

CCS Meeting Minutes 11/12/2024

Meeting started 6pm, adjourned 7:50pm

Attendees: +1 303-***-**03, +1 303-***-**78, Alex Brown, Beth Caughran, Chad Pedigo, Christine Kirkland, Rob McFarland, Dan Sullivan, Dave Lester, Donald Davis, Duncan Byrne, Hunter Klein, Jeff Goben, Jennifer Zedalis, Jesse Rochette, Ken Headrick, Kenneth Newton, Kevin Manley, Kristen Levy, Paul Fowler, Rebecca Schifanelli, Richard Rhinehart, Tristan Stahl, Will Grandbois

Updates on USFS caves and projects

CCS/WRNF Coordination Calls

CCS/WRNF Coordination meetings have been held quarterly and as needed and the minutes emailed as pdf and posted to the CCS website.

- Jen Z related the CCS has had 5 meetings with WRNF this year and availability to meet to discuss further topics as needed.

WRNF Exception Permits

- Jen Z reported that 2024 Exception permits were received for Groaning and Spring Cave for trips August 15th-Oct 14th. Two trips were made into Groaning to place (09/07/24) and retrieve (09/29/24) CO2/O2 monitors by cavers from CSMG, noting a daily cycle of CO2/O2 exchange with a dip in values on 09/11. Paul Slayback noted that the monitor was not calibrated for exact values and that the battery lasted for 4.5 days of measurement (09/08-12). The trip reports and bat observations will be submitted by December, and CSMG photographed the register for the annual report. Six roosting bats were noted in the CSU Junction on 09/29 and none on 09/07. Thank you!
- Chad P. reported that Timberline Grotto made their trip to Spring Cave October 3rd-6th under the exception permit with participation from five grottos. Successful trips with cleanup undertaken, biota observations made, and measurements taken for the potential replacement of the second ladder above Thunder Road. Timberline grotto has offered to take the lead on designing the new ladder and will open for feedback from all once a design is made. Hopeful installation of the new ladder would be in August 2025 at the end of the regular season if funding is available. Kevin M. asked if the installation and machinery use would be done before bat hibernation. TG noted that water levels were very low and cave conditions reported to be good.
- Ken Newton shared that they have the ladder measurements and survey data to share and are happy to move on with the new ladder project.

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

- Jen Z related that Alex Lyles WRNF will follow up with Aspen-Sopris Recreational planning department on the requested verbiage about WNS decon protocols in cave sensitive climbing areas which could be put on the Mountain Project website and on other climbing sites (those also receive raptor closure notices) to help educate climbers.

Hunter K asked if this had been put on the M. Project website yet and Jen Z replied that it has not yet been. Rob M suggested the use of existing FS email group notifications, such as those used to share prescribed burn notifications and raptor closures, to share information about WNS climbing closure zones. Jen Z shared that this suggestion has been passed on to Alex Lyles WRNF.

- Kristen Levy (NCG) made several site surveys to the Fixin cliffs over the summer and noted FS climbing regulations signs installed at the top of the climbdown and the walk around trail and reported that the climber liaison, Jeff Bosboom, had removed 3 of the 15 or 16 routes and is working slowly to remove more. Also Kristen noted that people are still allowed to climb and put up new routes outside of the cave closure zones. She asked that if anyone sees anything new, such as new routes, trail development and/or rebar use, to keep her posted.

Groaning Cave

The Groaning Cave Management Agreement is available on the CCS website. Noted changes are that the trip leader age requirement was changed from 21 to 18 years old, and WRNF no longer requires liability waivers, however an updated Hazards disclosure form is still to be filled out to provide a database for the access coordinators. WRNF also wishes to be notified of seasonal combo lock changes.

