

## **CCS Fall 2023 Meeting Minutes 2023-11-15 7-9:30pm**

### **Attendees:**

+1 303-\*\*\*-\*\*03, +1 303-\*\*\*-\*\*78, Benjamin Smith, Chad Pedigo, Chris Carter, Rob McFarland, Colorado Western Slope Grotto, Dan Sullivan, David Gnuse, Derek Bristol, Donald Davis, Hunter Klein, Jeff Goben, Jennifer Zedalis, Jesse Rochette, Kay Cochran, Karla Mayne, Ken Headrick, Kevin Manley, Kristen Levy, Mark Garnick, Micah Ball, Micah Bean, Paul Fowler, Paul Slayback, Jim Lawton, Steve Reames, Stuart Marlatt, Tristan Stahl, Wilson, Rebecca Schifanelli, Duncan Byrne.

Note: Transcript of meeting available upon request.

### **USFS caves**

#### **Biannual CCS/WRNF Coordination Call**

CCS Chairs: WRNF has hired the new Cave and Karst Resources Manager, Alex Lyles. Fall 2023 meeting minutes are available. Please contact the Chairs to request a copy. Next meeting: Jan/Feb 2024

#### **Recommendations For Cave and Karst Management**

CCS Chairs: Version 4 is available for review. The book is now being hosted by CWSG, whose membership have volunteered to lead development of Version 5. Any persons interested in helping please contact CWSG.

- Old business of the vote of whether to cease or continue CCS development of the Recommendations document was taken: 8 votes to cease/6 votes to continue. Motion to cease CCS development of the Recommendation document passed.

#### **Exception Permits**

CCS Chairs: Exception Requests for Spring and Groaning were received and distributed to interested parties. Reminder to submit trip reports and bat observations by December 15th to WRNF.

- Brief discussion about the Exception request process was had and all favored the current process. 2024 Exception request will be submitted to WRNF by April 2024, with expected response by July 31, 2024.

#### **Fixin' Cliff, Lime Creek, and Hadley Point Conservation Issues**

CCS Chairs: WRNF has indicated they are working on a Forest Wide response to the situation. CCS continues to stress the importance of habitat conservation and resource protection as WRNF considers any new response. (Editor's note: The Recommendations for Cave and Karst Management book offers a caver-focused framework for developing cave protection measures and for ensuring continued access.)

Kristen Levy (NCG): A 09/20/23 visit by FS personnel to the Fixin cliffs accomplished: replace damaged/failing “No Climbing Zone” signs, install new signs at the top of both main down climbs (Roybal’s and climber’s) and at the beginning of the amphitheater, and to monitor the area and determine future signage and management needs. WRNF has finalized the new MOU with the Access Fund and CCS for 2024, and intends to remove hardware, hangers and bolts from the no climbing zones and to install new signage next season.

- Many thanks were expressed to Kristen Levy for all her hard work in getting this accomplished.
- Paul Fowler added the URL for the new MOU between WRNF, CCS, and the Access Fund to the CCS website:

[https://coloradocavesurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/24MU11021500005\\_Access-Fund\\_CO-Cave-Survey\\_Deep-Creek\\_Executed.pdf](https://coloradocavesurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/24MU11021500005_Access-Fund_CO-Cave-Survey_Deep-Creek_Executed.pdf)

- There was general discussion as how to best prevent cave and karst resource damage at other popular climbing sites such as Lime Creek, Spring Cave and Hadley Point
- Jim Lawton suggested reaching out to Jeremy Seimers for bat conservation materials and possibly posting at climbing gyms.
- Kevin Manley suggested that a statement to the climbing community from the Access Fund might help.
- Jennifer Zedalis noted that Rob Schorr heads a group called Climbers for bats at <https://climbersforbats.colostate.edu/> and may be of help.
- Hunter Klein suggested the resources already made for educating about caves at NCKRI <https://nckri.org/>
- Jesse Rochette also offered his assistance.
- Micah Ball spoke to the importance of educating the climbing community about cave resource conservation through media efforts.
- Hunter K. suggested extreme caution with media efforts as it may be seen as polarizing and induce more cave closures adding that the whole point of limiting climber’s cave resource abuse is to limit the spread of white nose.
- Kristen Levy offered to reach out to Eric Murdoch of the Access Fund.
- Rob M. stated that the CCS has been encouraging the WRNF for a forest wide response to climber-caused cave resource damage and has been presenting this issue as a more of a conservation issue than a climber vs caver issue, that cavers are not against bolting, but are against cave abuse and the potential of climbers accidentally spread white nose syndrome.

