

A View of Cave Politics From Inside the Colorado Cave Survey

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Colorado has a national reputation for intense cave politics. I learned that when preparing to move here in 1999. Caver friends on both coasts, some of whom had never lived in Colorado, told me “All they do is fight about caving there” and “You’ll never get to go caving.” Upon arrival though, I learned that it was really not that hard to get involved with the local grottos and go caving. In fact, it was probably not any harder than in other parts of the country where most cavers are busy with day jobs, often focus on project caving, and most of the caves require a few hours of driving to reach. As time went on though, I learned that Colorado’s reputation for cave politics is well-earned.

Why do cave politics run so hot in Colorado? One theory is that the culture took root after the breakthrough and early exploration of Lechuguilla Cave, in which Colorado cavers played major roles. Back then, rising to the top of the caving scene in Colorado could launch a caver onto the national stage. However, the glory days of Lechuguilla and Colorado’s involvement are now receding into the past, while the politics are not.

An even earlier factor might be the 1973 publication of Lloyd Parris’ Caves of Colorado. Parris compiled the information for his book partly through being a member of the organized caving community, but its publication outraged many organized cavers. The incident sparked debates about secrecy and information sharing that reverberated for decades. In the aftermath of the book, many organized cavers questioned even publicizing the existence of Grottos and the risks of recruiting new cavers. In the eyes of many first time attendees at Grotto meetings, suspicion of outsiders became a defining characteristic of Colorado’s organized caving community.

The biggest factor in Colorado cave politics might more timeless and universal. Our state has a large population of very outdoor-oriented people and that produces a relatively large population of potential cavers, and yet the total quantity of cave passage easily accessible during a weekend venture from the major population centers is small, relative to some other parts of the country. Additionally, many of Colorado’s caves are located on public lands, particularly those managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Such agencies are often understaffed and under-resourced. Since caves and karst are not common features on their lands, those resources sometimes get little attention. Historically, many land managers have been relatively ignorant about the numbers or locations of caves on land they managed. That often left the caves to the cavers, a situation that cavers were quite comfortable with, at least until a problem cropped up. Then suddenly cavers had to deal with a government bureaucracy which did not understand or care about the caves quite the same way they did. The bureaucracies had final say on management issues, and they could potentially be swayed to follow the recommendations of some cavers over others. That situation has set the stage for some of the most contentious cave politics the state has seen.

At the center of most of Colorado’s cave politics is the Colorado Cave Survey (CCS). Unlike cave surveys in other states, the primary purpose of the CCS has not been the collection and archiving of information on caves in the state. A small set of files is maintained by the Survey, but contributions to them have been limited. The CCS was founded around 1969 primarily in response to the need to manage exploration in

Groaning Cave. Bill Yett suggested forming the CCS after having seen how cave surveys worked in the eastern U.S. Managing exploration in Groaning evolved into managing access, because the multi-mile, alpine maze cave is located within view of a tourist parking lot and scenic view in the White River National Forest (WRNF). When the WRNF had no interest in managing day-to-day access for Groaning, the job fell to the caving community. The CCS was the solution to democratic, statewide coordination of access rather than handing control to a small clique or one grotto.

Rather than being a survey per se, the CCS functions as a “coalition of grottos whose main objective is to represent the interests of organized cavers across the state” according to its founding documents. Primarily, the CCS acts as liaison between the organized caving community and land managers and land owners in Colorado. Meetings are usually held three times per year, and each grotto in the state gets two votes on CCS business, one from the grotto chair or president, and one from an elected grotto representative. With the ebb and flow of controversial business, CCS meetings and the related flow of phone calls and emails can be either quiet little discussions, or the rancorous debates that cement Colorado’s reputation as a hotbed of cave politics.

For the second half of this past decade I led the CCS and got to experience all of this up close and personal. Here I hope to record some of the more interesting crises and happenings of that time, admittedly from my point of view. Other western cavers may find lessons here on how to deal with situations in their own state. For Colorado cavers, these stories should record a kind of history that is all too frequently lost, and could shed light on the road ahead.

Secret plots for control

I never intended to become a cave politician, much less a Colorado cave politician. My caving career began in the eastern U.S. with a student grotto. There, a caver’s standing was generally judged first by how much time they volunteered to grotto activities, and second by how much they spent underground. That ethic of service was already engrained in me upon arrival in Colorado. In Colorado, I volunteered my time and got elected to various grotto positions as a way of getting involved in my new caving community. I attended CCS meetings to find out what was happening state-wide. So it happened that I was at the meeting at Bruce Albright’s house in January 2005. An unusual aspect of the CCS is that a Chairman may only serve two years before term limits force the person out for the next term. In 2005, we needed a replacement for Bruce. At the time, I was working thirty-two hours a week and going to school full-time. I needed another job in a caving organization like I needed a hole in the head. Still, when Dan Sullivan nominated me, I stepped up.

One of the first things I began to realize as Chairman of the CCS, was how many Colorado cavers viewed the organization with suspicion. Stuart Marlatt tells me that some of this may stem from the 1980s when certain cavers affiliated with the CCS apparently negotiated “side agreements” with the WRNF to limit or gain special access to Groaning Cave. Cave gating controversies also touched the CCS in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thursday Morning Cave was gated with Forest Service permission, but without support from the CCS or wider caving community. A gate not supported by the caving community, the CCS or the Forest Service was installed on Ron-Tom Cave. In 1994, the CCS led the widely supported effort to gate LaSunder Cave, and subsequently

access was lost as the BLM delayed creating a management plan. In the late 1990s, a prolonged debate occurred over the potential gating of Cave Creek Caverns as part of saving the cave from a state mine closure program. Many Colorado cavers saw a pattern of different parties trying to control where and when they could go caving. Although the CCS was not always advocating for tighter controls, the CCS was frequently the nexus of the debates. Further, it was clear that if anyone was plotting to 'control' caving in Colorado, the CCS would be a logical means to that end. However, I had ended up in charge of the CCS because no one else was seeking the job. With this newfound responsibility, I was finding that just organizing cavers was difficult enough. The idea of conspiring to control them was downright silly.

That did not stop the suspicions and rumors though. Additionally, some Colorado cavers like to hype conflict, sometimes to draw attention to a particular cause or even to a website or newsletter. I once saw a disagreement arise over a caving project between two cavers from two different grottos. Another caver spread the news: "Oh there's going to be a war between the grottos!" Horrified, I pointed out that the disagreement was between individuals, not grottos. My message was less exciting though, and people seemed less interested.