- Jen Z and Chad P reported that WRNF authorized end of year budget funding for a two part stainless steel tube to replace the old rusted culvert, manufactured by IronFly in Denver. The CCS and caver volunteers have offered to assist with the installation under the new WRNF/CG SPA to allow reimbursement for materials and gas and limited expenses. The project would be open to all grottos for inclusion with Paul Slayback (CSMG) handling the necessary paperwork and submission of expenses - thank you, Paul.
- Discussion was had about the details of the reimbursement process through the NSS and the WRNF/CG SPA and it was noted that no reimbursements were made yet for the 2024 projects.
- Timberline Grotto will be hosting a volunteer work weekend in June, possibly June 6-8th or 13-15th, and are inviting all grottos to help with the culvert installation. Trips into the cave on the weekend of the installation may need to be put on hold for the culvert work.
- Hunter K asked if and how the old culvert would be removed and if any corrosion prevention would be done. Jen Z noted that the old culvert would be removed and the new design is 304SS with stainless fasteners as well. Chad P explained that we would first use grinders to remove as much of the old metal and then use quickcrete to backfill any gaps before installing the new culvert.
- Chad P related that Steve Reames has a false boulder safe which could be used as a repository for combo locks that are changed during the season and would be more geographically convenient for all Grottos. Charles Zelenka has also volunteered to maintain such a box and locks if necessary as he lives nearby. Chad suggested getting the conversation to streamline this process started with the Groaning Cave combo access coordinators.

- Air quality monitoring trips were led by CSMG cavers Paul Slayback and Alex Brown to record levels of CO₂/O₂ north of the CSU Junction for a period of a few weeks under the Exception permit. They noted that there appears to be a daily cycle of CO₂/O₂ exchange, with a notable dip in CO₂ around 9/11, with CO₂ climbing back up to a steady state. Six bats were noted on Sept 29th and they hope to continue the air monitoring next season.
- The annual Groaning visitation report, exception permit trip reports and bat data observations are due to be submitted by December 2024.
- Duncan B reported that when he had checked the rescue cache in Hard to Get To Hall that the contents were disintegrated and the medical supply out of date. Paul F shared that he put the rescue caches in Submarine and Shattered Halls about 20 years ago and that there should be no medicines but only gauze and tape. Duncan B offered to help replace and upgrade the rescue cache during the next season and asked if there might be funds through CG and the Colorado cave Rescue Network. Jen Z suggested that we may be able to include materials and compensation on the culvert repair project budget as it may be considered necessary maintenance.

Spring Cave

- Jen Z noted that WRNF plans to renew the climbing closure at Spring Cave when it expires this year. Eventually, the WRNF updated Forest Plan will include language on recreational rock climbing within cave entrances so that climbing closures like this will be automatic.
- WRNF would like to replace the second ladder in Spring cave. Timberline grotto (Ken Newton) has taken measurements and been helping with a new project design for the replacement gate. Thank you, TG!

Boom & Boom Boom Gravel Pits

WRNF intends to re-activate two gravel quarries along FSR 600 Coffee Pot Rd for road maintenance. FS has asked cavers for information regarding any sensitive features in the expansion area, have not noted any with ground surveys, and have shifted any future footprint to avoid any sinks, dolines or possible hydrological impacts.

- Jen Z shared that the project is currently undergoing the lengthy NEPA process of review and will likely be undergoing this throughout 2025.

Sweetwater Cave

Access to the cave by NSS members is permissible under the closure order via an exception permit, and Alex Lyles WRNF will reach out to the Heritage department for a more coherent explanation of terms of access.

- Jen Z reported that the FS Heritage has also met with tribal leaders to discuss the cave and the WRNF management recommendations and plan to have a field visit to the cave with tribes early next spring.
- Donald D asked that this group be notified that the blue paint signatures have been documented as historical and also need to be preserved. Jen Z said that the CCS has and continues to stress the importance of these signatures to WRNF for protection.

- Jen Z related that WRNF is working on a special management plan for this area including Sweetwater Indian Cave and now plans to gate the cave. CCS has asked WRNF to clarify what work may be allowed at the cave. Scientific and recreational trips which involve no photographs of the pictographs may be allowed.

Forest Wide Aspen Management

- A prescribed burn for the Coyote Park area occurred in mid-October. Jen Z reported no updates or future prescribed burns are known in any cave areas but we are on the notification email list for any future burns.

Significant Cave Database

WRNF has a list of 121 caves to be considered for Significant designation and continues to add caves found under their Karst Lidar mapping project.

