

Virginia Cave Board Meeting Minutes

Saturday, June 9, 2012

Vinton Firehouse, Vinton, Virginia

Virginia Cave Board (VCB) Members Present

Steve Lindeman
Judy Molnar
David Socky
Meredith Weberg

VCB Members Not Present

Babs Bodin
David Culver
Dan Doctor
Drew Harrison
John Holsinger
Tom Lera
Roger Kirchen (Ex officio member, Department of Historic Resources)

Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Staff

Larry Smith

Guests

Joey Fagan

Minutes

The meeting started officially at 1:08 p.m., called to order by Chairman Weberg. We did not have a quorum. We combined the committee meetings due to the low attendance.

Introductions and Announcements

Ms. Weberg thanked the many folks who helped with Virginia Cave Week 2012: Babs Bodin and Judy Molnar, contents; Dave Socky, Web site; Dave Socky and Meredith Weberg, photographs for Scavenger Hunt; Larry Smith, all-around help; and Julie Buchanan (DCR employee), press releases and advice. Ms. Weberg found out that the first Virginia Cave Week was October 16–22, 2000.

Larry Smith announced he, Wil Orndorff, Tom Smith, and Ryan Klopf took David A. Johnson, their agency director, on caving trips in Madison Saltpeter Cave, where they saw George Washington's signature, and to Ogden's Cave, where the director got the "full experience" of caving. This is the first time Mr. Smith (or Mr. Lindeman) remembers a DCR agency head taking such a hands-on interest in caving

Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes

With the exception of correcting the spelling of Rod Auwarter's name, we accepted the minutes from the February 11, 2012, VCB meeting.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Smith reported VCB has \$1,608 in its account, most of which is designated for the *Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter* (VCON). At least \$75 is from the annual Blue Ridge Grotto donation and may be used at the discretion of the Board. About half the money designated for VCON will be spent on printing and mailing the postcards. The rest will go toward printing VCONs for people who do not have email capability and request hard copies.

Committee Reports

Education and Outreach Committee

Ms. Weberg asked Judy Molnar to chair the Education and Outreach Committee. Ms. Molnar declined. Ms. Weberg remains chairman of the committee.

Ms. Molnar reported she had spoken with Lettie Stickley of Grand Caverns regarding Cave Week. Grand Caverns had no increase in business due to Cave Week nor anyone requesting Cave Week discounts. Grand Caverns did not post a sign, though staff did post it on the Facebook page and website; tourists had to know to ask for a Cave Week discount.

Mr. Fagan suggested show caves promote Cave Week by issuing Cave Week discounts that would be useable during other times of the year and could reference the VCB.

Mr. Smith announced that three environmental education employees are joining the Department of Conservation and Recreation at the end of June. He feels that we can call on them to help the Cave Board with education and outreach.

Online Survey Questions

We discussed at length the proposed VCB/*Virginia Cave Owners' Newsletter* online survey. Ms. Weberg will compile the changes and send to Julie Buchanan to incorporate. We discussed the VCB email address it contains and wondered whether the "tiny.url" is stable and long-term. Right now, the link on the survey goes to Mr. Smith's email address. Ms. Weberg questioned that. Mr. Socky volunteered to be the

point of contact where the link will send requests. Mr. Smith will do some research on how to make the link show “VirginiaCaveBoard@xxx” or something like that but go to Mr. Socky’s email account.

Ms. Molnar said she and Ms. Buchanan had questions as to the exact purpose of the survey: are we trying to get more cave owners’ information for the VCON or for the Virginia Speleological Society (VSS), which provided the mailing list database (consisting of public record information). A long discussion ensued and we decided that if any new cave(s)/cave owner information resulted, VCB would send a letter to the landowner asking permission to share the information with VSS. The survey states that no information will be shared with outside entities, so this process works within that.

Other Education

Mr. Lindeman asked whether VCB ever advertises itself. A discussion followed where we decided to look into getting a professional and portable display that could be set up for outdoor environmental events. The display would showcase what VCB’s mission is and be simple but informative. Mr. Fagan reminded us that the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias (CCV) and the Cave Conservancy Foundation (CCF) both might be able to help in the way of a grant for materials. Mr. Smith reminded us that we have Carol Zokaite of Virginia State Parks as a resource to use also. We might consider putting out a press release every few years too.

