

CCS Meeting Minutes May 2022

May 12, 2022 - 7pm

Attendees: Rob McFarland, Ray Keeler, Jennifer Zedalis, Mike Frazier, Chad Pedigo, Jim Lawton, Kay Cochran, David Gnuse(proxy for Chris Carter), Rick Rhinehart, Kenny Headrick, Kristen Levy, Gerard G., Jon Schow, Kevin Manley, Paul Fowler, Micah Ball, Ben Smith

Agenda

Presentation by Ray Keeler and Discussion of the proposed working document, *WRNF Recommendations for Cave and Karst Management* .

Minutes

This evening's meeting began with Rob McFarland giving background on his meeting with Ray Keeler and learning of his work in Arizona and on creating cave and karst management documents with the local caving community and the regional national forests.


Rob then introduced Ray Keeler, who then gave a thorough and informative presentation on the history and details of his work creating their Recommendations for Cave and Karst management with 5 local Arizona forests, "Wouldn't it be nice if..." slideshow.

Some notes from his presentation include how this document:

- details the Laws, Codes of Federal Regulations and the Forest Service Manuals (written in response to the regulations).
- gives guidelines for how to protect and manage caves on federal land.
- gives a detailed process and forms for significant cave nomination.
- creates a secure system for file management, non - FOIA-able.
- describes the process for the evaluation and classification of caves on federal land.
- elaborates on the cave management levels and rating system of low, medium or high for the different significant features of each resource.
- Explains caving ethics and conservation methods.
- Details conservation tactics and protective buffer zones for timber harvest projects, prescribed burning and grazing activities .
- details guidelines for research activities.

Ray emphasized that this document does not mandate any sharing of cave locations , but allows cavers to share the information that they choose to, especially when they may see those caves threatened in some way.

Ray also pointed out that there is an important amendment to the 2021-2026 USFS-NSS MOU, on section IV. G which in effect allows the FS to provide FOIA exempt information to



volunteer caving organizations when such agreements are in place. This could be the federal information on the GIS layer and other LiDAR data. The 2021-2026 WNF-CCS MOU would need to be updated to include such “local Agreements”.

Mike Frazier asked if the cave information shared would be exempt from FOIA. Ray answers yes.

Micah Ball asked why we should disclose any cave locations if the cave was not threatened in any way. Rob responded that any disclosure is optional, however the FS has LiDAR mapping and interns in the field identifying “karst hazards” and other cave features for upcoming projects such as the Aspen Management and District Wildlife Habitat improvement program and others.

Ray spoke of a specific cave in the Apache- Sitgreaves forest which was threatened by an inholding development after being discovered by FS LiDAR , and with the management plan in place, they were able to protect and manage the cave successfully.

Kevin Manley liked the idea of the plan but was concerned that any action to classify or manage the cave would stall or not progress due to the FS’s lack of funding and /or manpower. He mentioned liking the sharing of information and better relationship with the Forest, but wanted to know more of who would be evaluating the cave and how long it would take.

Ray suggested that to establish a good working relationship, that the cavers could share better and more accurate information on a cave that the forest already knows about. In his example in Arizona, cavers came up with 15 caves yearly which to visit, inventory and monitor, and then share that updated info with the FS.

David Gnuse asked where to find the NSS USFS MOU update of section IV.G and asked about federal paper files of cave locations. Ray responded that much of the paper files were lost as a result of the federal paperwork reduction act, however new files are kept on the digital GIS layer. Ray commented that selective file sharing may happen as a relationship develops.


Kay Cochran asked about the relationship with BLM in regards to cave management.

Ray stated that in region 4, Doug Powell is also working on a similarly adapted document for Utah/Nevada.

Chad Pedigo commented that the document would be great for communication and for building a relationship where the FS values the cavers and their work and contributions. He expressed his gratitude.

Ray mentioned the importance of continued monitoring of the bats as WNS threats continue.

Ray also suggested contacting Geri Moni for good resolution LiDAR publicly available.



Kevin M. noted that attempts to use FOIA on the forest service to get information could be painful and unpleasant for the forest service. Better to have a working sharing relationship.

Rob spoke on the current major successes of the WRNF/CCS relationship in regards to the possible reevaluations of closed caves, the Hanging lake dye trace project and Lime park Aspen management and wildlife improvement project.

Ray also mentioned that there is a need for volunteer cavers to identify and inventory caves on the Caribou National forest in SE Idaho. Please contact Ray Keeler if interested.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10pm