- Jen Z shared that WRNF will be nominating 20-30 more caves this year and has indicated that they would like all caves in the forest to be considered for Significant nomination for protection although they still have no management plan.

WRNF Cave Closures and R2 Response to WNS

Positive Pd and WNS found in bats in Utah, Idaho, California, as well as Colorado now.

- WRNF Cave closure order update - the USFS R2 cave closure order is renewing as the same with the following exceptions:
 - Possible removal from the closure order for Powerline Cave and Ice Cave near Hubbard's pending future bat use monitoring.
 - Wednesday Afternoon Cave is to change its closure date to Aug 15th to reflect the swarming closure.
 - Possibly opening Premonition Cave from April 15-Aug 15th if new bat surveys indicate no summer maternity. A site visit with WRNF was taken in September in advance of bat monitoring work.
 - Possible bat swarming survey of Charlotte's Cave is planned by WRNF for the end of Aug/ beginning of September. (Note: bat surveys did not occur for Premo or Charlottes in 2024)
- Kevin M reported assisting with bat monitoring at Powerline on two trips this fall, the first trip noting 6 bats and the second in Oct noting 8 bats (some of which were likely double counted). Kevin shared that Phil Nyland seemed to think the cave should not be on a swarming closure list but that he would confer with CPW biologists.
- WRNF and CPW would like to increase their bat monitoring and surveys to track the spread of WNS, especially in more susceptible Myotis species. Jen Z noted that any caver volunteered reports of bat observations would be helpful as well and suggested using the trip report or bat observation form.

FS R2 WNS response update

- Jen Z related that WRNF is stating that Tier 1 closure will remain in effect with the newly updated cave closure order with no current plans to move to Tier 2. WRNF intends to ramp up biological surveys over the coming few years to collect accurate baseline data

for if/when WNS reaches the forest to see the effects it has on bat populations. Focus is more on caves with Little Brown Bat, as they are known to be more susceptible to WNS than other species on the WRNF. Plans are to maintain the ongoing closure order, i.e. requiring current registration to access caves on the closure list.

Karst LiDAR Mapping Project

Alex Lyles WRNF has been working with the CSMG and Colorado Grotto under a new Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) to resurvey in Groaning Cave and to locate, document and protect other caves on the Forest. Protection would be by nominating caves as Significant with no known FS cave management plan as of yet.

- 2024 is the first season for this project and a number of caves have been documented, with Holyujah cave being recommended for gating by WRNF.
- WRNF intends to do an eventual paleontological survey of bones at the bottom of the pit, with possibly Bruce Schumacher or Jack Wood as paleontologist.
 - Alex Lyles WRNF is now recommending gating the 2 entrances to protect the cave. Gating and survey would begin next season at the earliest. The CCS requested continued access for science and recreation in the long term.
 - Kevin M described the pit as technically bolted with 3 rebelayes to prevent rope rub and stated a rigging map is available. Kevin advocated for the paleo survey to be done soon and that no gate be installed.
 - Rob M expressed concern with the WRNF gating reaction and the potential of a very long delay in any paleontology survey.

USFS/NSS MPA and WRNF/CG SPA

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. WRNF joined with Colorado Grotto (CG) and Colorado School of Mines Grotto (CSMG) in a 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 current SPA Cave Expedition (SPACE) coordinator and coordinator of projects.

- Jen Z reminded all that the SPA is an agreement with Colorado Grotto and trips must be led by a NSS/CG member and reimbursement will be distributed through CG. All cavers are welcome to participate however the project must be led by a CG member.
- Rob M asked why any caver would have to go through CG for a reimbursement trip and why was this agreement not made through CCS. Dave Lester and Hunter K contributed that it likely had to do with the reimbursement process and 501c3 or Sam number which allows the FS to reimburse an organization. Rob M noted that the prior agreement and funds for reimbursement from BLM to CG for volunteer expenses failed to work out. Chad P encouraged patience, focusing on a better process and transparency.
- Paul F asked how the culvert repair project was paid for and Chad P shared that it was with a direct purchase order to the manufacturer with the surplus WRNF budget funds available at the end of the fiscal year and not through a SPA. Paul F asked if the

reimbursement for labor must go through an SPA . Jen Z responded that the end of year funds may not be available next season and that the SPA reimbursement was recommended as preferred and more available.

