

CCS Meeting Minutes May 29, 2024

Attendees: Barbara Smith, Bill Duncan, Chad Pedigo (TG), Chloe Marshall, Chris Carter (CG), Dan Sullivan, David Gnuse, Donald Davis, Duncan Byrne CSMG), Hunter Klein, Jeff Goben (CG), Jennifer Zedalis, Jesse Rochette (SCMG), Ken Headrick (CWSG), Kenneth Newton, Kevin Manley (FRG), Kristen Levy (NCG), Micah Ball, Paul Fowler, Paul Slayback, Randy Macan, Richard Rhinehart, Rob McFarland, Steve Reames (TG), Tristan Stahl (FRG), Will Grandbois (CWSG)

A voting quorum (11/14) was present.

Note: Transcript of meeting available upon request.

USFS caves

CCS/WRNF Coordination Call

CCS Chairs: Jen Z. noted that the February and May 2024 WRNF meeting minutes are available on CCS website, the meetings are now quarterly or as needed and that Alex Lyles, the new Cave and karst Specialist at WRNF has been very wonderful to work with and open for communication. Next WRNF meeting: TBD details of the past meetings are discussed below.

Exception Permits

CCS Chairs: Exception Requests for Spring and Groaning were submitted to WRNF by April 2024, with an expected response by July 31, 2024. Exception trips are allowed under specific Exception permit rules from August 16-Oct 14, with trip reports and bat observations submitted by December 15th.

- Chad P. shared that the Timberline Grotto would be having their fall caving trip at Spring over the first weekend in October and that all are welcome to join. A possible dive push is planned for that trip.

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

CCS Chairs: Jen Z. related that Alex Lyles had requested the FS Recreational planning department to include verbiage about WNS decontamination protocols in cave sensitive climbing areas on the Mountain Project website and on other sites which also receive raptor closure notices to help educate climbers.

Kristen Levy (NCG): Kristen reports that we are still waiting on this season's efforts for site restoration. WRNF had previously finalized the MOU between the WRNF, CCS and the Access Fund 24-MU-11021500-005 for 2024 which stipulates that the climbing community must remove any unauthorized hardware. WRNF also intends to remove hardware/hangers/bolts from the no climbing zones and to install new signage in 2024 when the area is accessible. Site visits are planned for June with CCSA and July 2024 with Alex Lyles and Mike Beach of WRNF.

- Jen Z thanked Kristen L. for all her hard work. Kristen explained the need for removing the first few bolts to make the cave-impacted climbs less inviting and more inaccessible for climbers.
- Jesse R. asked if leaving the upper bolts would still provide an attractive invitation for some climbers to re-bolt and climb.
- Kristen L. replied that there is a plethora of signage that prohibits such climbing so climbers should be well informed.
- Kristen L. stressed that cavers should be included in discussions of any verbiage put on climbing sites describing WNS and cave conservation details before posting.
- Jen Z. mentioned that WRNF geo corps interns might be available for climber education outreach at certain sights over the season and also asked for site updates if anyone notes further degradation at climbing areas.

Groaning Cave

CCS Chairs: CCS submitted the updated Groaning Cave Management Agreement and is expected to have it signed very soon. This agreement recognizes the 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.

- Jen Z. explained that the FS would prefer no liability waivers for participants, however an updated Hazards disclosure form would still be filled out to provide a visitors trip leader database for the access coordinators. Forms are now updated to remove liability waiver.
- The WRNF is interested in repairing the rusted culvert at the gate although has no specific funding but a possible budget under \$2500 for all cave infrastructure maintenance. The CCS and volunteer cavers have offered to take measurements and photos to assist in the repair. A possible plastic sleeve may serve as a short term inexpensive solution and would not affect the integrity of the gate.
- WRNF has requested to be notified of the seasonal combo lock changes.
- The annual visitation report is due to be submitted by December 15th. The first trip of the 2024 season is requested to photograph the register logbook of 2023 visits so that Mary may create the annual report for last year.

Spring Cave

CCS Chairs: CCS chairs continue to ask WRNF about the planned management of this cave and if the climbing closure for the areas around Spring cave will be renewed after its expiration this year.

- WRNF is intending on replacing the second ladder in Spring cave with a sturdy aluminum one with a possible budget of under \$2500.
- Kevin M. asked if it would be sturdy enough to withstand floodwaters.
- Rob M. related that when he went to Spring previously with the FS ranger Curtis Keetch who mentioned that the Spring Cave gate was paid with surplus money from a mining lease in the district and that any upgrades might be funded from that.
- WRNF has Geo Corps interns hired for this season to provide outreach at Spring and Fulford caves. An intro trip for the interns is planned for early June at Fulford.