Ms. Weberg and Mr. Socky said they would ask caver-artist Marian McConnell to do the art for the proposed Virginia Cave and Karst Trail logo the committee designed. We need a good and simple logo so drivers at 65+ miles per hour will recognize it. We can use the logo on the VCB website and in the VCON and wherever we advertise the trail.

Technical Committee

Mr. Smith asked about the guidelines for karst area development mentioned in the February meeting minutes. Mr. Lindeman explained it was stalled for now because no work had been done between meetings. We talked about the need for “homework” action items. We discussed local planning commissions and educating them. Often the county engineer or administrator is a good one to educate - whoever is on the front lines of communication about karst-area development.

Mr. Fagan said that professional group conferences would be a good place for VCB to provide information about caves and karst resource protection issues. VCB should offer to host a cave- and karst-related forum at *Environment Virginia*, a major environmental symposium held at Virginia Military Institute each spring and attended by many environmental leaders and consultants. VCB should pursue hosting a karst-related "track" of presentations at a future conference to educate state government and environmental agency leaders about caves and karst and to promote VCB.

DCR Karst Program Update

The following was submitted via email on June 7, 2012, by Wil Orndorff, DCR Karst Program.

“Staff continues to work collaboratively with Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) to monitor impacts to Virginia’s cave-dwelling bats from white-nose syndrome (WNS). Work since the last VCB meeting focuses on assessing bat condition during

emergence from hibernation. Bat numbers were very low, but condition generally fair to good. Next good estimate of mortality will be ~ 1 April, 2013, after hibernation counts. Current work involves locating and monitoring maternity colonies of affected species, and mist netting for Northern long-eared bats to compare capture rates and conditions to pre-WNS sampling events. Gray bat summer colony work in August and September will be more important than ever, since for the first time Gray bats were reported this winter to have been verified as developing white-nose syndrome, although no mortality was reported. The degree to which WNS will affect Gray bats remains to be seen. The good news is that Gray bats have been exposed to *Geomyces* for at least three winters, and only this year have been observed developing WNS.

Chesapeake Bay Journal reporters and photographers spent a day in May with Dan Doctor of the USGS and Virginia Cave Board as well as Wil Orndorff of the Natural Heritage Program. The reporters suggest that there'll be a 4-6 page spread on karst and the environment in the July-August issue of the *Bay Journal*.

Staff completed an investigation of the potential impact to a domestic water supply well from a VDOT inert material dump in a nearby sinkhole. Dye tracing efforts revealed that the sinkhole in question was not connected to the contaminated well. There was no indication that the fill had produced any negative groundwater effects.

Karst protection coordinator Wil Orndorff will be presenting talks at the NSS Convention in Lewisburg, June 25-29, 2012. In the conservation session, Orndorff will discuss the status of Virginia's cave bats after four years with WNS, then serve on a discussion panel regarding WNS and cave and karst management. In the session on biological sampling, Orndorff will present a paper on minimally invasive techniques for monitoring populations of cave obligate invertebrates in streams. VCB member John Holsinger will be leading a workshop on the subterranean amphipod genus *Stygobromus*, a common denizen of caves in the region. Dr. Holsinger is the world's foremost expert on *Stygobromus*.

Staff has worked in collaboration with cave board members Holsinger and Culver in completion of the manuscript "Invertebrate Cave Fauna of Virginia". The database has been finalized, and distribution maps drafted. Dr. Holsinger is now working on the species descriptions to accompany the distribution data.

Staff continues to work on habitat and population monitoring projects for two endangered isopod species – the Lee County cave isopod and the Madison Cave isopod.

Fifteen volunteers from Virginia Tech spent their spring break mapping and photodocumenting caves in Scott and Lee counties under the guidance of karst protection staff Orndorff and Bill Balfour. Over 7000 feet of cave passage was mapped, and a new generation of cavers was exposed to the extreme karst of the Virginia portion of the Upper Tennessee River basin."

Discussion followed on a variety of subjects regarding VCB and the Karst Program.

Mr. Fagan suggested we have a bat update on the VCB page. We discussed this at length. We decided to add a box link to the main VCB page (across from the current box link to Cave Week) that will say “Current WNS Info” and link to a new page. The new page would start with a short paragraph explaining why WNS is important and affecting Virginia’s bats and caves and it will have links to a variety of current WNS websites (Fish and Wildlife Service, NSS, DGIF, etc.). It will also have information specific to Virginia’s bats, which we will get from Mr. Orndorff’s reports and previous VCB minutes. (This is one of two new proposed web pages.)

