

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday May 11, 2024
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Henrico, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Cave Board took place at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 11, 2024, at the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources in Henrico, Virginia.

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Robert K. Denton, Jr., Chair
Dr. Daniel Doctor, Vice Chair
Jason H. Carter

John H.H. Graves
Austin Shanks
Meredith Hall Weberg

VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

John T. Haynes
Rick Lambert
Allen Louderback

Russell Kohrs
ONE VACANCY

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION (DCR) STAFF PRESENT

Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director
Michael Fletcher, Board Liaison
Anne Chazal, Chief Biologist
Paul Saunders, Policy and Planning Specialist
Penelope Vorster, Karst Field Technician

OTHERS PRESENT

Amy Edwards, Richmond Area Speleological Society
Margot Geisler, Richmond Area Speleological Society
Richard Geisler, Richmond Area Speleological Society
Billy Pickett, Richmond Area Speleological Society
John Tichenor, Richmond Area Speleological Society
Carol Tideman

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Denton called the meeting to order at 11:07 a.m.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Denton called for introductions and announcements.

Ms. Weberg reported that at the VAR (Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society) meeting she had offered a tip jar for donations toward bringing CaveSim to Virginia. She advised that a \$250 matching grant is available.

Dr. Doctor announced that the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will hold an educational workshop on karst on Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at Blue Ridge Community College. Dr. Doctor will be speaking. More information may be found at the following link:

<https://svswcd.org/karstmeeting/>

Ms. Weberg noted that this was the same day as the Virginia Cave Week event at Ogdens Cave.

Mr. Shank reported that the Town of Grottos will host the 2nd Annual Cave and Karst Expo at Grand Caverns Park on Saturday, June 8, from 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. This is during Virginia Cave Week. Partners include Bat Conservation & Rescue of Virginia, JMU Geology Department, Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, Virginia Cave Board, Virginia Museum of Natural History, Virginia Living Museum, Shenandoah National Park, and the National Natural Landmark Program.

Chairman Denton reported that the 4th Appalachian Karst Conference will be in Lewisburg, West Virginia, in November 2024.

TREASURER’S REPORT

Ms. Chazal presented the following financial information:

FY24 Beginning Cash Balance	<u>2,148</u>
Revenues	Amount
FY24 Revenues	<u>100</u>
Total Revenues	<u>100</u>
Expenses	Amount
FY 24 Expenses	<u>1,107</u>
Total Expenses	<u>1,107</u>
Total Cash Balance (as of March 31, 2024)	<u>1,141</u>

FY24 Revenues	100
<i>Donations</i>	100
FY24 Expenses	1,107
<i>Newsletter</i>	1,107
In escrow (not available to spend)	

Cave Board License Plates

1,480

Mr. Smith advised that the \$1,480 of Cave Board License Plate revenue does not reflect available funds. These are in held in escrow until the license plates are approved or canceled.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 3, 2024

Ms. Weberg moved that the minutes from the February 3, 2024, meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Graves seconded, and the motion carried.

DCR KARST PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Vorster presented the following:

DCR-Department of Natural Heritage (DNH) Summary for Virginia Cave Board Meeting 5/11/2024