Boom & Boom Boom Pits

CCS Chairs: WRNF is interested in re-activating two gravel quarries along FSR600 Coffeepot Rd. FS has asked cavers for information regarding sensitive features in the area.

- This project is currently open for public comment at <https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/PinyonPublic/file/1524499830374> and a boots on the ground survey is planned for the second weekend in June in conjunction with the TG cave in.
- CCS can offer public comment as agreed upon. Additional comments are welcome.

Sweetwater Cave

CCS Chairs: Access to the cave by NSS Members is permissible under the closure order via an exception permit. Alex Lyles said he would reach out to the Heritage department for a more coherent explanation of terms of access. WRNF is working on a special management plan for this area including Sweetwater Indian Cave with no plans to gate the cave. We have asked WRNF to clarify what work may be allowed at the cave. Scientific and historical studies which involve no photographs of the pictographs may be allowed.

Hanging Lake Dye Trace

CCS Chairs: There is no funding this year for any further FS dye tracing projects and any cavers interested in volunteer dye tracing would require a special permit.

Forest Wide Aspen Management

CCS Chairs: The prescribed burn for the Northern Lime Park area occurred in mid-October, a 700 acre low intensity burn of grasses and shrubs. No further updates or future prescribed burns known in any cave areas.

Significant Cave Database

CCS Chairs: WRNF had previously asked for a review of their proposed list of 121 caves to be considered for Significant designation. This review was submitted with minor corrections. 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. Of the 121 originally considered, only 40 caves with (presumed) accurate location details were submitted for designation. It is unclear how this will change the management for these caves, if at all.

- WRNF has indicated that they would like all caves in the forest to be considered for Significant nomination.

WRNF and R2 Response to WNS positive in Colorado

CCS Chairs: Jen Z reports that there are no expected changes in access protocols. R2 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.

Karst Hazard Mapping

CCS Chairs: WRNF Alex Lyles, Cave and Karst Specialist, is working with the CSMG and Colorado Grotto under a new Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) to locate, document and protect caves in the Forest. Protection would be done by nominating caves as Significant with no known FS cave management plan as of yet. FS would like to protect the overlying footprint and hydrological basin of the cave and karst areas. See further details on the SPA below.

USFS/NSS MPA and WRNF/CG SPA

CCS Chairs: The USFS and the NSS have created a Master Participating Agreement (MPA) with language facilitating the two-way sharing of information. This is similar to previous MOUs and additionally includes cost share agreements for reimbursement of equipment, gas and food of the volunteers for Supplemental projects (SPAs) created under the MPA.

- The WRNF has now joined with Colorado Grotto (CG) and Colorado School of Mines Grotto (CSMG) in an initial Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) for a joint cave and karst survey and LiDAR verification work on the Plateau through 12/2028. Paul Slayback is the SPA Cave Expedition (SPACE) coordinator and will give a presentation on this project agreement at the end of the agenda.
- This SPA is an agreement with Colorado Grotto and trips must be led by a NSS/CG member and then reimbursement will be distributed through CG.

BLM Caves

LaSunder Cave

CCS Chairs: The updated LaSunder CMA was signed last year and trips are allowed to proceed within the agreed guidelines to the front and back of the cave.

Stuart Marlatt (CG): Stuart reports that there was only a single trip in 2023; Rob McFarland led a CCS/BLM administrative trip to acquaint BLM personnel with the cave and replace the fixed drop to the upper/back section. There were other trips planned late in 2023, but both canceled due to weather and prior to submitting permit requests. In 2024 there have been two trips so far; Rob McFarland led a CWSG group to the back section in April, and Rebecca Schifanelli led a CSM trip in May. Rebecca's permit was for the back section as well, but due to weather delays they cut their trip short and only visited the front section. Stuart is working on the 2022/2023 biannual report for the BLM.

Twenty Pound Tick

CCS Chairs: BLM CRVFO has a contract to build a gate. Upon completion, the gate will be accessible to "Authorized Personnel Only". All other visitation of the cave will only be allowed via the sump.

- As of May 2024, work on the gate had not begun. A water level monitoring device was noted in May above the 1st sump(?) and Jen Z. asked if anyone had knowledge of it. Steve Reames mentioned a water measurement device near the entrance from 10 yrs ago but it may not be the same one.