- Kristen L expressed gratitude and also her disappointment in how the SPA was set up, disregarding how the CCS represents all of the state's grottos, and she hoped for improved future caver inclusivity.
- Rick R clarified that reimbursements go through the MPA to the NSS and then to CG to pass back to individual cavers. Jen Z suggested that any specific questions be directed to Paul Slayback as the SPA coordinator, as he has been open to explaining how this works.

BLM Caves

LaSunder Cave

Stuart Marlatt (CG): Stuart reported 3 trips so far in 2024; all recreational with 2 trips to the back section. No issues with gate, lock, rope and no trash or breakage observed.

- Stuart M proposed photo monitoring to help in documenting any changes or impacts. This was brought up to Alan Czepinski BLM, who has been open to the suggestion.
 - Rob M asked if this would be done under an allowed work maintenance trip and Jen Z confirmed that it should be.
- Additionally ideas for alternatives to the PVC flagging tape (which packrats tend to chew and relocate) as trail markers with low or no impact are sought.
 - Kevin M suggested stainless slim markers with reflective paint or tape secured so the packrats cannot remove them.
 - Jesse Rochette suggested using Ram fasteners where appropriate.
 - Dan Sullivan suggested ½" PVC tube sections with reflective tops and noted that the packrats have not disturbed them in other caves.
 - Rob M suggested a more durable marker in the front of the cave where there are more packrats and a less obtrusive type further back.

Twenty Pound Tick

BLM CRVFO has now installed a steel barrier at the illegally created entrance to the cave, to be accessible by "Authorized Personnel Only". All other visitation of the cave will only be allowed via the sump.

- Jen Z explained that under these sensitive circumstances the CCS continues to advocate for future access including scientific studies of the geology, hydrology, and assistance with any future management or restoration, noting that the sump is still accessible. The BLM views the barrier as remediation of illegal digging and not of natural cave passage. CCS noted that the original air gap was not restored for environmental conditions.
- Chad P related that the CCS discussed safety concerns of sump diving and possible access through the gate/barrier for any potential emergency or rescue.

- Hunter K expressed his understanding of being sensitive with land managers, however asked if the BLM went through the proper environmental compliance (NEPA) prior to installing the barrier and asked for compliance documentation of either an EA or Cat X.
- Hunter K asked if the cave was a designated significant cave and Kevin M stated that it was nominated Significant after the incident.
- Donald D asked how this was viewed as vandalizing a cave as none of the mining was in the cave itself, but rather like a prospect on the surface which would not be an illegal activity.
- Rob M shared that when the CCS started the conversation to oppose the gating, cavers had much to lose as for access to many caves, and that the CCS worked hard to maintain good working relations with the BLM local field office showing that cavers are responsible and conservation minded.
- Paul F noted that when Jim Goodbar did the formal inventory on 20lb, he noted the need for restoration work (broken formations and muddy footprints around the Subway), and had recommended restoration trips. Paul suggested pursuing this point for future access.
- Paul F also noted that the BLM might be viewing the barrier not as a gate on a natural cave entrance but rather restoring illegal vandalism. Paul stated that the BLM lawyers were clearly consulted and that per conversation with Jim Goodbar, the DOI lawyers required the BLM field office to put a form of closure on it because of previous legal cases in which people were getting harmed in BLM caves. Paul then noted that the question of whether the proper procedures were followed is up for question.
- Jen Z said the CCS would follow up with the BLM as to what procedures were followed in the case at their next meeting.

Witch's Pantry

BLM has communicated concerns from the Ute Council regarding published reports detailing the removal of bones from the cave. The Ute tribes 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

Increased visitation continues in the area and additional trash found in the entrance sink.

- Site visit is planned for December coordinated by Rob McFarland (CWSG) to familiarize Alan Czepinski BLM with the cave and to check conditions.
- Jen Z shared that previous discussions on installing signage and undergoing cleanup had been 'forgotten' with personal change.