- **Bat Counts:** During this quarter, bat hibernacula counts were performed at 39 individual locations including 38 caves and the Bristol culvert. The results are a mixed bag. Some caves surveyed showed increased counts of certain species and not others, some showed decreased numbers, and a few held relatively steady. We were lucky to work with Rick Reynolds of Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), Karen Powers and some of her students at Radford University, Chad Harrold of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and USFS interns, as well as a number of other volunteers.
- **USFS work:** DCR-DNH continues to collaborate with the USFS on several projects. We have been performing site assessments involving ridgewalking karst areas on USFS-managed lands. DNH Karst Program is involved in surveying and producing maps for the Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS) database and for USFS use. We are in the process of drafting maps for three caves found and surveyed on the Mt. Rogers Rangers District. Our team was joined for some of the winter bat counts in USFS caves by the Region 8 Cave & Karst/Geologic Hazard Program lead, Chad Harrold.
- **Bat Call Data Recorders (BCDR):** This summer season, we deployed BCDR loggers at 9 sites and have 12 loggers out in the field currently. We plan to place one additional logger at Hupmans Cave once the landowner if finished with his hunting activities on the property. Something worth mentioning is that this is a change from past years. Previously we have just used these loggers in SW Virginia to look at Gray bat sites. This year we have expanded to both Gray sites and Little Brown bat sites. We are not certain how well they will work at the Little Brown sites, so this is going to be a test year for those.
- **Groundwater isopods of Virginia event and field work:** April 23–27, members of the DCR-DNH Karst Program and the Southwest Stewardship Region were joined by Dr. Jerry Lewis and Salisa Lewis, principal investigators of the monograph *The Groundwater Isopods of Virginia (Isopoda: Asellidae and Cirolanidae)*, recently published by the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH). Co-author Dr. Florian Malard, whose molecular genetics lab at the Université de Lyon in France, has worked extensively with isopod specimens collected by Lewis and the Karst Program, was present as well thanks to the generous support of the Cave Conservancy of the

Virginias (CCV). The week's fieldwork included isopod specimen collection in Lee County springs and caves, and investigation of invertebrates dwelling in the hyporheic zone of the Powell River. During the week Natural Heritage staff interfaced with stakeholders from several other agencies and organizations. On Wednesday, we were joined by members of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on our visits to Thompson Cedar Cave and Flanary Bridge Spring, both on the Cedars Natural Area Preserve. Wednesday evening, Jerry Lewis gave a presentation to a well-attended meeting of the Friends of the Cedars volunteer stewardship committee in Jonesville, VA. The Lewis and Malard visit culminated on Friday evening with an event hosted by VMNH to celebrate the publication of the team's groundbreaking monograph. Jerry spoke at the event, which was attended by five of the eight authors—the three above mentioned as well as Wil Orndorff and Dr. Zenah Orndorff. Current and former DCR staff enjoyed an evening with the authors, VMNH staff and board members, and representatives from CCV.

- **Easement reviews:** Natural Heritage Protection section has asked DNH Karst Program to review a handful of easements for karst resources. New River Land Trust has asked us to look at one property in Montgomery County that resulted in a field visit. During this visit, a new cave was documented and is potentially a new location for *Pseudotremia cavernarum* (Ellett Valley Millipede). Recent fieldwork has also identified another potential landowner who may be interested in pursuing a conservation easement on her land that contains a cave with a known population of Ellett Valley Millipede.
- **Virginia State Parks Cave Safety Training:** On May 1st staff from the DCR Natural Heritage karst team and southwest stewardship worked together to provide basic cave safety training to state park staff. This is a great example of different DCR divisions working collaboratively to cross train employees. The training took place at Natural Tunnel State Park. New River Trail State Park and Natural Tunnel State Park offer guided wild caving tours. Twenty-one people attended including staff from both parks, three members of the Barren Springs Volunteer Fire Department, and students and faculty from UVA Wise who visit park caves for research. The effort was geared toward providing some basic preparedness to State Parks and local first responders who may be the first on the scene if an incident occurred. The morning was spent in the classroom discussing multiple topics including cave rescue procedures, common types of incidents, and ways to pre-plan for a more efficient response. In the afternoon, the class was split into two groups to visit some of the caves used for tours. Some potential hazards were identified and ways to mitigate them discussed. Students got to run through some basic scenarios in the caves and learn firsthand how to respond. State Park staff are now better equipped to handle an incident if one occurs and have a clearer path forward to develop safe and rewarding programming for visitors.
- **CaveSim in Virginia:** Zenah Orndorff, Meredith Weberg, and Carol Tideman have worked to bring CaveSim to Virginia from July 6–13 (approximately), the week after the NSS convention. Please discuss how the Board can be involved during the week at different locations across Virginia. Having the Cave Board display set up would be nice. This project was generously supported by a grant to VAR from the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias.
- **Mountain Valley Pipeline** is due to go into service within the next few weeks. No additional karst-related issues to report.