Witch's Pantry

CCS Chairs: BLM has communicated concerns from the Ute Council regarding published reports detailing the removal of bones from the cave. The Ute have suggested to the BLM that no further excavation should be permitted. No further updates or changes at the cave. (See the Mid Continent Quarry notes for more details).

Great Horned Owl Cave

CCS Chairs: Development continues in the area and trash has been found in the entrance sink. We contacted the BLM to begin removal and consider protections for the cave but no further action or updates noted.

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. No further updates.

MOU with BLM

CCS Chairs: Citing the events at 20 Pound Tick and Witch's Pantry, the BLM 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 but a meeting is expected later this year.

Private Caves

Fly and Marble Caves

Christine Kirkland (SCMG) & Talmage Trujillo: Christine explained that they are looking for suggestions to improve the process for determining trip leaders, such as time since last leading a trip and knowledge of site requirements. General discussion ensued as to requirements for trip leaders and a consensus was that:

- All trips must be led by a trip leader vetted and approved by the Cave Access Coordinators. All trip leaders must have visited the caves at least one trip previously in the past (10 years), and be familiar with navigating in the cave and with the stipulations for surface and site access, must be vouched for by another qualified trip leader, and must have a conversation with a Fly and Marble Cave Access Coordinator to ensure they understand and can follow the rules regarding access before being added to the trip leader list.

Any caver wishing to become a trip leader should contact the Cave Access Coordinators for further guidance.

Active Committee Reports

Deep Creek Stakeholders Group

Ken Newton (TG): Updates are being made on the Deep Creek process, specifically about the in-stream flow water development allowance, the mineral withdrawal for mining on properties near the rim, and the protective setback from the rim.

- Jen Z. Asked if cavers could help with outreach or attend group meetings, and Ken stated that he would reach out with the July meeting info and further details. The Deep Creek Stakeholder group meeting is TBD on the Flat Tops in July.

Mid-Continent Quarry Proposal

Rick Rhinehart (FRG): Mid-Continent Quarry at Glenwood Springs, federal and state agencies have shuttered much of the operations at the site while agencies review and issue determinations and recommendations.

- Rick reported that the BLM's "common variety" determination of the mine's limestone means that RMI will need to pay the federal government extraction fees for the limestone, including an escrow account that holds years of potential fees. Additionally the mine collapse on the north side last year has been a setback for the mining operations as safety would require a clearance beyond the mine footprint.

Clear Creek Canyon Project

Shannon Glazer (CG): Shannon reports that there have been no break-ins at CJ's since May of 2023. Construction continues in that area for the Sea to Summit trail along Rt 6. JeffCo still has possible plans for a Huccacove-style gate at CJ's entrance but no action as of yet.

Bat Working Groups

In March 2024, CPW confirmed two dead little brown bats were positive for WNS in Boulder and Longmont.

Colorado Bat Working Group (CBWG)

Paul Fowler: CBWG Fall 2023 meeting was held on November 8th and minutes are available upon request. Contact CCS for more info.

Mountain Prairie WNS Coordination Meetings/Region 6

Jim Lawton (NCG): Meeting notes are available upon request. Jim shared a report on the efforts to integrate data collected from a wildlife disease surveillance program and a population monitoring program through a joint spatial model to inform landscape conservation planning. Details at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13253-023-00593-8>

Western Bat Working Group

Paul Fowler: No update since the last CCS meeting.

Other Topics

Colorado Cave Trip Report Form

Chad Pedigo (TG/CCS) - Chad has created a simplified Colorado Cave Trip Report Form that can be optionally used as needed for any cavers wishing to document their trips. This form can be posted on the CCS website and linked on other grotto sites. Any ideas for improvements are welcome.

- Chad P. explained that the shortened trip report form would be optional and available for all with a QR code for quick download and fields available for photos and additional notes. He noted that any grotto or group may use the form and keep it confidential until deciding it to be shared and he also emphasized that these trip reports would show that even recreational trips could have the value of monitoring cave and biota conditions over time. Bill D. has been working on making the format improved and available. The CCS will not keep record of any Trip Reports. Colorado grottos can use the report and keep them as each grotto chooses.
- Jen Z. asked for an informal response for acceptance of this trip report form and it was positive for continued development.

CCS File Request (Rick Rhinehart)

Jen Z. shared a file request from Rick Rhinehart for accessing certain cave maps and photos of the requested Blair bench caves that would be intended to accompany one of his articles on Donald Davis's history of explorations in that area in 1969 and 70.