### **Groaning Cave**

CCS Chairs: CCS submitted the updated Groaning Cave Management Agreement (available on request) in Fall of 2022. WRNF is beginning a review and CCS hopes to have feedback by late December. This agreement merely recognizes CCS cooperative role in management of access to the cave and updates the language for current practices and conditions. One major update is to change the trip leader age requirement from 21 to 18 years old.

- Rob M. asked Jeff G and Chris C if they could contact Mark Klaus so that she could provide the yearly lock combinations to the WRNF per their request and to remind her to submit the annual report.

- General discussion was had on the repair or replacement of the rusty torn culvert at the gate.
- Rob M. stated that WRNF should fund the repair or replacement. Further discussion revealed that the culvert is not part of the locking gate door and could be replaced with steel or sewer grade plastic. If the culvert is removed, Stuartt M. expressed that the concrete would be exposed and subject to potential vandalism or damage.

### **Spring Cave**

CCS Chairs: No update since the last CCS meeting.

### **Boom & Boom Boom Pits**

CCS Chairs: WRNF is interested in re-activating two gravel quarries along FSR600 Coffeepot Rd. They have asked cavers for information regarding sensitive features in the area. CCS met with WRNF at the Supervisor's Office to discuss the proposal and the Recommendations Book was referenced by both parties to discuss appropriate buffers for sensitive features.

- Rob M. explained the Boom quarry reactivation project and asked if anybody on this call knows of anything in those immediate areas that might need to be protected to either reach out to us or to Alex Lyles of WRNF.

### **Sweetwater Cave**

CCS Chairs: Access to the cave by NSS Members is permissible under the closure order via an exception permit. However, the process is more complex than usual due to stipulations made by the Ute tribes. CCS have asked WRNF to clarify what work may be allowed at the cave. No clear response has been received although Alex Lyles said he would reach out to the Heritage dept people for a more coherent explanation. Alex related that the FS is starting an EIS for Sweetwater and that there is no FS plan to gate the cave.

- Kay C. asked if there is a way to speak to the Ute tribes directly and Micah Ball offered to try and connect with the tribes as well.
- Rob M noted his lack of success attempting to contact the Ute Mtn Tribe.

### **Hanging Lake Dye Trace**

CCS Chairs: at the request of WRNF, we reviewed the full report from Ozark Labs and suggested edits to protect the cave resources mentioned. In response, WRNF requested that Ozark Labs submit a version of the report better suited to public consumption. No report has been made public as of yet. The new Cave and Karst Manager, Alex Lyles, is interested in borrowing a drill and would like volunteers to escort him to various sites to continue their study. Anyone who is interested in volunteering for that, please contact CCS or Alex Lyles directly.

### **Karst Hazard Mapping**

CCS Chairs: Status is an ongoing project related to the Hanging Lake Dye Tracing project. Please see Alex Lyles for more info.

### **Forest Wide Aspen Management**

CCS Chairs: The first prescribed burn for the Northern Lime Park occurred in mid-October. The Recommendations Book was again referenced by both parties to discuss appropriate buffers for sensitive features and avoid any cave resource impacts.

### **Significant Cave Database**

CCS Chairs: WRNF asked for a review of their proposed list of 121 caves to be considered for Significant designation. Our review was submitted with minor corrections of watershed. WRNF could not answer questions regarding changes in management and/or caver access, how the caves were evaluated, or where the names were sourced. CCS stressed the importance of transparency in the decision making process. Most of the caves can be found in Cave of CO (L. Parris 1973), The Caves of the Eastern White River Plateau (R. Rhinehart 1994), and the NSS 2011 Convention Guidebook (S. Reames 2011). Of the 121 listed caves, 41 were nominated for Significance by the FS in August 2023.

- General discussion was had on confidentiality of cave information and potential management guidelines for these caves.
- Rob M. explained that the FS doesn't know exactly what their management strategy or management goals are and we have an opportunity to help them develop these. Paul S. stated that CSMG is not giving any information about caves that we've already known. FS gives us Lidar data, we go out and help check those points and report exactly what we find from those trips, helping with their verification process.
- Jennifer Zedalis shared in the chat: From the updated USFS/NSS MOU: "... the FS shall: IV. G. Provide collected data (cave locations, inventories, etc.) compiled to the NSS to help with determining additional useful information needed, with the understanding to maintain the significant cave location confidential in accordance under Agreements executed between the NSS and individual Forests."
- Derek Bristol shared in the chat: Cavers have always considered all caves to be significant. It was the USFS that pushed to have this "significance" designation put in the FCRPA of 1988 because they didn't want to have to develop management plans for every hole in the ground. If White River wants to designate all of them as significant then that should be supported.
- Jennifer Z. related that in the fall meeting with WRNF, the FS was very concerned about the cave conservation in the Deep Creek area, and Alex L. was asking for any resource information to be shared from the Deep Creek area so that the forest service can protect that area from the overuse or degradation.
- More general discussion about what information could be shared to protect the caves already known to the FS in the Deep creek area.
- Chad P. stressed that communication is important for developing good working relationships with the FS for future access and management goals.
- Rob M. asked what is the most important thing that cavers would like to see from the FS.
- Kevin M. answered with access, clarified as also developing access for caves.
- Kristen L suggested access without the permit or registration system.
- Hunter K. suggested gaining access to closed caves by offering to do volunteer bat surveys or other helpful work.

