

Colorado Cave Survey Projects

>>December Updates

>>>>Recent Updates

Minutes of the January 20th Meeting

Twenty Pound Tick - presentation by Justin Jones, CRVFO BLM

Justin Jones stated that the BLM had come to the decision to install a concrete and rebar closure of the illegal sump bypass of the Twenty Pound Tick, explaining three main reasons for their decision. First, he stressed that the BLM did not want to reward the behavior of illegal blasting as opposed to going through proper channels. Secondly, they want to minimize any further potential risk that the opening and publicizing of what they consider hazardous conditions of this passage. Thirdly, they would like to minimize any changes to the airflow for the cave environment which the bypass created. Justin also mentioned that this cave now has the Federal Significant Cave designation.

When questioned as to whether a gate installed would be an option, Justin replied that they had been quoted \$35,000 for gate installation for which they do not have a budget. Various covers did at this point volunteer their personal funds and time in putting in a future gate.

Steve Reames brought up the federal Wild and Scenic River designation and asked if the BLM and FS would then be co-managing the cave. Justin stated that the area is of "Critical Environmental Concern" with the BLM.

Justin also stated that the sump access will remain open and that the rebar and concrete closure might possibly be removed at some future point.

Carl Bern was apologetic and explained that his actions in opening the bypass were not intended as vandalism, but to create a safer alternative to diving the sump.

Hunter Klein asked if there have been any studies done to ensure that bats would not be excluded by the proposed gate. Justin responded that the cave has much too strong cold airflow to allow for bats. Paul Fowler reported that Dan Neubaum of the CPW had visited the site for bat survey and noted that not only was the site not a hibernaculum for any bat species, but that the airflow and thick willows at the entrance would make this an undesirable habitat.

Kevin Manley brought up that there were large discrepancies in the old and new maps and also read a letter from Ken Newton which explained that the bypass offered a much safer alternative to the dangerous sump dive.

Justin acknowledged these comments but was firm in the BLM's decision to close the bypass, reiterating his points above.

Rob McFarland asked if there is a current management plan for the cave and Justin's response was that it is yet to be determined. Further discussion with himself, Hilary Boyd, the BLM office's biologist and Larry Sandoval, BLM Field Manager would determine a management plan.

Justin closed his comments with an open invitation to cordially discuss these matters with him via email.

Regular meeting begins 7:15pm

USFS caves

MOU

CCS Chairs: Renewed with minimal changes. Expires 03/21/2026

Cave Closure Order

CCS Chairs: Renewed without notification or request for CCS input. Language regarding Exceptions has changed, again.

Biannual Meetings WRNF/CCS Initiated

CCS Chairs: Next meeting May, date TBA. Separate meetings added as indicated below. Recently adopted practice at the suggestion of the new WRNF Cave Lead Jared Pierce.

Blue O'Brennan explained that our MOU with the WRNF has been renewed through March 31/2026 and required twice yearly meetings with the CCS and Jared Pierce, the last meeting of which was in December 2020.

Exception Permits on WRNF

CCS Chairs: Exceptions requests for Spring and Groaning were submitted to WRNF on April 27th. We didn't hear back until September 7th and official approval took another week. Options for a better method of handling these will be discussed at the upcoming meeting. Several trips were requested by cavers, however, it is not known if any trips were successfully completed.

>>Planning underway to streamline the process. Including earlier CCS submission, faster USFS response time, and potential inclusion of additional caves.

>>Detection of WNS has been confirmed within the 250 mile radius. Cave access could be affected in the future.

In reference to the delay in processing the exemption permits, Blue explained that the Forest Service has requested that all yearly exemption permits be filed by April 30th with a response expected no later than July 31st of each year.

Fixin' cliff cave and karst conservation

Kristen Levy: Users now park on Coffee Pot Road and hike 1.87 miles to the cliff. Climbers have created a decent short cut just past Sheep Spring. Kristen, Lacie Jurado (FS) and Jeff Bosboom installed various signs and markers designating climbing areas. At the top of the Roybal's descent a sign was installed stating the agreed upon rules of the area. The same sign was posted at the bottom of the North Descent. Three different sets of No Climbing Zone signs were drilled and epoxied into areas that buffered caves. These signs had arrows pointing left or right creating a buffer around a cave. The CCS provided much education in regard to what constitutes a cave and what features should be protected. The FS finally determined that a 100-foot buffer zone was needed. The area is slowly returning to a more natural state. Not only caves would be protected in this area but all the unique and outstanding features of the area which can include hydrological, and botanical resources.