- Discussion of cave files requested was made and a majority vote was had to allow the files be dispersed to Rick with his received application of Confidentiality statement and agreement to withhold any location data in his publication.
- Kevin M. supported the approval of the file request and offered to waive the confidentiality for digital publication the article provided no location data be shared.
- Rick Rhinehart also inquired if the CCS would be willing to accept files from Jens Munthe's widow of his cave explorations and descriptions for archival records.

WNS Bat Research Grants

(per Mike McGrath-Regional WNS Coordinator)

- Jen Z. related that the US Fish and Wildlife Service White-nose Syndrome Program is now accepting applications for White-nose Syndrome Research for Conservation Grants. The funding opportunity announcement is available here:
<https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/354440>

CCS Website

Paul Fowler: Work is ongoing to improve organization and navigation. Volunteers and suggestions welcome.

Cave Survey Database

Stuart Marlatt (CG): No update since the last CCS meeting.

Presentation on the USFS/NSS MPA and WRNF/CG SPA

Paul Slayback (CSMG): The USFS and the NSS have created a Master Participating Agreement (MPA) with language facilitating the expected cooperative duties and two-way sharing of information. This is similar to a MOU but also includes cost share agreements for financial reimbursement of equipment, gas and food for Supplemental projects (SPAs) created under the MPA. WRNF has now joined with CG and CSMG in a Supplemental Participating Agreement or SPA for cave and karst location and survey using LiDAR data on the Plateau through 12/2028.

- Paul Slayback is the SPA-Cave Expedition coordinator and explained that the SPA is a pilot cost sharing program where the FS would compensate cavers for their volunteer time and resources and provide a recognition of value for these volunteer efforts through 2028. He stressed that it is not the SPA project participants giving out cave location information, or not funding for recreational caving, nor is it a management plan.
- Paul continued to explain that the CSMG is not set up as a school grotto to join in such an agreement, therefore they are working with CG to set up this prototype agreement, which would hopefully be scaled up for the inclusion of non CG members to lead in the future. Volunteer activities covered by the SPA would be to inventory cave locations and cave resources via LiDAR and ground truthing via ridgewalking, to reevaluate and monitor known cave resources, and to provide maintenance of cave infrastructure such as gates and monitoring equipment.
- Chad P. asked what is the participants specific goal with the SPA.
- Paul S. explained that on their first July project trip, with the co-leadership of Duncan Byrne, they are intending to resurvey the main travel route in Groaning Cave and to push the leads in the back of the cave, providing survey and cartographic assistance and sharing the data with the FS with the Colorado Grotto coordinating logistics and planning for project activities and providing volunteer expertise.
- Paul S. shared that the FS would reimburse the project participants for gas, equipment and food, and would also provide the White Owl FS cabin for accommodation. He noted that if volunteers log approximately 200 hours for federal agencies that they may receive a free federal parks pass.
- Jen Z. asked if, while ridgewalking or ground truthing LiDAR data for the FS while participating with this project, they come across a cave resource that was previously found and perhaps already surveyed and was protected by its obscure location, how would they proceed respectfully?
- Paul S. responded that they would ask around for previous maps and if that didn't work, they could map it themselves. He stressed that they have the discretion of whether to provide these volunteer activities or not.
- Jesse R. asked an ethical question of whether, with remote sensing technology becoming more sophisticated, would the goal be for the USFS to register and survey every cave on federal lands even if the original surveyors might not have or been able to turn over their surveys.

- Paul S. responded that the USFS may develop a more comprehensive database of caves without the assistance of cavers, yet by cavers providing assistance and expertise then cavers may be viewed as a valuable asset for future consultation.
- Jen Z. asked whether there has been any thought given for future management of such a database of caves on FS lands and for how to best protect these caves and keep continued responsible access for cavers. She noted that there may be changes in federal personnel, policies and politics that may affect future access and conservation of caves on federal lands.
- Paul S. replied that this is not a management plan but this is an agreement that recognizes economic value of caver volunteer's efforts and expertise, which would not be good management for the FS to ignore, and could provide a base for continued access and possibly prevent closures.
- Kristen L. commented that it seemed an interesting plan yet sounded like the previously developed recommendations for cave management with agreements for reimbursement. She expressed concern for how much sensitive information would be shared and how that relationship might be affected by changes in policy or future federal management, as seen in the past.
- Paul S. agreed that the SPA is not recommendations nor a management plan but rather an agreement for volunteerism and reimbursement.
- Paul S. continued that he is very interested in listening to comments, concerns, history and feedback, and he welcomes any communication to help navigate the future process.
- Jen Z. thanked everyone for their time and contributions and the meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

[SPA overview](#)

[Nss usfs](#)