The solution to cavers not understanding the CCS seemed to be communication. I, myself, had found it difficult to understand the organization before getting directly involved. One strategy was to make better use of the CCS website. The webmaster and former CCS Chairman, Stuart Marlatt began updating and adding content to the site with my assistance. Many cavers thought that secret business was discussed at the CCS meetings, or that meetings were closed. We ensured that all meetings were announced in advance on the website, along with agendas before the meetings and minutes afterward. Over the years we substantially expanded the content of the site to include summaries of past projects and other information on the CCS. I made it an unofficial policy to hold at least one meeting per year in western Colorado, instead of along the Front Range, to make it easier for Western Slope cavers to be involved. In 2008, the CCS created a Google Group for facilitating email communication between voting members and other interested cavers. While these efforts have improved the transparency and understanding of the CCS over the years, the controversies and politics still swirl.

LaSunder Cave and the Bureau of Land Management

When I became CCS Chairman in 2005, LaSunder Cave had been a sore point for the caving community for a long time. Controversy erupted almost immediately after LaSunder came to the attention of the organized caving community in 1991. Conflict was initially between unaffiliated cavers and cavers from the Front Range Grotto over ownership of the primary dig and conservation ethics. A breakthrough at that dig dramatically expanded the cave, revealing some spectacular and pristine passage decorated with anthodites and sparking concerns for the cave's protection. LaSunder is located on land administered by the BLM and there was apparently consensus between the BLM and cavers to gate the cave. The Timberline Grotto was to coordinate from the caver's side, but in 1994 the cave still lacked a gate. The CCS stepped in, and with BLM assistance the cave was gated in July 1994.

Colorado cavers then learned the hard lesson of gating a cave before a management plan has been created. The cave was locked, the BLM had the keys, and

cavers inquiring about access were told that a management plan was being written and caver assistance was not required. That situation became the status quo for years, and “Remember LaSunder” became a rallying cry for not trusting government land managers and not gating caves.

Eventually a change in personnel at BLM brought hope to the situation. Kay Hopkins, an Outdoor Recreation Planner, took over the local caves program at the BLM. Kay saw to it that mineralogical and biological inventories were initiated so that a management plan could be written and local cavers were contracted to do the work. By the time I became Chairman of the CCS, Bruce Albright and Donald Davis had already been working with Kay on developing a management plan that included recreational access. Completing this management plan for LaSunder became my top CCS priority. Over the next year, and in the middle of an energy development boom on Colorado BLM lands, Kay and I slogged through the work of developing a management plan that conformed to BLM requirements. With help from Donald Davis and other cavers, I documented the current extent of human impacts on the cave for monitoring purposes. At last, in late 2006, LaSunder Cave re-opened to recreational traffic.

LaSunder’s re-opening removed a thorn from the side of the Colorado caving community, but overall the story remains a cautionary tale. The experience did convince me that I could help accomplish things for the caving community. Perhaps the greatest side benefit was the understanding and working relationship forged between Kay Hopkins and the CCS by writing the management plan. That work strengthened communication between the CCS and the BLM tremendously, and had the same effect with the White River National Forest in later years when Kay took a job there that oversaw the Forest’s caves program.

www.CavesR4All.com

Over the years, cavers in Colorado have relied on secrecy to protect caves. Secrecy from the public, secrecy from land managers, and secrecy from other cavers all played different roles. Regardless of the cries of elitism, the bad feelings, and culture of suspicion that secrecy bred, it seemed to be an effective tool for protecting caves. After all, people cannot mess up a cave if they cannot find it. As cavers are now learning, the effectiveness of secrecy is now eroding before the technologies of Global Positioning System receivers (GPS) and the Internet. Thanks to these technologies, obscure cave locations that were held secret by cavers for decades can be described with pin-point accuracy and unilaterally disseminated to the general public with ease. Via the Internet, individuals or groups can disseminate such information with relative anonymity and without regard to the concerns of the organized caving community.

For Colorado, the dawn of this brave new world came in the year 2000. Two unaffiliated cavers, Dan Castellari and Steve Hawkins, placed a geocache in well-known Fault Cave west of Denver. Geocaching is an activity in which participants visit interesting locations and then post GPS coordinates of those locations on geocaching websites so other participants can find them. Sometimes the cache is a box of trinkets to be swapped, or sometimes it is just the location (a “virtual cache”). The reaction to Dan and Steve’s cache came quickly. The physical cache disappeared and they began receiving threatening emails telling them not to post cave locations on the Internet.

The emails were presumably from members of the organized caving community. Dan and Steve had been members of the organized caving community in the late 1980's, when they joined the Front Range and Colorado Grottos. They got on a few grotto trips, but felt frozen out when they asked for more information about Colorado caves. In any case, Dan and Steve decided to continue their caving without the grottos.

Placing the cache in Fault Cave was a natural merge of Dan's interest in caving and the new activity of geocaching. Although they were getting hate mail from some organized cavers, conversely, Dan and Steve began receiving other more positive emails indicating a substantial and unmet desire to find cave location information online. They began to develop a website to serve those interests.

At the same time, Dan and Steve continued to place geocaches in other caves. Conflict with the organized caving community came to a head in 2003. At the Rocky Mountain Regional, held at Lime Park, Skip Withrow pulled two geocaches from nearby caves. In front of a host of cavers, the two caches were burned in the Regional's campfire. I remember standing on the sidelines and saying nothing and I still regret it.

The long-planned website, CavesR4All.com, went online in October 2003 with detailed descriptions of some of the more popular caves, and a 'Master List' of cave locations in Colorado. At it's peak, that list included >140 cave locations. More hate mail poured in to Dan and Steve, but it soon became apparent that there was little the organized caving community could do to shut them down. Dan and Steve had learned not to post cave locations on private land, and had also learned that the Federal Cave Resources Protection act did not restrict them from distributing information about caves on public lands. To many outside the organized caving community, and a quiet number within, Dan and Steve were heroes for taking on the 'elitist' establishment and making caving more accessible.

