

CCS Meeting Minutes 01/28/2025

Meeting began at 6:05pm

Attendees

+1 719-***-**56, Alex Brown, Alex Oram, Angela Nichole, Beth Caughran, Bill Duncan, Chad Pedigo, Charles Zelenka, Chloe Marshall, Chris Carter, Christine Kirkland, Colorado Western Slope Grotto, Dan Sullivan, Derek Bristol, Eoghan Conlon O'Neill, Heidi Wagner Lamendola, Jack Utermoehl, Jeff Goben, Jennifer Zedalis, Jess M, Jesse Rochette, Karla Mayne, Ken Headrick, Kenneth Newton, Kevin Manley, Kristen Levy, Max, Paul Fowler, Randy M, Richard Rhinehart, Troy Fisher, Zach Adams

- Jen Z. welcomed everyone and expressed the CCS's gratitude for all the volunteers and all their hard work. Thank you all.

Updates on USFS caves and projects

CCS/WRNF Coordination Calls

- Jen Z. reported that CCS/WRNF meetings are held quarterly and as needed and minutes are available on CCS website shortly after meetings.

WRNF Exception Permits Groaning and Spring Caves 2024

- Jen Z. shared that the Exception trip reports and bat observations were submitted by December 15th, 2024 and the register log was recorded for the annual report. CCS plans to request the 2025 Exception permit for these caves by April 30th for this year.

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

- Jen Z. noted that WRNF (Alex Lyles) is following up with Aspen-Sopris Recreational planning department about verbiage of WNS decon protocols and climbing closures in cave areas to be put on the Mountain Project website and other climbing sites to help educate climbers.
- Kristen Levy (NCG) led site surveys in 2024, noting that climber Jeff B. has removed 3 out of 15 routes so far and that FS climbing regulations signs have been installed at the top of the climbdown and the walk around trail, also noting new climber trail/belay station developments with rebar used. Kristen L. asked that if anyone notes any routes or development in the closed areas next season to let the FS or the grottos know. She shared that cavers have permission to remove unallowed routes but it would be safer to let the FS do so.

Groaning Cave

- Chad P. stated that the project to replace the rusted culvert with a 2 part stainless steel culvert is scheduled for early June and will be hosted by Timberline Grotto. Demo and site prep will be tentatively scheduled for Sun 06/08-Mon 06/9, and culvert installation for the weekend of June 13-15th, with all grottos invited to volunteer. Rec trips into the cave for those dates should not be scheduled due to the work. Jen Z. has asked the WRNF to not issue recreational permits for those dates. Chad P. requested that anyone who has battery powered grinders bring them. Robbie S. offered some of his battery power tools and Chad P. shared his email for contact. Further updates will go out via the CCS group email.

- Jen Z. reported that the project may use the WRNF/CG SPA for reimbursement of materials and gas and limited expenses. Participation would be open to all grottos for inclusion with Paul Slayback handling the necessary reimbursement paperwork.
- Chad P. shared that there is a planned meeting with the Groaning Cave access coordinators and Steve Reames to discuss how to make the seasonal lock changes more centralized and efficient using a fake rock lockbox at Steve Reames property on FSR 600.

Spring Cave

- Jen Z. noted that WRNF plans to renew the Spring Cave area climbing closure, and that WRNF hopes to have funds to replace the second ladder in Spring Cave. Timberline Grotto (Ken Newton) has taken measurements and created a new project design for the replacement ladder. Timberline Grotto will be coordinating this project with hopeful volunteer expense reimbursement from the SPA with WRNF.
- Bill Duncan (Timberline G.) offered to remove the climbing routes inside the cave entrance during their project with the WRNF's permission.

Boom & Boom Boom Gravel Pits

- Jen Z. reported that the project to re-activate the two WRNF gravel quarries along FSR 600 Coffee Pot Rd. for road maintenance is undergoing NEPA process of review.

Sweetwater Cave - No further updates.

WRNF Significant Cave Database

- Jen Z. related that 15 WRNF caves found through LiDAR and ridgewalking will be nominated for Significant Cave status by the end of January 2025 per Alex Lyles, with no management plans for these significant caves yet.