- Chad P. stressed the importance of sharing trip reports with the FS to show continued responsible volunteer efforts by cavers.

### **WRNF and R2 Response to WNS positive in Colorado**

No update or changes in status. Region 2 and WRNF have been in Tier 1 (targeted openings) response since 2013. WRNF has repeatedly commented that they do not want to enact a full Tier 2 response (blanket closure) to positive WNS as they felt it would be ineffective. CCS continues to offer support and assistance in developing an appropriate response to the situation. Alex Lyles said in the fall meeting that he would like to have a public decontamination station made available.

- Rob M suggested that the WNS decon protocols be simplified to ensure better understanding and compliance.

### **MOU/CCSA**

CCS Chairs: WRNF has recognized the importance of amending the MOU with language facilitating the two-way sharing of information. The NSS-USFS National MOU contains provisions for these local agreements and will serve as a guide for any updates.

### **Additional topics from the floor**

- Hunter Klein shared that there is a new comment period for collection and sharing cave locations for the BLM nationwide:

[https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/11/13/2023-24859/agency-information-collection-activities-cave-management-cave-nominations-and-requests-for?fbclid=IwAR2evBWHGPunsVJKgigWXv7v2fC\\_gPB6VnnTMVvuITNWt2fU4LfbaJSobls](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/11/13/2023-24859/agency-information-collection-activities-cave-management-cave-nominations-and-requests-for?fbclid=IwAR2evBWHGPunsVJKgigWXv7v2fC_gPB6VnnTMVvuITNWt2fU4LfbaJSobls)

- Karla Mayne nominated herself for the president position and Tristan S. for vice president to be put on the ballot.
- Ballot nominations are open up until the vote at the January 2024 meeting.
- Chad P. announced that Timberline Grotto would like to open their annual grotto trip to Spring Cave to all for the first weekend of October under the exception permit requirements.

### **BLM Caves (discussion saved for next meeting due to time constraints)**

#### **LaSunder**

CCS Chairs: The updated CMA has been signed by the BLM and CCS. The rope has been replaced and trips to the back/upper section of the cave are allowed to proceed within the agreed limitations.

#### **Twenty Pound Tick**

CCS Chairs: BLM CRVFO has solicited bids to build a gate. Upon completion, the gate will be accessible to "Authorized Personnel Only". All other visitors to the cave will only be allowed via the sump. As of September 2023, work on the gate had not begun.

#### **Witch's Pantry**

CCS Chairs: The BLM has communicated concerns from the Ute Council regarding numerous published reports detailing the removal of bones from the cave. The Ute have suggested to the BLM that no further excavation should be permitted.

#### **Great Horned Owl**

CCS Chairs: Development continues in the area. Industrial trash has been found in the entrance sink. We contacted the BLM to begin removal and consider protections for the cave.

#### **Anvil Points**

CCS Chairs: The BLM has arranged Administrative Use access for cavers to pass through the scales at the GARCO Dump and access the normal parking area. The BLM has suggested identifying suitable access from BLM lands NW of the cave.

#### **MOU with BLM**

CCS Chairs: Citing the events at 20# and Witch's Pantry, the BLM has requested creating a more binding agreement to replace the existing MOU, which was originally part of the LaSunder Agreement. No further details have been discussed.

### **Private Caves (discussion saved for next meeting due to time constraints)**

#### **Fly and Marble Caves (Private)**

Christine Kirkland (SCMG) & Talmage Trujillo: No update since the last CCS meeting.

#### **Active Committee Reports**

Deep Creek Stakeholders Group

Ken Newton (TG): No update since the last CCS meeting.

Mid-Continent Quarry Proposal

Rick Rhinehart (FRG): No update since the last CCS meeting.

Clear Creek Canyon Project

Sharron Glazer (CG): No update since the last CCS meeting.

#### **Bat Working Groups**

Colorado Bat Working Group (CBWG): Paul Fowler (CDS): Fall 2023 meeting held November 8th. Meeting minutes available upon request.

Mountain Prairie WNS Coordination Meetings/Region 6: Jim Lawton (NCG): Meeting details available upon request.

Western Bat Working Group: Paul Fowler (CDS): Meeting held Fall of 2023.

January: Meeting TBA