Rob McFarland: Still pushing for an explanation of the closure date of Wednesday being so radically different from Fixin' and why the climbers are not held accountable to the same seasonal closures.

>>Postponed topic for separate meeting with District personnel. TBA

Kristen Levy reported that the work with the Forest service and the Deep Creek Climbing Coalition is going well. The previously closed access road is now more permanently closed and there is a trail to the cliffs and signs now installed showing the no climbing buffer zones, but permanent signs are needed. Raptors have been observed and Kristen mentioned that at least some of the bolts inside Curtain cave have been removed. There was discussion as to why Wednesday Afternoon cave has radically different fall closure dates. This would be in the swarming period for bats,

but no conclusion as to why. It was mentioned that Fixin cave itself might need gating as there is much increased visitation at the cliffs. No further comments.

Hubbard's Cave

Rob McFarland: Proposed submitting an annual Exception letter with limited dates and purposes. Combination lock proposed for caver use modeled on Groaning access. >>Postponed topic for separate meeting with District personnel. TBA

>>>Does CCS want to manage access to Hubbards Cave?

Rob McFarland proposed that the CCS present the WRNF with a template for access management of Hubbard's Cave loosely modeled upon Groaning Cave with a proposed combination lock access.

Derek Bristol asked if the bat maternity/hibernaculum designation for the cave is currently legitimate.

Blue O'Brennan moves to set up a vote that CCS work with the WRNF to develop a cooperative management agreement. Voted and agreed upon.

Spring Cave

CCS Chairs: Vandalism reported to WRNF. Report ignored.

>>Vandalism reviewed, discussion of better access strategies and existing options. >>>Does CCS want to manage access to Spring Cave?

Combination lock requested for caver use modeled on Groaning access.

Ken Newton: Proposed T-Junction ladder project.

>>Project details unknown to meeting participants. Postponed topic for separate meeting. TBA

>>>Is this to be a CCS managed project? WRNF Partnership?

Blue O'Brennan brought up this cave as possibly needing more CCS involvement in management due to conservation concerns.

Rob McFarland noted that the cave experienced extensive vandalism last year including the discovery of both live and spent ammo and chiseling and in the lower section past the T junction ladder. He questioned the forest services level of involvement, noting that the cave is closed and gated for bat swarming and hibernaculum, but no plan to prevent vandalism.

Kay Cochran commented that the locals would not respond kindly to year round gating limiting access.

Ken Newton and the Timberline Grotto have reported removing old ropes and decaying ladder pieces and have brought up the possible replacement or re-securing of the T Junction ladder.

Rob asks that this project be clearly proposed to the WRNF as a grotto project or a CCS project to avoid confusion.

Chad Pedigo suggests that pulling the ladder would prevent some of the non-cover visitation that had led to vandalism, stating that the climbdown is feasible for most covers without the metal ladder .

Jim Lawton recommended year round gating and cave management for access.

Kristen Levy proposed that we continue to discuss this with the respective grottos.

Summer's End

CCS Chairs: Vandalism reported to CCS. Graffiti scratched into formations. Rob McFarland: suggested proposal for Significant Designation under FCRPA1988. >>Grotto input sought and discussion requested.

Rob McFarland reported that vandalism was noted at this cave and requested to nominate the cave for Significant Cave designation to increase its protection. This was generally supported by the reps and members at large and they supported Rob in his efforts.

Blue O'Brennan noted that cave locations would be protected by the FS in the same way they protect the locations of other significant resources; such as cultural artifacts. This information is not FOIA-able.

Sweetwater Cave

CCS Chairs: Information requested by WRNF, articles submitted by CCS on behalf of cavers or those with permission of original authors.

Request by CCS to be included in discussion of continued access to the cave after purchase and transfer is complete.

>>FS partnership w/CPW leaves management of the cave undecided. CCS will be consulted at an appropriate time.

>>Grotto input sought and discussion requested.

Rob McFarland noted that the partnership between WRNF and CPW leaves the management for the caves in question. A plan is in progress between the WRNF and CPW and they will reach out at some point in the future. Blue moved to table the discussion for now.