WRNF Cave Closures and R2 Response to WNS positive in Colorado

- Jen Z. shared that WRNF cave closure order is renewing as the same with the following exceptions:
 - Powerline Cave and Ice Cave are still closed for the swarming season. Wed. Afternoon Cave now has its closure date Aug. 15th to parallel other caves in the cliff.
 - Bat monitoring at Premonition Cave to be conducted in 2025, possibly using private land access from the east. A site visit with WRNF was taken in September 2024 for planning logistics.
 - Bat swarming survey of Charlotte's planned by WRNF was not accomplished in 2024.
- WRNF states that Tier 1 closures will remain in effect with the newly updated cave closure order and with no plans to move to Tier 2. Plans to ramp up biological surveys over the coming years to collect accurate baseline data for if/when WNS reaches the forest and to see the effects on bat populations. Current plans are to maintain the ongoing closure order, i.e. requiring permits to access caves on the closure list.
- Jen Z. related that with WNS possibly affecting more bat populations across the state, any caver observations of bat mortality would be important to pass along to state biologists, specifically in any *Myotis* species.

Karst LiDAR Mapping Project

WRNF (Alex L.) has been working with the CSMG and Colorado Grotto in 2024 under a new Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) to locate, document and protect caves in the Forest. Protection would be by nominating caves as Significant with no known FS cave management plan as of yet.

- Holey-Lujah Cave - WRNF intends to do a future paleontological survey with Bruce Schumacher and Alex L. recommends gating the 2 entrances to protect the cave. Gating and survey would begin 2025 at the earliest. The CCS requested continued access for science and recreation in the long term.

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/CG SPA-** The WRNF has 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 WRNF through 12/2028 with Paul Slayback as the SPA Cave Expedition (SPACE) coordinator. Paul S. has explained that the SPA is an agreement with CG, and any projects must be approved by a NSS/CG member, with reimbursement distributed through CG. SPA projects need to be submitted to Paul S., and must have a "Project lead" who is a NSS/CG member, however the actual trip leaders may be from any of Colorado's grottos, and all cavers are welcome to participate. Mileage reimbursement has caps and will be at the discretion of the SPA coordinator and will make the best and most fair use of available funds. Alex Brown CSMG shared details of how it worked this past season and asked that any further questions be directed to Paul Slayback CSMG.
- Jen Z. proposed that CCS reps from all grottos meet with the SPA Coordinator to submit and discuss proposals for projects and will request access to the finalized SPA agreement in the interest of transparency of processes. Rob M. and other reps expressed concern about the SPA's vague process and lack of clarity, and asked if the finalized SPA agreement could be shared with all grottos and the process made public. Kevin M. (FRG) stated that the CSMG SPA is working for more inclusion among grottos for their specific project. Derek B. expressed that the initial SPA project with CSMG should be managed at the discretion of Paul S., but that any future projects be expanded in scope. Chad P. clarified that the Groaning culvert and Spring Cave ladder projects are Timberline Grotto projects and not CCS projects. Troy F. (CWSG) asked if there is any other funds for these projects other than the SPA, and Jen Z and Chad P. replied that there is none known outside the funds for infrastructure repair. Chris C. explained that the process of reimbursement is still being worked out with CG, and further information is coming soon. Rob M. asked for an invitation for the CG meetings. Rick R. noted that the RMC journal has a good article detailing this SPA.

BLM Caves

LaSunder Cave - Stuart Marlatt (CG): Stuart submitted the biannual 2022-23 report to the BLM in July, and reported 3 trips (17 cavers) in 2024; all recreational, with 2 to the back section up

the rope. The April trip noted the rope in the back was wet and swollen, however the August trip up the rope was not wet. No issues were noted with the gate, lock, rope and no trash or breakage was observed.

- Stuart proposed photo monitoring to help in documenting any changes or impacts. This was brought up to Alan C. of the BLM who is agreeable to the suggestion and caver volunteers are welcome. Restoration and photo monitoring trips can be combined on a work trip limited to 3 cavers. Additionally ideas for alternatives to the PVC flagging tape (which pack rats chew and relocate) as trail markers with low or no impact are sought. Some ideas proposed are PVC, galvanized, or stainless steel markers with reflective paint at the top.
- Site administrative visit with BLM Rec Planner, Alan Czepinski, tentatively planned for the end of March 2025.