Anvil Points

The BLM had arranged Administrative Use access for cavers to pass through the scales at the GARCO Dump and access the normal parking area. BLM hopes to identify suitable access from public lands NW of the cave.

- Jen Z shared that Alan Czepinski BLM is working to clarify access with local Garfield county employees to prevent future problems.

MOU with BLM

Citing the events at 20 Pound Tick and Witch's Pantry, BLM requested creating a more binding agreement to replace the existing MOU, which was originally part of the LaSunder Agreement.

- Jen Z shared that discussion and development of an MOU is undergoing and such an agreement would help clarify:
 - A broad framework for developing cooperative cave management and volunteer agreements between BLM and CCS loosely modeled on what has worked with the FS MOUs.
 - The allowance for more specific cave management plans for individual caves as needed.
 - Guidelines for recreation, research, and monitoring of cave resources.
 - Guidelines for procedures when discovering new caves and for significant cave nominations.
 - Guidelines for allowed activities and expectations from both parties.
 - The establishment of a BLM CRVFO managed process for reimbursement for expenses incurred during volunteer maintenance, monitoring, and conservation activities.
 - The inclusion of tribal consultations regarding cave resources where appropriate.

Private Caves

Fly and Marble Caves

Christine Kirkland (SCMG) & Talmage Trujillo:

No new updates.

Active Committee Reports

Deep Creek Stakeholders Group

Ken Newton (TG): Updates are being made on the Deep Creek draft 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.

- Ken N shared that the draft is complete and Federal legislation is pending for a vote in 2025.

Mid-Continent Quarry Proposal

Rick Rhinehart (FRG): Mid-Continent Quarry at Glenwood Springs

- Rick R shared that there has been no news from the Glenwood Citizen's Committee since the last Cave Survey meeting. "With the change in federal administration in January, it may be that the quarry will gain new life. This will threaten Witches' Pantry Cave and other karst features in the proposed quarry footprint. Following the September Williams Canyon Project meeting at Cave of the Winds, I corresponded with

paleontologist Greg McDonald. He noted: “the surface bones from Witches Pantry were sent to me for identification, all were modern sheep bones. So I had the BLM paleontologist that looked at them – and also retired. Being a pit trap cave, it is certainly possible that older material may be present, but nothing indicative of that was in the sample I looked at. My position was eventually backfilled but they are based in the BLM office in Salt Lake - but still handles Colorado as well, like I did. Her name is Georgia Knauss and would be the person to contact with regard to additional exploration for older material.”

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. In September, at the request of Jeffco Open Space, myself and one other caver, went to Fault Cave to determine if there was any fire damage from the Goltra Fire that burned off of Rt 6 in August. The fire did not get very close to the cave, so no damage was observed. Not much trash was observed there either! We did remove one rope that was rigged in the cave over the narrow drop because it was a crappy Home Depot rope with a paper core.”

Bat Working Groups

Colorado Bat Working Group (CBWG)

Paul Fowler (CDS): CBWG Fall 2024 meeting was held on September 17th and minutes are available upon request. Contact CCS for more info.

- Jen Z reported that Pd and WNS monitoring efforts continue and developments of vaccines and other efforts are being carried out by wildlife biologists.

Mountain Prairie WNS Coordination Meetings/Region 6

Jim Lawton (NCG): Meeting notes are available upon request.

Western Bat Working Group

Paul Fowler (CDS): No update since the last CCS meeting. Spring meeting is scheduled in California 2025.

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 by any cavers wishing to document their trips.

- Chad P shared that the trip report form is on the Timberline Grotto website and on the CCS website and welcomed it being used and linked on other grotto sites. It can document cave conditions and biota use. Chad encouraged mentioning its use in grotto meetings and welcomed ideas for any improvements.

CCS Website

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

- Jen Z thanked Paul for all his hard work and dedication with updating and maintaining the website.

Additional topics

Jen Z thanked all and gave a reminder for a call for chair and vice chair tickets for elections in January.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50pm