The CavesR4All website gave a negative impression of the organized caving community, and took issue with gating caves, which was obviously a means of shutting out unaffiliated cavers. However, through the uproar, some organized cavers reached out to Dan and Steve to try to help them see the other side of the issues. In the spring of 2004, Dan Sullivan and L.P. Lawrence took Dan Castellari to Breezeway Cave, a gated cave on private land in Williams Canyon. Seeing how the gate, and great care by cavers, preserved features like Holy Waters, Stone River, and the Elkhorn Chambers, Dan began to see that organized cavers were not solely selfish and elitist in their actions. More trips with organized cavers followed. A dialog was established, and some cave locations that were less appropriate for public traffic were removed from CavesR4All. Meanwhile, the situation was receiving national attention on caving discussion boards. As things came to a head in Colorado, cavers across the country were wrestling with the issues and how they might play out in other states. Dan and Steve sent a statement to be read at the panel discussion regarding posting of cave locations on the Internet at the 2005 NSS Convention in Huntsville.

Over the succeeding years, the worst fears about the effects of CavesR4All have not come to pass. There has not been a proliferation of broken formations and spray painted cave passages, and no tragic accidents involving unwary novices have been connected to the site. Any increase in cave traffic can only be measured anecdotally. Some of the anti-organized caving language has disappeared from the website, but as of this writing there are still no links or positive references to grottos or the NSS despite

Dan Castellari's subsequent affiliation with both. Other websites posting Colorado cave locations have since popped up and the CCS tries to dialog with their webmasters to add content on cave safety, conservation, and benefits of checking out the organized caving community. Considering the inevitability of publication of cave locations on the Internet, a strategy of educating webmasters while not endorsing their actions may be the best course.

Amending the Constitution

In the mid-2000s, some new cavers on Colorado's Western Slope had been frustrated in their attempts to get involved with the very loosely organized Timberline Grotto. In response, an energetic and outspoken caver named Matt Crass founded and organized the Colorado Western Slope Grotto (CWSG) in 2007. In April, the grotto elected Dan Castellari, co-creator of CavesR4All.com, as their representative to the CCS.

The resulting firestorm was immediate and spectacular. Perhaps, as indicated by Matt, Dan had been chosen because he lived on the Front Range and could easily attend CCS meetings. However, many cavers feared that the credibility of the CCS would be compromised by having a voting member who broke radically with ethics endorsed by the NSS. Even more they feared that the CCS would be obligated to grant Dan access to the CCS files and the cave locations contained would get publish on his website. Colorado cavers had been burned in this regard before. Content from the CCS files ended up in Lloyd Parris's celebrated and despised book, Caves of Colorado. Parris was subsequently shunned by the organized caving community.

Suggestions for what to do about Castellari as a voting member of the CCS came from all corners, and many involved refusing to accept him. Larry Fish, a founder of the CCS, was deeply concerned and suggested that the bylaws of the CCS could be changed to exclude Castellari, or even the CWSG. Alternatively, he thought the CCS could be abolished, or a competing organization could be set up. I could foresee the chaos and unnecessary work such a strategy would cause and wanted no part of it. Further, I did not see Dan's lone vote, or minority opinions (within the CCS) on disseminating cave locations, as that much of a threat. It also seemed to be a bad precedent to reject a grotto representative or whole grotto from the CCS. We were a democratic institution, right? Our legitimacy stemmed from all organized cavers having a voice in our business.

At the time, Stuart Marlatt had replaced me as CCS Chair, but only after I promised to stay heavily involved and return to the job after my term-limit-mandated year off. We were working on an amendment to the CCS constitution that would create a Vice-Chairman position. That would help maintain continuity in leadership, while maintaining term limits, and also help recruit and train replacement leadership for the CCS. That last item was especially important as Stuart and I had observed that lately cavers in Colorado had gotten trapped in elected positions if they did not recruit replacements. A second amendment was also written to mandate the CCS keep up with reporting to the NSS.

Having just written two amendments, a third did not seem unnatural. My goal was to create a firewall between Castellari and the CCS files, thus blunting some of the objections and risk to his status as a voting member and allowing him to represent the CWSG. With help, and after researching other state cave surveys, I wrote an amendment that granted a person access to the CCS files only after a two-thirds majority vote of the

CCS and the signing of a confidentiality agreement which stated that the information would not be published. The consequences of violating the agreement were spelled out, and ranged from no action, to recommending expulsion from caving organizations, to legal action. Then I went to meet Dan Castellari for the first time.

Dan and I met one-on-one at Red Lobster for a beer. I found Dan to be a fairly quiet guy, not intent on destroying Colorado caving or getting back at cavers who excluded him in the 1980's. He was rather uncomfortable about the prospect of being in the middle of a hostile crowd at the upcoming CCS meeting. I gave Dan my promise to not let things get out of hand at the meeting, and then explained the proposed third amendment. Dan seemed to like it, he had no illusions about the CCS handing him cave locations, and no desire to spark further controversy.

The May CCS meeting at Stuart Marlatt's house was fiery. Eventually though, most of the cavers present came around to the idea of accepting Dan Castellari, and the safeguards of the CCS files provided by the third amendment. The one person who vehemently would not accept Dan was Donald Davis, perhaps the most widely-respected caver in Colorado. As the argument dragged on, I finally explained, with my own vehemence, that there was not sufficient support for kicking Dan out and it was time to move on.

The first two amendments were easily ratified by the grottos. Adding the Vice-Chairman position was probably the smartest thing I did for the CCS. The third amendment just squeaked by when the Southern Colorado Mountain Grotto approved it by a narrow vote, and then accepted the decision by rejecting calls for a re-vote. Apparently, many cavers objected to the idea of having to sign any type of agreement, even if it codified certain unwritten but long-held traditions of secrecy. After the fact, I have my own mixed feelings. Lack of requests for access to the files have meant that the amendment has not been truly implemented, and we are now pursuing other ideas for managing cave information in the state. Time will tell the legacy of those hot days of spring 2007.

The Elephant Mountain Mines

The geothermal cave passages intersected by the early 20th century Maree Love mine on Elephant Mountain had been mostly forgotten, until re-opened by miner Robert Congdon in 1988. By 2005 though, a complex web of government agencies were taking a keen interest in surface occupancy (WRNF), mineral rights (BLM), access (Pitkin County), and wildlife (Colorado Division of Wildlife) at the mines. The overriding concern seemed to be for a large and significant colony of Townsend's Big-Eared Bats using the site as a maternity roost. Congdon had unpatented mining claims on the site, but his future plans there were focused on tourism. Those plans were in doubt though as he was facing several citations from the USFS for his work at the mine, and a charge of interfering with a federal officer.

