced in the next General Assembly session.

Budget Amendments to SB1100

This budget amendment would add approximately a quarter million annually in support of DCR staff addressing karst issues.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE – *Karst Area Protection Manager*

Mr. Orndorff gave the following report.

2019 is an odd numbered year, which means that DCR is working collaboratively with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to perform hibernacula counts on approximately thirty Virginia Caves where Indiana and/or Virginia Big-eared bats roost. Both species were listed as federally endangered prior to the arrival of White Nose Syndrome in the state in 2009. Virginia big-eared bat numbers appear to be down in Virginia, although they are up in the northern part of the range. This reduction does not appear to be due to White Nose Syndrome, but rather is part of a long term trend that may be attributable to movement of bats to inaccessible parts of the hibernacula (apparent decline), movement to other hibernacula, or an actual reduction in population for unknown reasons. Tricolored and little brown bats, both decimated by WNS, continue to persist at post-epidemic levels, while Indiana bats appear to be on a slow, continued decline. Northern long-eared bats, listed as threatened in 2014 due to WNS-related declines, are essentially absent from Virginia caves. Eastern small-footed and big brown bats appear to

be essentially unaffected by the disease in Virginia, as do gray bats which exist in Virginia in only the extreme southwestern portions of the state.

DCR staff Wil Orndorff attended the 2019 Northeast Bat Working Group meeting in State College, PA on January 16-18. Conference highlights included a talk demonstrating Evolutionary Rescue in little brown bats in New York and New England, increased little brown bat recruitment (reproduction) in the same area, and talks on the persistence of success of northern long-eared bats outside of karst areas. A presentation on a collaborative project between DCR, DGIF, Radford University, Virginia Tech, and VDOT was delivered by Dr. Karen Powers of Radford, summarizing complex activity patterns at gray bat roosts and on the landscape across the upper Tennessee River basin in extreme southwestern Virginia.

DCR staff continues to focus on biological inventory and data quality assurance/quality control for significant caves and caves with significant bio in counties within the New River watershed. This project, funded by the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, is the first of a five year project to dramatically improved the quality of cave and karst data across western Virginia to support better conservation decision making and prioritize cave and karst protection efforts.

Staff supported legislative efforts to expand the Virginia Cave Protection Act and to grant localities increased authority to regulate karst issues.

Staff provided technical expertise at a meeting between Virginia DEQ, Mountain Valley Natural Gas Transmission Pipeline and its consultant Draper Aden, and Linda Sink of Blacksburg. A spring owned by Sink has been impacted multiple time with sediment contamination since construction on the pipeline began in the spring's recharge area in May, 2018. Sink owns a second spring that is used as a domestic and agricultural water supply for four properties, and is concerned that this spring may be contaminated by the pipeline as well. DCR demonstrated the connections of the pipeline corridor to the springs by dye trace investigations performed prior to and during pipeline construction.

DCR is providing technical support to stakeholders in Bath County's Little Valley, where consultants from Terracon are performing dye trace studies on behalf of Dominion Energy Transmission to determine potential areas of impact from the Atlantic Coast Natural Gas Transmission pipeline, slated to go through the area.

DCR staff is pursuing a contract with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to continue and expand DCR's work studying Gray bat use of the Upper Tennessee River watershed in Virginia. Staff is also working with the Service to evaluate the conservation status of seventeen rare cave beetle species in Virginia, part of a multi-species listing petition filed by the Center for Biodiversity several years ago.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

The Nature Conservancy – Steve Lindeman

Mr. Lindeman reported that TNC would be submitting an application for an EPA brownfield cleanup grant for the Russell Sawmill property located in Lee County in preparation for transferring the property to DCR.

DCR – Rob Evans

The Mountain Valley Pipeline gave \$15 million to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation for competitive grant applications. The 1st grant round amount of \$3.6 million was based on the amount of land clearing to-date. DCR received \$1.4 million for two different projects. The next grant round has not yet been announced.

NEW BUSINESS

Election of Officers

The following slate of officers was recommended:

- Dan Doctor, Chairman
- Steve Lindeman, Vice Chairman
- Marian McConnell, Recording Secretary

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Weberg moved the approval and election of the slate of officers as presented. Mr. Graves seconded and the motion carried.

Dr. Doctor assumed the chair.

Karst Training for DEQ Staff

Dr. Doctor noted that the training specialist from DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) had been invited to the meeting but was unable to attend. He suggested that further discussion with DEQ regarding karst issues would be beneficial.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter – Meredith Weberg

Ms. Weberg indicated that it would be helpful to publish the next newsletter prior to Cave Week. The newsletter will focus on the work of John Holsinger. Dr. Doctor will draft a Chairman's message.

At the next meeting, the Board will discuss the need to clean up the mailing list.

Virginia Cave Week – Meredith Weberg

Virginia Cave Week will be moved to the first week of June to coincide with National Cave Day on June 6, 2019.

Virginia Cave Week will be June 2-8, 2019 and will focus on the legacy of John Holsinger.

Virginia Karst Trail and signage – Meredith Weberg

There are eleven (11) signs left available to be posted.

Ms. Weberg asked that, when signs are posted, members or staff take photos and forward them to her for inclusion on the Facebook page and elsewhere.

2019 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium – Wil Orndorff

The 2019 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium will be held October 7 - 11 in Bristol, VA. DCR and the Cave Board are both cosponsors. The website is up and running at sinkingcreekpottery.org. The meeting features cave and karst managers from across North America from both the public and private sectors, as well as academic professionals, students, and members of the caving community. A pre-conference field trip is planned for October 5-7.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline/Mountain Valley Pipeline

Mr. Denton reported that the ACP is currently shut down due to a decision by the 4th Circuit regarding an issue with the Forest Service and the Appalachian Trail.

Mr. Orndorff noted that the Mountain Valley Pipeline has installed about eight out of thirty miles of pipeline in karst areas. Work areas remain exposed Giles County. This pipeline project is also currently shut down pending court decisions.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Virginia Cave Board will be Saturday, April 20, 2019 in the Staunton area.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.