Hanging Lake Dye Trace

Rob McFarland: Request for information by WRNF, information submitted by CCS from individual cavers with area specific knowledge. No cave locations were discussed as none are known to be active insurgences. Kick-off meeting attended by CCS rep. Hired contractor was dismissive of caver input while expressing the value of such input. As part of the discussion with WRNF, CCS requested better access for cavers, to continue discovery, study, and exploration of cave features. No reply has been received. >>Weekly pick ups continued until Early November. To date, Ozark labs has not detected dye in any of the traps. Dye was not placed in areas recommended by Jim Baichtal (USFS) and Colorado Cavers due to no active water in these areas.

>>>FS requested a written proposal from CCS for increased caver access of target areas related to this project.

>>>>FS: see if anyone is interested in volunteering to help Dave Woods (Ozark Underground Labs) gain access to the upper portions of East Deadhorse Creek (well above Spouting Rock) in efforts to expand dye drop points. This likely would be happening in the late May to early June time frame. Dave was specifically asking about technical rigging and rope equipment and expertise.

Rob McFarland reiterated his notes and reports from above and suggested that if they ask for cavers for assistance, that at the very least they should allow volunteers access beyond closures and allow for parking at the Hanging Lake trailhead rather than using the shuttle. CCS agreed to pursue and continue talks with Jared Pierce in regard to volunteers.

The following topics became part of a larger discussion on how to increase protections for USFS caves, prevent closures, and improve communication between WRNF and cavers. Significant time was given to address the need to abide by USFS policies restricting any sharing of information related to cave locations, respecting CCS and local cavers preservation efforts guided by similar traditions, and finding mutual ground to foster trust between our groups. These topics are of high priority for the WRNF and discussion is ongoing.

Karst Hazard Mapping

CCS Chairs: WRNF had USGS interns identifying karst regions with satellite LIDAR and ground survey to produce maps of hazards related to karst features for such uses as resource identification, firefighting, the upcoming forest health projects, among others. In a call over the summer, a FS resource advisor noted they had identified significant karst areas that didn't correspond to any named cave they were aware of. They offered to share their maps, but did not follow through. Rob spoke directly to one of the interns conducting the study; he is locating a lot of caves but does not have information to know what he has found. The permit system has given them a lot of names but no locations. This study is expected to continue across all WRNF lands.

>>CCS input has been requested.

>>>Protocols will need to be developed regarding the potential sharing of confidential information.

Rob explained that this Hazard mapping is part of the larger Forest Aspen Management plan and its intent is to protect karst areas. Hunter mentions that the LIDAR imagery is available publicly and Nick Viau clarified that their LIDAR has been linked with digital elevation modeling which likely not publicly available. Blue suggested that coordination with the FS would be best to protect these areas and noted that the CCS does not share any locations without a vote. It was generally agreed that there need be a clarification of any request.

Signification Cave Database

Rob McFarland: WRNF is currently amassing a database of cave names and attempting to decide which should be nominated for protections as a Significant Cave under FCRPA1988.

>>CCS input has been requested.

>>>Protocols will need to be developed regarding the potential sharing of confidential information.

Rob noted that the CCS can provide data for the Forest Service and assistance in site surveys and “proto”-scientific surveys. There was lots of discussion among reps and Chad suggested a proactive approach in disclosure for cave protection, Kristen stated the FS might have its own protocols. Blue noted that any plan that means less work for the FS would be received positively. Kevin suggested that all caves found be

designated Significant and might be later modified as more significant based on his experiences with the Lincoln National Forest. Stuart Marlatt agreed that a solid plan would be good to have. There was continued discussion as to how we should let the FS know of significant karst areas or locations.

Forest Wide Aspen Management

WRNF will “Broadcast burn impacts to karst features.”

>>WRNF would like to address concerns raised by cavers during the Public Comment Period. CCS input has been requested.

>>>Protocols will need to be developed regarding the potential sharing of confidential information.

See above discussion.