- **Cave Week:** Karst team staff and Cave Board members are hosting a Cave Week event at Ogdens Cave Natural Area Preserve (NAP) on Tuesday, June 4.
- **Virginia Stormwater Management Handbook:** Final (public) comments from VDCR Karst Program staff were submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on the 2024 *Virginia Stormwater Management Handbook*, after extensive review by agency (DCR) leadership. The handbook is due to take effect on 1 July 2024. DEQ staff advised Wil Orndorff that all comments will not be addressed by that time, and that the 1 July release will be the version sent for public comment. A version that fully addresses and/or incorporates comments and suggestions should be out by 1 January 2025. Please note that DEQ plans to have this as a living document (hosted online by enCodePlus) with regular updates so that guidance can keep pace with regulatory changes, technological advances, and edits made based on user feedback to increase clarity and remove any errors that managed to make it through the two-year long process.
- **The Appalachian Karst Symposium** will be held November 7–10 in Lewisburg, West Virginia, co-hosted by the Karst Waters Institute and the West Virginia Cave Conservancy. Cave Board participation is welcomed and encouraged, and sponsorship opportunities remain. For more information, see <https://karstwaters.org/conferences/appalachian-karst-symposium-2024/>. Registration is open.
- **Cave collection permits** as specified under the Virginia Cave Protection Act may now be applied for online at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/cave-collection-permit>.

Chairman Denton asked if DCR had been contacted by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) regarding the I-81 expansions near Dixie Caverns in Roanoke County. He noted that he was contacted as Chair of the Cave Board. He connected them with the Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS).

Ms. Chazal noted that she was not aware, but that she would check with DCR staff who cover that region and who do karst reviews. She noted that VDOT routinely submits projects to DCR for review.

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

Ms. Chazal presented the following report from Rob Evans.

There are no significant cave and karst related protection activities completed since the last meeting.

Two related items:

- (1) Cave Board was previously aware of DCR interest in parcel adjacent to Mill Creek NAP (aka The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Blake Preserve). At that juncture, the parcel was actively for sale, but owners' asking price was higher than DCR and partners believed could be supported by appraisals. One of the Board members (Graves if I recall correctly), reached out for more information & Evans provide a verbal update. More recently, this parcel was listed by another realtor and the parcel sold.
- (2) The former owner of the Blake Preserve, who donated the tract to TNC passed away at 102 years of age. For more information contact Rob Evans.

NEW BUSINESS

2024 Stormwater Management Handbook (VDEQ) – comments submitted

Chairman Denton advised that he and Mr. Orndorf had been members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) during the development of the new handbook. He noted that the handbook covers stormwater management as well as erosion and sediment control.

For the first time, there will be a karst appendix included in the handbook. Karst is also addressed in the best management practices (BMP) section. The handbook was drafted in 2013 but was never approved and finalized. The new karst section includes updated photos and information.

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will offer training based on the current released version. The final version will be released on July 1. Between July 1 and December 31, a second version with comments received will be edited, with a final release date of January 2025.

Chairman Denton noted that a great compliment to the board was the fact that the guidelines the Board wrote were incorporated into the new ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) “Standard Practices for Karst Surveys for Development.”

Dr. Doctor noted that at the February meeting Matt Heller, Virginia Department of Energy was present. Mr. Heller developed the 2023 map of carbonite formations in Virginia. He noted that the map did not make it into the handbook.

Chairman Denton noted that the final version released in January 2025 will contain the map.

OLD BUSINESS

Virginia Cave Owners’ Newsletter

Ms. Weberg expressed appreciation to all who wrote articles for the newsletter.

Ms. Chazal confirmed that the newsletter had been mailed.