In early 2006, Rick Rhinehart brought the exploration and study of the caves/mines to the CCS as a potential project. Documenting the mines/caves would be of assistance to all parties involved. With WRNF permission, Rick, Donald Davis, and Mark Maslyn completed a geological reconnaissance, and Chris Andrew drew up a map of the lower mine. The project seemed to be going well.

Then I received a phone call from the WRNF asking if the CCS was taking Congdon's side in their dispute. Apparently, someone involved in the project was giving them that impression. I said of course not, the CCS advocates for the caving community, not Robert Congdon. Some time later I got another similar phone call. The solution was an official position statement, approved by vote of the CCS in October 2006 and sent to all parties involved. It made no mention of Congdon, but recommended stabilization and gating of the mine portals to protect the bats. It also suggested access be limited to scientific needs, as there had been mixed messages sent to the WRNF over whether the CCS thought the site appropriate for recreational caving.

The reaction from Robert Congdon seemed to confirm that he had been relying on the CCS as leverage in his dispute with the WRNF. He then tried to recruit other organizations to his cause and apparently designated Matt Crass, a caver then on unfriendly terms with the CCS, as his representative to the caving community.

Tensions had cooled some by October 2007 and the CCS helped arrange a meeting at the Glenwood Canyon Brewing Company that included Robert Congdon, the USFS District Ranger Irene Davidson, and WRNF District Biologist Phil Nyland. All parties came together over the idea of protecting the bat colony. Congdon later plead guilty to two charges and had the others dropped. Late in 2008, the WRNF supervised installation of two bat gates at the site. The whole saga raised the stature of the CCS in the eyes of WRNF personnel. Even though the project tied the name of the CCS to cave gating, most cavers considered it a success. Two cavers did criticize the WRNF because a subsequent newspaper article contained enough details for readers to triangulate the gated cave's location. You cannot please everyone.

The Cave That Shall Not Be Named

The recent saga of Hourglass Cave can still arouse such passions that I half-jokingly refer to it as The Cave That Shall Not Be Named. The cave was discovered by Rich Wolfert, Cyndi Mosch, and Tom Shirrell in 1988, and the significance of their find became apparent when apparently ancient human remains were located deep inside the cave. The three enlisted help from archeologist Patty Jo Watson and the USFS, including WRNF archeologist Bill Kight, and conducted a study of the cave. The human remains were dated to around 8,000 years before present, and were therefore quite significant in the understanding of human occupation in the Rocky Mountains. Results were published in two scientific journals in the late 1990's, and generated some media coverage. What human remains had been removed from the cave were later turned over to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe for reburial in the spirit of what later became the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

In 2006, part-time Colorado caver Doug Medville innocently stopped into a USFS office and inquired about getting permission to study geological features of Hourglass and learn the cave's carefully guarded location. Doug has a long interest in caves of unusual geologic origin and Hourglass is supposed to be in ashflow tuff. Doug was told he could prepare a proposal and so recruited a team including Donald Davis and Rick Rhinehart to the effort.

As was common practice in the loosely organized world of the CCS, all the cavers on the proposal were identified as "members" of the CCS. Technically, the only members of the CCS are the two voting representatives from each grotto. However, such blurring

of official affiliations could add credibility to communications with land managers and making membership distinctions was not always a priority for the CCS. The benefits were better understood than the liabilities and the CCS was used as to start many similar projects, like a cave-hunting trip at Dinosaur National Monument and a study of Steamboat Springs' Sulphur Cave. However, the practice could also lead to confusion over who spoke for the CCS.

Forest Supervisor Maribeth Gustafson subsequently turned down the Doug's proposal and it became apparent that no Special Use Permit would be forthcoming for Hourglass. The WRNF considered protecting the cultural values of the site as the dominant public value. Doug regretted, but respected, the USFS decision and was content to let the issue go. Donald and Rick were less sanguine about the rejection, as this was their second time being denied a chance to study Hourglass Cave. Only selected cavers had been invited to participate in the 1990's studies and they had been excluded despite their prolific work in Colorado. It only rubbed salt in their perceived wound when the USFS gave an award for the project to Mosch, Wolfert, and Shirrell at the 1996 NSS Convention in Salida, CO. Hourglass Cave was now gated and its location was not being disclosed by the USFS or the research team. So often in the past, the caving community had been in the position of withholding cave locations from the USFS. Now the situation was reversed.

Rick and Donald went about challenging the rejection of Doug's proposal in a string of correspondence and phone calls. The WRNF responded that it was not going to change its decision. Further explanations from Bill Kight reiterated that protecting the cultural values took precedence, and that the cave, though recently discovered, was considered sacred by the Southern Ute Indian Tribe as burial site.

In my own conversations with Bill Kight, I learned that he and others at the WRNF were losing patience with Rick and Donald on the issue of Hourglass. The decision was not going to be changed, and the situation was eroding the WRNF's positive view of the CCS and the organized caving community. Late one evening, I sent an email to Rick and Donald and others on the proposal trying to explain this situation and ask them to back off. Rick had recently identified the elevation and host strata of Hourglass Cave on a caving web-forum and was being public about his own efforts to locate the cave. My email stated that I would view continuing down that road as an attempt to poison relations between the WRNF and the organized caving community.

A short time later that night, my phone rang. It was Rick Rhinehart, and he was not happy. Rick was the editor of Rocky Mountain Caving Magazine (RMC) and author of much of its content. He asked me if the CCS was trying to censor him or the RMC? Was I doing it on behalf of the WRNF? I imagined the hue and cry that could be raised with the word censorship. My very careful answer was that I obviously could not tell him what to write or say, but that the fallout could negatively affect Colorado's organized caving community as a whole. As Chairman of the CCS, that was my primary concern.

The situation eventually cooled down. I don't believe that the Hourglass Cave's location has been rediscovered, or maybe it has and the fact kept quiet. Periodically though, some cavers bring up The Cave That Shall Not Be Named as an example of unfair and poorly justified behavior by the WRNF. To me, Hourglass Cave is a pot that will boil again when least expected.