Twenty Pound Tick Cave

BLM CRVFO has installed a steel barrier at the sump bypass in the cave without NEPA being conducted, to be accessible by "Authorized Personnel Only". All other visitation of the cave will only be allowed via the sump.

- CCS continues to advocate for future access for further scientific studies of the geology, hydrology, and also offered assistance with any future maintenance and management.

Witch's Pantry Cave - no further updates

Great Horned Owl Cave

- Site visit December 11th, 2024 was led by Rob McFarland (CWSSG) with Alan Czepinski (BLM) to monitor the cave for biota use and adverse impacts. Rob M. shared that six bats were observed, some trash was removed and signage for bat and cave resource protection was again discussed. Increased visitation was noted and signs are again being developed and hopefully installed by the BLM this spring.

Anvil Points Cave

- The BLM had previously arranged Administrative Use access for cavers to pass through the scales at the GARCO Dump and access the normal parking area, however this has been problematic with confused county permissions. BLM has suggested access from BLM lands NW of the cave and a coordinated BLM/CCS site visit is planned for the end of January to ascertain best access.

MOU with BLM- no further updates

BLM has requested creating a more binding agreement to replace the existing MOU, which was originally part of the LaSunder Agreement.

- Development of an MOU is undergoing and 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:

- With interest and requests for new trip leaders, Talmage T. suggested there might be a possibility of setting up a trip specifically to support new trip leaders. Christine K. offered to assist after April with possible trip leader orientation and vetting process. Dan S. asked if there has been a lot of trip leader interest and Christine replied only a bit but that this could open it up for more trip leaders. Further notices will be made through the CCS group email.

Active Committee Reports

Deep Creek Stakeholders Group - no further updates Ken Newton (TG):

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

- Rick R. shared that the DOI has halted mining of all “common variety” limestone at the quarry and ordered RMI to pay BLM the fair market value for all such rock sold from the quarry since 2019. Now the company continues to work with the state government on updates to its reclamation bond, In August 2024, DRMS proposed a bond increase to \$3.2 million to cover rock bolting work needed to stabilize the overhanging cliff that remains in place after the January 2023 rockslide. RMI has begun dismantling of mining operations as of mid January 2025.

Clear Creek Canyon Project - no new updates Shannon Glazer (CG)

Bat Working Groups

Colorado Bat Working Group (CBWG)

Paul Fowler (CDS): no updates since the last meeting.

Mountain Prairie WNS Coordination Meetings/Region 6

Jim Lawton (NCG): no updates since last meeting.

Western Bat Working Group

Paul Fowler (CDS): Next meeting for Western Bat Working Group April 22 – 25, 2025 San Diego, CA

Other Topics

Colorado Cave Trip Report Form

Chad Pedigo (TG/CCS) - Chad P. shared that the simplified Colorado Cave Trip Report Form that can be optionally used as needed for any cavers wishing to document their trips and/or biota use. This form is on the Timberline Grotto website and can be linked to other grotto sites. Caver feedback and any ideas for improvements are welcome.

Fulford Cave

Chad P. shared that there was chalk graffiti observed in Fulford Cave 2024 and could use careful restoration with vacuum, wet sponge and dust and wastewater collection this spring or summer for any cavers interested in assisting.

CCS Website - Paul Fowler. NCG Work is ongoing to improve organization and navigation and volunteers and suggestions are welcome -please contact Paul F. further info.

CCS Elections - Call for 2025 nominations.

Nomination ticket was made for Chair and Vice Chair - Jennifer Zedalis (NCG,CWSG), Jesse Rochette (SoCoMoGro), and seconded by Rob M. CWSG.

- Calls for any other nominations were made and there were none. Vote was taken with unanimous yes votes from all reps attending and from proxy votes for Jen Z. and Jesse R. for 2025 Chair and vice Chair.

Meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.