Ms. Weberg reported that, based on an item in the 2023 newsletter, she was contacted by a landowner in Bland County regarding assistance with cleaning out a sinkhole. Arrangements were made and earlier in April the sinkhole was cleared. The landowner was very happy with the results.

Ms. Chazal asked about the maintenance of the mailing list for the newsletter. She noted that DCR does not keep the list but does receive the newsletters that are returned due to bad addresses. She asked how DCR might work with VSS to update the list.

Ms. Tideman advised that she would work with Ms. Chazal to obtain the list from VSS. DCR will contact VSS once annually and provide a list of addresses that were bounced back.

Dr. Doctor noted that the digital version was not yet on the DCR website. Ms. Chazal agreed to address that.

Virginia Cave Week

Ms. Weberg reported that Virginia Cave Week will be held June 2–8, 2024. She will be sending the webmaster a list of events for the vacaveweek.com website.

There will be an open house at Ogdens Cave NAP on June 4. Volunteers are needed to help with the event. Ms. Weberg contacted those who participated in 2023. About 45 people have signed up. The event is limited to 75 members of the public.

Luray Caverns will assist in promoting Cave Week.

The Grand Caverns event will be during Cave Week on June 8. Mr. Shank noted that about 400 people attended the first event in 2023. About 20 educational partners are participating.

At this time the Board recessed for lunch.

Mountain Valley Pipeline

Ms. Vorster reported that the Mountain Valley Pipeline is scheduled to be in operation in a few weeks. There have been no new karst issues to report related to the MVP. The sedimentation issues in the Giles County streams have been resolved.

Ms. Tiderman noted that there was an incident involving pressure testing of the pipeline near Bent Mountain where the pipes burst.

Ms. Weberg asked when appointments would be made and when there would be more women appointed to the Cave Board. She noted that two were nominated and only Mr. Shanks was appointed.

Chairman Denton advised that he had written the Secretary of the Commonwealth on several occasions. He read his most recent communication and asked that the text be recorded in the minutes.

Dear Secretary Gee,

Once again I'm writing to you in regards to the Cave Board applications of Andrea Futrell and Carol Tiderman. We are having our meeting this Saturday (5/11/24) at the Department of Wildlife Resources in Henrico, VA, and I'd like to be able to give a status update to the board regarding these lagging appointments. FYI, we barely made our quorum for the upcoming meeting, and currently still have a vacancy open. As of this July we will have a second vacancy because Daniel Doctor will be vacating his board position.

I need to be able to tell the VCB members what the status of these appointments is, because I know I'll be asked about it. Both Carol and Andrea were vetted and approved by the board to submit their applications. It is also my understanding that Carol Tiderman served some years ago on the VCB. We currently only have one woman serving on the board, and there has been

some grumbling not only about the fact that we need more women to be represented, but that Austin Shank was approved and Carol and Andrea were not.

I would appreciate if you would let me know prior to our meeting this Saturday if Carol and Andrea were accepted, were rejected, or if their applications are still under review. I would hate to go to this meeting and have to tell the board "...the governor's office has yet to update us on Carol's and Andrea's applications", especially considering their applications have languished since the Autumn of 2022.

Sincerely,
Bob Denton
Chairperson, VCB

Mr. Smith reported that he had spoken with the Assistant Secretary who handles appointments. She apologized and noted it was their intention to have the appointments made. They will be made shortly. He noted that they are making appointments for over 300 boards. He advised that he did not know who the appointments will be.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

Chair Denton expressed appreciation to Amy Edwards for suggesting the meeting site, to Mike Fletcher for lunch, and to the guests who attended the meeting.

Ms. Weberg mentioned she had gotten the remaining "All Caves Are Protected" signs from former Chair David Ek. Mr. Graves offered to store these signs with the remaining Virginia Cave and Karst Trail brochures.

DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

Staff will poll the Board regarding dates for a fall meeting.

It was suggested that the Board meet at Melrose Caverns if available.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.