BLM Caves

Twenty Pound Tick

Rob McFarland: The BLM has decided the bypass will be permanently closed. CCS has made several attempts to find an amicable solution to allow the bypass to remain, including installing an environmental barrier, lockable gate, and assisting to draft a management plan. However, the BLM considers the bypass to be a dangerous liability resulting from an illegal act. They point to the widespread publication of materials related to the cave, including YouTube videos and the readily available location information, as further reasons for the closure. Another complication in the discussion stems from the bypass having been opened by previous CCS chairpersons; raising questions about the more than twenty year relationship the BLM has shared with the CCS. We’re hopeful to repair the relationship with the new Recreation Planner in the CRVFO. Thankfully, the BLM seems to have abandoned their plan to collapse the entire entrance. The BLM has stated this work has not been completed, yet.

>>Expected to be completed by Summer 2022. >>>BLM will be on hand at January meeting to discuss their plan and brief Q&A

See above notes.

Witch’s Pantry

Rob McFarland: BLM/CCS site visit was conducted. The cave was surveyed and inventoried. Has been designated as Significant under FCRPA1988. This designation does not overrule the Mining Act of 1872, so the cave’s future is in

question. No gate is planned. Caving is currently permitted however no digging is allowed without permit from the BLM due to the potential for paleontological study. It was suggested that further exploration would only be permissible after proper scientific excavation of the existing fill.

Paleontologists wanted...

Rob noted that a bat survey during the last year with Dan Neubaum of the CPW did not find any bats. Paleontologist needed for study of the cave to allow further exploration.

Cattleguard Cave

CCS Chairs: The cave's ownership into question and verification has been sought in conjunction with the BLM.

>>Cave has been confirmed to be on Private Land.

Steve Reames confirmed that the private landowner is Royal Elk Ranch with owners possibly in France and no response from polite inquiries through their ranch manager.

MOU

CCS Chairs: This year the BLM decided not to renew the MOU with the NSS, preferring state level agreements. The existing CCS MOU Expires 2021. This agreement mostly covers LaSunder Cave Management, which isn't expected to change. A continuation letter was signed. If a more broad MOU is developed it will include topics such as: Expense Reimbursement changes initiated by the BLM and communicated to CCS but not formalized will remain ON HOLD until July 2022, Significant Cave designation process, cave discovery notification, and digging protocols.

>>Rob McFarland: Met with BLM in Silt to update the existing agreement. BLM changed the reimbursement process, language added to include FCRPA adherence expected of cavers, added expected communication of Significant Cave discovery. Document is awaiting BLM signature, CCS signature to follow.

>>>No Vote. BLM responding to recent cave digging and restructure of spending rules.

MOU language was updated separating provisions of the MOU and LaSunder CMA. See above for details. LaSunder CMA renewed through 2026. Access to the closed

sections was agreed upon, however requires NEPA study to confirm. Back remains closed until further announcement.

Great Horned Owl Cave

>>Meeting and site visit conducted. Two more bats were found. BLM has arranged for a wildlife biologist visit. FCRPA1988 Significant designation has been confirmed.

>>BLM is asking for CCS guidance regarding management, access, and protection. >>>Nick Viau of CWSG has agreed to head the newly formed CCS Committee. Awaiting confirmation.

Rob noted that Significant Cave designation and management plan requested. Nick Viau volunteered to help work on this plan as the cave is unique as the largest gypsum cave with water and is near a residential area and has a non-gateable entrance. Blue made a motion to form a committee led by Nick Viau to work with the BLM on a management plan for Great Horned Owl Cave , voted upon and passed unanimously.

CCS-Managed Caves

LaSunder Cave (BLM)

Stuart Marlatt: Two trips, so far in 2021.

>>Robert McFarland: Agreement Renewal has been signed. Expires 12/2026. Received permission to proceed past the closure at C25 to photograph and evaluate the crawlway. Repost submitted to the BLM. Access changes discussed in previous meetings have been officially proposed. Approval pending BLM review.

>>>Changes proposed by Chair Kristen Levy in CCS meetings 2019/2020 and approved. >>>>BLM to begin NEPA process to consider.

Rob reported the details above and Stuart Marlatt reported that there had been only 2 trips there last year.

Fly and Marble Caves (Private)

Christine Kirkland & Talmage Trujillo: Three approved trips, so far. Two trips are pending. The previous access reports were lost in a server malfunction. Future access reports will be stored with the access coordinators and submitted annually.

The locks seem to be corroding and seizing faster than normal. We've had to replace them several times in the last two years.