Memorandum of Understanding

For some reason, I thought that signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the CCS and the WRNF to cooperate on cave issues would involve a minimum of controversy. The idea for an MOU came in October 2006 from Rich Doak, the caves program coordinator for the WRNF. The idea seemed to have many potential benefits, and a national-level MOU between the NSS and USFS supported such local agreements. Our proposed MOU would permit the WRNF to openly involve the CCS in discussions that might affect caves in the Forest and do so prior to formal plans being made available for public comment. Perhaps most importantly, it would help stabilize the relationship between the CCS and the WRNF, which waxed and waned as individuals on both sides moved in and out of particular jobs and chief rangers changed management priorities. Specifically, the MOU would compel the WRNF to designate a caves program manager to serve as point of contact on cave issues. That crucial job had sometimes been left unfilled. The MOU with the WRNF would also be something the CCS could use to establish credibility with other land managing agencies.

After a long period waiting for input from the WRNF, a draft of the MOU was emailed to cavers in October 2008. Mike Frazier was quick to take issue with the CCS agreeing to “Inform the WRNF caves program coordinator of the discovery of new caves or cave features within its boundaries that are particularly sensitive and require specific management.” Mike’s feeling was that it was the most sensitive caves that cavers should keep secret from the WRNF. Evan Anderson feared that anyone attending a CCS meeting would be compelled to share their cave locations with the WRNF (obviously they would not). Evan and Mike also suggested that the USFS was not to be trusted generally, and had accidentally released cave location information to the public. To my knowledge, such an incident has not been verified. Donald Davis and others were concerned with the mention of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) that was now required in all MOUs.

In the end, a few careful changes to the MOU seemed to satisfy everyone’s concerns. A specific mention of how the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act (FCRPA) can limit cave location data releases under FOIA was added. It was pointed out that if the CCS kept secret a cave that was “sensitive” and “require[d] specific management”, and that cave got trashed, everyone would have failed in their responsibilities. However, language was added that allowed the CCS to provide cave locations to only the nearest quarter section unless the cave was being nominated as significant under the FCRPA. In the end the MOU was unanimously approved by eleven votes at the CCS meeting in February 2009 and the signed agreement has proved a boon in working with the WRNF.

Sharing cave locations with land managers

A recurring fear among cavers in Colorado is that the CCS is handing over cave locations to federal land managers. That fear stems from a widespread belief that the fewer cave locations the land managers know, the better for the cavers. The thought seems to be that land managers knowledge of cave locations will lead to more cave gates, or management of access, or at least increased scrutiny. The position leads to a bit of a conundrum because cavers want to be consulted by land managers on cave issues, but are then extremely reluctant to share information.

From the land manager's point of view, they cannot manage what they do not know is there. Management could mean cave gates, but it could also mean protecting caves from timbering, quarrying, energy extraction activities, or simply the ability to monitor bat populations. The pressures on public lands from a burgeoning population increase every year. The land managers know that climbing crags, prime hunting and fishing spots, endangered plants, and caves can no longer be protected simply by obscurity.

On only two occasions during my time with the CCS, and only after careful consideration and open discussion, we gave limited cave location data to federal land managers. In 2007, mining interests were putting pressure on the BLM to open more land for quarrying or gas drilling. Kay Hopkins of the BLM turned to the CCS seeking cave information to support renewing the mineral rights withdrawal protecting Deep Creek Canyon from such development. In the past, Kay had been able to steer gas leases around Anvil Points Claystone Cave after cavers documented the cave's significance. Because of the nature of what the BLM needed for the mineral withdrawal, cave locations were only given to the nearest quarter section, a compromise that seemed to satisfy everyone involved.

The second occasion involved the proposed Burnt Mountain Timber Sale in the WRNF. A sizeable portion of the project included clear-cuts and was proposed to occur on the Lime Creek karst, a prime alpine caving area characterized by caves with pit entrances. Thanks in part to the recently signed MOU, the WRNF involved the CCS early in the planning process in 2009. In 2010, the CCS gave specific cave locations in the area of the proposed timber sale to the WRNF. This was followed up by a site visit by CCS Chairman David Lambert and no less than six employees of the WRNF to look at the karst and understand how the caves could be impacted by timbering. Initially, buffer zones of 150-200 feet had been proposed to protect the caves. As the nature of the caves and the recreational caving experience became apparent, the WRNF realized that leaving such 'tree islands' centered on caves was inappropriate. As of this writing, the boundaries of the timber sale are being shifted and may exclude most or all of the karst. These two instances demonstrate how sharing cave locations with land managers, while controversial, can be beneficial and necessary to the CCS mission of cave conservation and access.

The Colorado Cave Archive

In the aftermath of securing the CCS files by constitutional amendment, I was thinking about how relatively incomplete those files were. Over the years, material had been lost and perhaps even removed to keep it from falling into the wrong hands. In recent years, cavers had contributed an occasional map and survey notes to the files, but no regular reports of cave discoveries or locations. Doug Medville, being quite familiar with the cave surveys in the Virginias and elsewhere, would periodically ask when the CCS was going to become a 'real' cave survey.

A tremendous amount of cave location data has been collected in Colorado over the decades, but it all resides in private collections. As cavers move away, or pass away, that hard won data is vulnerable to loss. In the meantime though, they do not trust the CCS enough to place such data in the files. There is a need for a central repository, and as

the CavesR4All incident shows, others will fill the niche if the organized caving community does not.

At the October 2007 CCS meeting we formed a committee to figure out a way to manage cave location data in a way that would allow the CCS to begin to function as a true survey. Recognizing the advantages and pitfalls of information technology for the task, the committee included cavers with relevant IT expertise. Stuart Marlatt, Marty Morey, Steve Reames, and Donna Renee were the committee and I was the Chair. We began meeting regularly to plan what we then called the Cave Information System. Mike Frazier joined the committee after tagging along to the meetings with Donna.

The committee made real progress, designing a system that would be useful tool for project cavers, but protect cave location data from accidental release or anyone trying to exploit the system. Reports on the planning process were published on the CCS website, and I wrote articles for Rocky Mountain Caving (RMC) to keep cavers abreast of the plans. Feedback from cavers and one-on-one discussions with cavers generated ideas for improving the planned system.

Naturally there was some drama. Mike Frazier quit the committee without warning via email on Christmas Day in 2008, prompting Donna Renee to follow suit. Mike had become convinced that cave locations collected in the new system would find their way to government land managers. He even promised to stop publishing articles in RMC to keep caves more secret. Meeting in January 2009, the committee discussed explicit plans for preventing disclosures of the type Mike feared. If cave locations were to be handed over to government land managers, it would happen by the normal channels of public decisions by the CCS or by cavers acting on their own.