We also discussed updating the VCB statement on WNS and caving in Virginia to include Lee County. We should discuss changes via email.

State and Project Underground Education Effort Update

The following report was submitted via email on June 6, 2012, by Carol Zokaite, Chief of Environmental Education, DCR Virginia State Parks.

“Here is some karst education information to share with the cave board. These are two big projects I have been working on. First is the BatsLIVE program. It is a set of national presentations through webinars that is now going to include Caves and Karst. The first webinars were pretty good.

DCR and State Parks are really helping with the caves and karst webinar since I will be spending a large amount of time on this late summer and fall. I will probably be asking for some help and advice from you guys. The webinar will be on Oct. 11. <http://batslive.pwnet.org/resource/webinars.php>

The Bat Flight webcast from Bracken Cave, in Texas, will be a great electronic field trip for folks of all ages. If you have not seen this bat flight it is spectacular. The webinar will be on Sept. 18 and hosted by BCI. <http://batslive.pwnet.org/webcast/index.php>

Next – National Project Underground is helping with the citizen’s education day at convention, Sat. June 23. It will be fun and targets the folks living in karst topography. We are including Alleghany, Bath and Highland County folks from Virginia in the targeted audience. We have been hosting a few karst talks in Alleghany County to attract participation in the Convention citizens’ day. I attached the flyer to this email. <http://nss2012.com/a-day-for-discovering-the-underground>

I am also still participating on the National WNS Communication Team, as the representative from DCR. Recently the committee activity has been helping with the above education programs.

Please keep including me on education email discussions. It is nice to see what the cave board is working on.”

Update on Board Appointments

Mr. Smith reported that the Secretary of Administration had requested names and resumes for individuals to be considered for Cave Board appointments. Bob Denton’s and Rick Lambert’s names and resumes were submitted. After some discussion, we decided to ask Marian McConnell if she would be interested. We also asked Mr. Fagan, who agreed to consider submitting his application for a possible future appointment to the Board by the Governor. Mr. Socky volunteered to ask Bill Keith, a former VCB chairman, if he would be interested in serving on the Board.

Old Business

Cave Owners' Newsletter and Mailing

This topic was covered under committee reports and was not repeated since everyone was there.

Cave Owners' Newsletter Survey

This topic was covered under committee reports and was not repeated since everyone was there.

New Business

VCB Outreach on Cave Conservation and Recreational Caving by Noncavers

Ms. Weberg brought this up because of a request she had received from a grotto. She did some research in the old VCB files and discovered that VCB used to do a lot more outreach and education than it has done during her time on the board. Much discussion followed. We decided to add a link near the top of the page that says "Thinking of Caving in Virginia?" This would link to a new page with a short paragraph describing WNS and caving in Virginia, as well as grottos, the NSS, and the NSS Youth Group liaison. (This is one of two new proposed web pages.)

Use of Sinkholes as Fill Sites by the Virginia Department of Transportation

Mr. Orndorff brought this topic to VCB attention via email on June 7, 2012. (See attached document.) We discussed the question and realized we need to know what the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) current policy is on disposing of fill into sinkholes.

VCB Materials for Display at NSS Convention in June

Ms. Weberg will check with Carol Zokaite about materials for the 1-panel display that the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias (CCV) offered for our use. Mr. Smith brought a number of old printed Virginia Cave Owners Newsletters to distribute with the display and some brochures for the October 2012 Natural Areas Association conference in Norfolk. Suggestions to include on the display were the VCB mission statement and Tom Lera's article on VCB history that was in an *NSS News*. Ms. Weberg will gather material and put together the display at the Convention.

Public Comment Period and Announcements

Mr. Fagan reported that CCV and CCF will be sponsors of the 39th annual Natural Areas Conference, to be held October 9–12, 2012, in Norfolk.

Mr. Fagan reported the start of work on a dye tracing study for DCR in the Wolf Creek Basin in Giles County that seeks to better define the karst groundwater basin containing Alva Blankenship Cave and Blankenship Blowhole, as well as several associated springs.

We decided to conduct a "Doodle Poll" to determine the date of the next meeting. The three choices we agreed upon are October 27, November 3, and November 10. Mr. Smith will send out the poll and Ms. Weberg expects ALL VCB members to reply. There will be a

deadline for replies. The meeting will be held somewhere in Charlottesville and Mr. Smith will invite Ms. Buchanan of DCR and others from the education department to attend in order to meet early with the Education and Outreach Committee on things discussed today.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

Submitted by Meredith Weberg