We discussed digging the first inclined narrow passage in Fly because a lot of soil has sloughed into that channel. CCS approved the initiative but we never did it. It would be a bit of work and I still think it could be helpful. If I decide to recruit some volunteers, I'll make sure to report on how the project goes. There have been several map requests from a person named J. Butch David. Multiple attempts to contact him, however, none have been successful. The incident is peculiar, but probably harmless.

Groaning Cave (USFS WRNF)

CCS Chairs & Mary Klaus: The Groaning Access Agreement 1985 needs to be updated to reflect the current situation with the USFS. WRNF has been sent a first draft and the topic will be discussed at the next CCS/WRNF meeting. The Annual Access Report was previously published by volunteers not otherwise involved with access of the cave. This year, WRNF officials made the report a mandatory part of our continued access. In line with the responsibilities of other access coordinators these reports will now fall to the duties of the Groaning Access Coordinator. Thank you to Mary Klaus for graciously adding one more responsibility to her roster and eleven years of service to Colorado cavers. Cheers!

>>Agreement from 1985 will be updated to reflect current procedures and expectations of all parties involved.

>>WRNF personnel are working on the first draft based on CCS and FS input. >>Postponed topic for separate meeting with District personnel. TBA

>>>Discussion/Vote pending receipt of first draft form WRNF.

Blue stated the CCS's desire to update and modernize the plan to reflect current data and usage. Chad recommended that we use a consistent format for all the caves we manage.

Active Committee Reports

Deep Creek Stakeholders Group

Ken Newton: The stakeholders group has made some really good progress this year. >>Robert McFarland: My apologies to Ken, who submitted a detailed update that I have not had the time to read through and summarize for this list.

Ken will have an update by the end of 2022

Mid-Continent Quarry Proposal

Rick Rhinehart: Local groups are encouraging the BLM to make a faster decision now there is a new administration less favorable to the type of proposal.

Rick reports that the local groups would like to see progress under the current administration but it is quiet for now.

Clear Creek Canyon Project

Shannon Glazer: I am continuing to make trips to CJs twice a year to check temperature loggers and evaporimeters. There was an attempt at a break-in Dec 2020 but the door held and was not breached. A new gate for CJs is a possibility due to ongoing Sea-to Summit trail construction along Route 6.

Shannon reported as noted above.

Bat Working Groups

Mountain Prairie WNS Coordination Meetings/Region 6:

Jim Lawton: October meeting minutes received. Available on Request.

Colorado WNS Working Group

Paul Fowler: Next meeting scheduled for this winter. Date TBA.

Colorado Bat Working Group (CBWG)

Paul Fowler: Annual meeting minutes received. Available on Request.

Western Bat Working Group

Paul Fowler: April meeting minutes received. Available on Request.

Jim L. and Paul F. both noted that there have been very few meetings of the bats groups due to Covid-19 and the pause in working with bats and their habitats.

However, no WNS reported in any Colorado bats.

Other Concerns

Website

Registration and fees due in Spring 2022. The website is very much out of date and should be modernized. Volunteers needed.

>>Jack Utermoehl of CWSG is working with Paul Fowler to organize the content on the website. Modernization and SEO to benefit non-cavers looking for information has been suggested by the Vice-Chair. Input from the membership is sought.

>>>Further changes will be put to discussion/vote before action is taken.

Paul Fowler and Jack Utermoehl have made great improvements to the website, but asked for additional volunteers to help with the web design and layout to further improve the website.

Digital Media Policy

Reached out to the NSS for guidance. The NSS thought it was a good idea and even roped some more committee members into it, then they went silent. We heard from a handful of Grottos in the Spring, but never got feedback from everyone. In the case of Twenty Pound, digital media has negatively contributed to CCS current ability to effectively discuss cave management with land managers.

Chad Pedigo put forth some great ideas and offered to work on the policy further.

Elections

>>>The current Vice-Chair, Rob McFarland will be a candidate for the Chair position with Jennifer Zedalis joining as candidate for the Vice-Chair position.

Other tickets are welcome.

There was a call for candidates for Chair and Vice Chair for 2022 CCS positions. The above ticket was the only set of candidates. Vote was taken and the new CCS Chair was voted Rob McFarland and Vice Chair Jennifer Zedalis.

Next meeting is scheduled for May 2022, TBD.

The meeting was adjourned at nearing 10 pm. Thank you to all!!!