In 2009, the name of the project was changed to the Colorado Cave Archive to better communicate the goal of permanent storage, rather than a cave location trading system. Dave Gribble was recruited to the committee for his database expertise as work began on the technical details of securing and managing cave location data. Since then, the project has been on a hiatus. More immediate CCS crises have taken priority and the Colorado Cave Archive is on the back burner. It remains to be seen whether the need for a central repository of cave location data in Colorado will be met by the organized caving community or by outsiders.

Fly and Marble Caves

The recent history of Fly and Marble Caves illustrates that gating and managing caves on private land in Colorado can be just as problematic as on public land. Fly and Marble have been known for decades as excellent places to introduce new cavers to the underground. Legal access became a problem in 1999 when an absentee landlord situation came over the property. For many Colorado cavers it was a long drive to the caves' location outside of Cañon City anyway, and visitation was generally left to those willing to trespass.

In early 2005, Rick Rhinehart, Fred Luiszer, and Mark Maslyn met with Larry and Mary Blackwell who had recently moved onto the property. They established that both caves could be gated to address the continuing problem of trespassers, and the CCS was offered up as an organization that could manage access. An agreement was struck and CCS-managed access was established in July. Fred Luiszer designed the cave gates, and cavers helped fabricate the parts in Denver. By 2006 both caves were gated.

Although the project once again tied the CCS to gating caves, that association seemed worthwhile in return for re-establishing legal access. Considering the persistence of trespassers reported by the Blackwells, anything short of cave gates would not have changed things anyway.

Managing cave access seems like it should be easy, but it takes work and issues are always cropping up. Initially, it was reminding cavers about using Leave No Trace ethics on the Blackwell property. In August 2008, the gate on Fly Cave was sledge-hammered open and had to be repaired. In August 2009, Larry Blackwell complained to access coordinator Rick Rhinehart about not receiving advance notification of trips visiting the cave as per the management plan. Cavers were also leaving the road gate unlocked. Rick emailed the other access coordinators, but Dan Sullivan had blocked Rick's emails using a spam filter. When it came to light that Dan had been granting access for many of the trips, and not all of the associated liability waivers were accounted for, Larry Blackwell closed the caves.

Over the next couple of months, Rick, Jason Conner from the Red Canyon Grotto, and I worked hard on getting the caves re-opened. A single access coordinator, or a trip leader system were suggested as possible ways to get management under control. Eventually we simply revised the access rules, condensed the liability waiver to a single page, and clarified access information on the CCS website. Jason and I met with Larry Blackwell at the property. Fly and Marble re-opened on October 8th, just in time for the Rocky Mountain Regional being hosted in the area.

On October 13th Larry Blackwell closed the Fly and Marble again when it was learned that cave-for-pay trips were being scheduled through a local climbing gym. This time Larry insisted on a trip leader system to manage access more closely. With some discussion, a way was found to implement that system with a minimum of bureaucracy and the caves re-opened in mid-November 2009. In the time since, the access coordinators Rick Rhinehart, Jason Conner, and Jonny Slumpff have reported no problems with cave access.

At various times during the crises with Fly and Marble Caves, it was suggested that management be handed over to the nearby Red Canyon Grotto, or even a single individual. That might have been a quick and easy way for the CCS to wash its hands of the problem, but would not be a good solution. The CCS was created as a mechanism to prevent Groaning Cave from being 'controlled' by a single grotto or clique, and it can serve the same function for other caves, like Fly and Marble. When cave access is controlled by one group, outsiders tend to have less easy access. The CCS, by nature, is composed of all grottos and cavers across the state who choose to get involved. Situations are likely to arise in the future where CCS managed cave access is a potential solution to no access, or government managed access. Some cavers may see the CCS as the solution to all such problems, while others will worry about CCS 'control' of Colorado caving. In those situations the CCS itself should carefully consider whether it has the volunteer resources to do a good job with managing cave access.

White Nose Syndrome and Cave Closures

Even by Colorado standards, the controversy and conflict hit new heights over the blanket cave closure ordered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to combat the spread of White Nose Syndrome (WNS). Long before the closure, reports of bat mortalities in

northeastern states in the 90-100% range were big news in Colorado. Cavers watched with trepidation as the disease spread to surrounding states over just a few hibernation seasons. We heard how, in the east, cave closures and voluntary caving moratoriums were used, along with decontamination of caving gear, in an attempt to prevent human spread of the fungal spores associated with WNS. We also heard about the controversies surrounding these strategies as the significance of the human vector in WNS transfer was debated. Since all this was happening east of the Mississippi River, the issues still seemed abstract to us in Colorado.

Though we thought we might have years to do so, it clearly made sense to prepare for the arrival of WNS in the west. In the summer of 2009, Rick Rhinehart and I were discussing the need for planning with Kirk Navo of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). By autumn, Kirk was coordinating periodic conference calls involving the CDOW, land managers from around Colorado, the CCS, and Rick Rhinehart. However, the calls tapered off over the winter, when the CDOW decided to replace Kirk as their point person on WNS. By April 2010, WNS had been found in Missouri and the CCS was prodding the CDOW to restart the conference calls. Without warning, a report of a bat with WNS in the bordering state of Oklahoma suddenly reached us just hours before the CCS meeting in May. We discussed the possibility of cave closures in Colorado at the meeting. Everyone present seemed to agree that if closures happened, it would be necessary for the CCS to support them since they related to cave conservation. If the idea of targeted cave closures came up at all, it was not discussed in any detail.

The CDOW subsequently appointed Bob Davies as their lead on WNS, but another conference call was not scheduled until June 22, 2010. David Lambert and I, Chairman and Vice-Chair of the CCS, pressed our contacts at the WRNF and learned that cave closures could be coming although it was still not clear how or where decisions would be made. Ominously, no one from the USFS was on the June 22nd conference call. David and I tracked down Nancy Warren as the lead person at the USFS Region 2 office where the decisions on closures were apparently to be made. When David called, Nancy reassured him that closure decisions were not being made in haste. We followed up with a July 1st email to Nancy and others from Region 2, asking again that the CCS be engaged in the decision-making process. At the Colorado Grotto meeting that night, Rick Rhinehart told me of a finalized multi-agency WNS response plan in Alabama that actually used targeted cave closures. That seemed to be a good blueprint, if we could get into discussions with Region 2.

On July 8th David and I suddenly learned from Nancy Warren that Region 2 was preparing to announce a blanket closure for all caves on USFS lands in their five state Region, including Colorado. David and I were extremely disappointed to have been cut out of the decision-making process, particularly as we learned from Kay Hopkins that she and others at the WRNF had been pushing Region 2 to talk to the CCS all along. We drafted an email telling cavers that closures were coming and sent it to the CCS Google Group and other caver email lists in the state on Friday July 9th. Cavers immediately decried the closures and some stated that they might respect the closure, but not support it, a distinction that David and I had not paid enough attention to in our announcement. Cavers began to criticize David and I, as they read too much CCS support for the closures into our hastily crafted announcement. On Sunday, David announced an emergency meeting of the CCS for July 17th. Starting on Monday, cavers began calling the Region 2

office to oppose the closures, and Region 2 began responding that a final decision had not been made. Feeling blindsided yet again by Region 2, David and I wrote an open letter Monday night to both the caving community and Region 2 explaining our opinion that communication issues with Region 2 were aggravating a situation that would be difficult under the best of circumstances. In response, Region 2 offered to send representatives to the upcoming emergency CCS meeting to speak to cavers directly.

In the intervening time, email traffic continued to rage on the CCS Google Group. Rick Speaect, chairman of the Colorado Grotto, stated that David and I had given “impression that the CCS is a minion of the NSFS [sic] with no voice of its own.” Mike Frazier again raised his fear that the CCS was handing over cave locations to the Forest Service. A big problem seemed to be that cavers did not understand the difference between the WRNF and Region 2. To them, it seemed that the CCS had recently been working closely with the USFS on things like the Burnt Mtn. timber sale and now the USFS was going to make cavers into “criminals”. Another problem was the pace at which the crisis was moving. David and I were struggling to balance the wave of closure-related emails and phone calls with our day jobs. I was additionally preoccupied with the joys and sleep deprivation of being a new father. Only later did we hear rumors of plans to impeach us, but it was hard to imagine anyone willing to take our places during the crisis.

The July 17th emergency meeting of the CCS at the Jefferson County Public Library in Golden was another moment of high drama in Colorado caving history. Region 2 sent three representatives who spoke to a room filled with several dozen cavers and then entertained their questions and comments for an hour and a half. Though caver passions were strong during the wide ranging discussion, everyone was civil. Region 2 communicated that they did not feel they had enough information to use targeted closures as a strategy, but felt they had to do something to buy themselves time in reacting to WNS. Cavers pointed out that the scientific understanding of WNS was incomplete, blanket closures would be largely unenforceable, and that caver goodwill towards the USFS was being vaporized. Before they left, the Region 2 representatives communicated that they had heard the caving community and would take our concerns into consideration. With only cavers present, the CCS then voted to send a letter to the Regional Forester opposing the blanket closures. The CCS also voted to continue communications with the USFS since doing otherwise would only diminish our influence on the closure issue.

The order for a one year blanket cave closure on USFS land in Region 2 was announced on July 27th. Some cavers felt that the closure violated their civil rights, and Mike Frazier went as far as to make analogies to Hitler’s Germany. The debates raged over whether to support the closure, whether to obey it but not support it, or what the chances were of getting caught. Everyone agreed that more data on bats would help Region 2 take more targeted approach to closures. However, cavers actually carrying out bat counts were labeled by some as “scabs” who were “working to imprison other cavers” because they were also required to post closure signs at the caves they visited. Ironically, the “Master List” of cave locations on CavesR4all.com was finally taken down, on the chance that the USFS might use it to enforce the closure order.

David and I worked to get a handle on the situation, particularly as cavers across the country were beginning to ask what the closure order meant for the upcoming 2011

NSS Convention in Glenwood Springs. Adding to the complexity, we began hearing back from the WRNF and the NSS liaison to the USFS about communications they were receiving from Rick Rhinehart that had left them with the impression he was speaking for the organized caving community in Colorado and the CCS. In striking similarity to the problems the USFS seemed to have organizing its WNS response, cavers at all levels of the NSS were trying to take action to respond to the blanket cave closures, but not all action was coordinated. Ray Keeler and Geary Schindel, the former and current NSS administrative vice-presidents, scheduled a conference call with personnel from Region 2 to discuss reducing the closures in some form. Ironically, it was Tom Willems of Region 2 who decided to invite David Lambert and I to participate in the call. While the call did not get the closures reduced, it did get everyone focused on the pressing problem of having many of Colorado's best caves closed during the upcoming NSS Convention. It was also noted that working on caving for the Convention should help with finding solutions to the blanket cave closure. Over the next several months David and I worked with Kay Hopkins and others from the WRNF, along with Region 2, to figure out a plan for Convention caving in the midst of a cave closure.

Of course not all other land managing agencies were closing their caves. Perhaps due to different philosophies and internal politics, perhaps from watching the USFS experience, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) took a different approach to the WNS response in Colorado. The BLM held a number of public meetings to get comments on responding to WNS and actively sought input from the CCS. Two BLM officials attended the October 2nd CCS meeting in Glenwood Springs. The BLM wanted to keep caves open, but wanted to learn more about how much caving was happening on their lands and monitor for arrival of WNS. Cavers were able to convince the BLM not to create new caving bureaucracy by creating a permit system simply for the purpose of obtaining such data. Instead, a voluntary reporting system has been created on the Colorado BLM's website. As of this writing, Colorado BLM caves remain open, pending the arrival of WNS.

A number of times before and during the cave closure crisis, different land managing agencies and the CCS have responded positively to the suggestion that the CDOW coordinate the negotiation of a statewide WNS response plan. Such an agreement between agencies and stakeholders still seems like the best way to both do our best for the bats, and get past the blanket cave closure. Unfortunately, as of the end of 2010, the CDOW has still taken few visible steps towards moving forward on this idea.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife Proposal

The caver furor over the USFS blanket cave closure came to a head again in December 2010 when the CDOW asked if the CCS would write a letter of support for a grant proposal to a once-a-year funding opportunity. Kirk Navo of the CDOW was hoping to obtain funding to support a summer survey of bat populations in caves, and volunteer support was going to be necessary to satisfy the matching funds requirements of the opportunity. The proposal was due just a few days after Kirk informed David Lambert and I of the request. David immediately sent an email to the CCS Google Group asking the CCS reps to vote on whether to support the proposal, and how many volunteer hours different grottos might contribute to the bat counts. It seemed like a great opportunity to show that the caving community was willing to get more involved in

addressing the WNS issue in Colorado and also help fill the data gap that Region 2 used as part of their justification for a blanket cave closure.

The proposal to do bat counts proved more controversial than David or I expected. Opposition cropped up quickly on the CCS Google Group as some cavers did not distinguish between the CDOW and USFS. Others were offended that some cavers might break solidarity by legally visiting closed caves as part of the bat count. Still others were willing to support the proposal if only caves already known to the CDOW were surveyed, or if cavers could count bats in caves and somehow keep the locations secret from the CDOW. The fear was that nothing good could come from a government agency learning some cave locations.

Because of the short deadline for the proposal, the vote had to happen quickly. David Lambert sent out his email Thursday, December 9th, with a request for votes by Sunday. Tuesday was the deadline to submit the letter of support. By Sunday night, many cavers had weighed in with opinions and votes. With only a single vote opposing the proposal, David sent two letters that Tuesday, one supporting the proposal and another to Kirk Navo raising the concerns cavers had over cave location information. Almost immediately cavers started to protest the speed of the vote. The Northern Colorado Grotto (NCG) had only just debated the issue at their Tuesday night meeting. Randy Macan of the NCG branded the CCS as “Communist” and “out of control”. There was also a question of whether Jim Lawton’s vote counted without him first having consulted the NCG and this drew the quorum for the vote into question. The debate escalated and Mike Frazier assailed David and I as “clowns” and suggested that cavers disband the CCS. Underlying all the anger seemed to be the idea that the timeline of the vote short-circuited what should have been a more lengthy debate about whether and under what circumstances cavers should now assist any government agency.

With all this ringing in our ears, David and I participated in yet another long weekday conference call to try to get access to USFS caves for the 2011 NSS Convention. David and I were briefly surprised to find that Kirk Navo and others from the CDOW were also invited on this call. Kay Hopkins of the WRNF had had the foresight to see that some cross-agency communication might add additional perspective and benefit the caver’s cause. At the start of the call there was some sentiment for keeping any cave with even moderate bat use off the access list. David and I pointed out that cavers across the country and throughout the NSS were going to be scrutinizing the cave access list for the convention. Everyone would want to predict where things were going with the blanket cave closure. A list of mostly short, bat-free caves would seem to confirm many caver’s worst fears. It would be particularly disappointing considering the rigorous WNS decontamination plan we had crafted as part of the convention permit application to the WRNF. As we discussed the specifics of that plan, the tide seemed to turn. As of this writing, nothing is definite, but hopes are higher for making some of the best Colorado caves on USFS land available during the 2011 NSS Convention.

The Future

At least for the moment, the organized caving community in Colorado seems quite divided. The looming threat of White Nose Syndrome and the blanket closure of caves on Forest Service land have driven wedges between different factions of cavers, bat biologists, and government agencies. Even if the crisis ended tomorrow, it will still color

Colorado cave politics a decade from now. Additionally, the temporary loss of access to many of the state's best caves will slow the process of recruiting and training the next generation, and is likely to cause some cavers to look for other pursuits. In the short term, Colorado's caving community could contract.

Fears of permit systems, closures, and cave gates will loom large in virtually all future debates of the CCS and charge them with emotion. This will be particularly true in dealings with the USFS, even though there are only four gated caves on USFS land in Colorado (Hourglass, another archeological site called Crack Cave, the Elephant Mountain Mines containing a maternity colony of bats, and Groaning). Interestingly, twice as many gated caves are controlled by the Williams Cañon Project, which is run by cavers for the purpose of managing cave access and exploration on a small parcel of private land near Manitou Springs, Colorado. Even before WNS, many cavers regarded the WCP more favorably than the USFS, despite the WCP's complex and restrictive system of trip leaders and rules. Obviously, issues of controlled and managed cave access will always be complicated, but for many cavers the central issue will boil down to whether it is 'us' or 'them' in charge, and who is included in 'us'.

Technology has changed the ways in which cave politics play out in Colorado in recent years. The Google Group allows far-flung cavers to learn about CCS business, and communications can continue all day, every day, via email. This certainly makes participation easier, but the immediate and faceless communication that email provides can cause people to say things they might not say in a face to face setting, or even over the phone. Misunderstandings that could be quickly cleared up in person instead stoke controversy. Some of the more spectacular email wars on the Google Group might be attributed to the medium of communication itself. The 24/7 nature of these debates can make conflict feel relentless, and while some cavers thrive on the traffic, others tune out.

Beyond email, the overall time demands on the CCS have increased in recent years. Individually, things like managing access to four caves and communicating with land managers do not take much time, but they add up and neglecting any one is recipe for disaster. The steady stream of crises, big and small, has also ensured that there is little downtime for the Chair and Vice-Chair. Although burnout seems to be an occupational hazard, delegating or otherwise sharing CCS duties is easier said than done. Some cavers keep the CCS at arm's length to avoid getting caught up in cave politics, others more actively cultivate 'outsider' status. Still, it will remain important to find ways to share the CCS load.

Debates over what to do with cave location information will also be a big part of the landscape for years to come. Square in the middle of such debates will be the creation of the Colorado Cave Archive. For some cavers, the risk of location information falling into the hands of land managers who could potentially misuse it will trump any benefits. Other project cavers will continue to desire a permanent archive for their hard work and an ability for cavers to build upon the work of those who came before. Why, they will ask, cannot western cavers have what eastern cavers take for granted.

While there is currently no shortage of criticism of the Colorado Cave Survey, I believe it continues to fulfill vital roles in the organized caving community. If we did not have an organized means for dealing with statewide issues of cave access and conservation, we would have to create one. Further, if there is no organization consistently advocating for cavers in Colorado, our interests will be overlooked.

Environmentalists and resource extraction folks have their lobbying groups, advocating for particular actions on public lands. Recreation groups have their advocacy groups looking after their interests. The rock climbers have the Access Fund, fly fishermen have Trout Unlimited, and mountain bikers have the Colorado Mountain Bike Association. Some of these groups are well-funded and have full-time and part-time staff. In Colorado, cavers have the Colorado Cave Survey trying to push caver interests. The CCS may not be perfect, but it is currently the best tool we have for achieving goals of cave access and cave conservation across the state.

My thanks to Stuart Marlatt and David Lambert for their input on this article and for the many hours they have invested in the mission of the Colorado Cave Survey.