

NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY, INC

Minutes

September 20, 2020 10:00 AM

Online via Videoconference

Meeting called to order at 10:07am

1. Introduction and greetings – Robert Simmons

2. Attendance

Officers: R. Simmons, T. Engel, M. Berger, B. Folsom

Trustees: D. Hedges, R. Armen, M. Ingalls, K. Dumont, E. Nieman, J. Morris-Siegel,
R. Drake, P. Rubin

3. Absent with proxy: None

4. Absent without designated proxy: L. Hatfield

The board may appoint proxies from the members in attendance.

Dumont moves to appoint J. Levinson as proxy for L. Hatfield

Second by [unknown]

For: Rest

Against: Morris-Siegel

[J. Levinson is appointed as proxy for L. Hatfield]

5. Officer reviews (D. Hedges)

The Trustees may choose to go into Executive Session at this time

[Note: Though we haven't heard plans to use this time, we omit a Management Plan review at the September meeting to reserve this space for officer reviews so that these discussions can occur prior to officer elections in December. This effort is driven by the Governance ad-hoc Committee.]

Hedges noted that the can could be kicked down the road on this topic, or a brief review could happen, and it seemed to be the pleasure of most present to hold the review.

Hedges moves to convene a meeting of the Trustees to conduct officer reviews.

Second by Dumont

For: All Trustees

[Motion passes - Trustees go into Special Session at 10:17am and exit Special Session at 10:25am.]

Hedges provided the officers with some general feedback from the Trustees, and indicated that some more individualized feedback would follow.

6. Berger moves to enter Executive Session to discuss the matter regarding the Bentleys Cave Preserve incident last winter.

Second by Engel

For: All

[Motion passes - the Board enters Executive Session at 10:35am and exits Executive Session at 11:50am.]

7. Officers' Reports

President: Attachment A

Vice President: Attachment B

Treasurer: Attachment C

Secretary: Attachment D

8. Simmons moves to open the Committee of the Whole (CotW). The Vice President will preside. Items may be entered as new business.

Second by Folsom

For: All

[The Committee of the Whole is opened]

Topics:

8.1. New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) scientific research project grant update (Simmons, Ingalls)

[This is the usual followup topic on progress with the grant project.]

Simmons reported (much as in Item 12 of the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D) that he submitted the year-end report for Phase 1 of the research project, and it was accepted. It was found that we under-spent the grant by approximately \$3,000, which will have to be returned. Simmons will work with Ingalls to prepare the proposal for the second phase of the project if indeed there is a funding cycle for the coming year. The grant application deadline (if it's happening) will be roughly by the next Board meeting, so some motions may be forthcoming.

8.2. Virtual National Speleological Society (NSS) Convention recap (Simmons, Berger, Engel, Morris-Siegel, Drake)

[Those who attended will bring the Board up to speed on their experiences.]

Simmons attended a few sessions, including the Cave Conservancies Roundtable, which Berger and Morris-Siegel were also at. There wasn't a great deal of content presented at that session. He reported that there was some content at the NSS Nature Preserves meeting, and went into a bit more detail. Simmons also saw a video presentation about the James Gage Preserve, and an outstanding one presented by Dunham on the Dome 12 dig at the Merlins Preserve. Drake gave a talk on college caving clubs and watched various other lectures.

8.3. Positions needing to be filled (Simmons)

[As noted in the President's Report in Attachment A, we are in need of a representative in Vermont, a new manager for the Sellecks Preserve, a new Membership Chair, and a Fundraising Chair. We can discuss advertising and recruiting efforts in this topic.]

Our former Sellecks Preserve Manager (J. O'Reilly) has moved out of town, our current Membership Chair (P. Youngbaer) doesn't have enough time to commit to the project because of new work commitments, and we've been looking for a Fundraising Chair for many years. All but the Fundraising Chair will need to be advertised to the membership before we can fill the positions, and they didn't make the current newsletter because it went out after we were led to understand that none would be published this cycle for lack of content submissions.

Hedges and Berger each expressed tentative interest in at least discussing the Membership Chair position with Youngbaer and considering whether to take it on. Nieman expressed willingness to care for the Sellecks Preserve. Hatfield (in notes submitted prior to the meeting) is willing to co-chair or perhaps chair the Fundraising Committee, but plans to discuss the position's requirements and qualifications with Simmons.

8.4. Sending notification about incidents or potential incidents (incursions, damage, etc.) (Berger)

[Since the last meeting, there have been at least two incursions or potential incursions onto our property unknown until long after the fact by some of our volunteers who need to know about these things right away. We'll use those as examples and remind everyone of what we need to do to for our protection to work.]

Berger explained that while we're committing a large piece of our budget to protecting ourselves with various forms of insurance, some of those policies have timelines during which we need to notify the carriers of potential issues once we become aware of them, not to necessarily file a claim, but to retain our eligibility to open a formal claim in the future in the event we're unable to amicably resolve the situation. As a result, any time something that has the potential to result in a liability lawsuit, or anyone damages our property or encroaches on our land, the Insurance Liaison needs to know for process reasons, and as a more practical matter, the whole Board should know so that they're apprised of issues going on within the organization they govern.

One example was the accidental encroachment onto our Clarksville property by a new neighbor who misread a survey and plowed a forest road into our parking area, which the Clarksville Managers knew about and had discussed with Simmons, but which Berger and Morris-Siegel first heard reference to at the NSS Cave Conservancies Roundtable. Another was the likely encroachment onto our land at the Traino Preserve by a farmer (discussion indicates that this likely is the same farmer we've interacted with at the Onesquethaw Preserve). Berger will work with Hedges outside of the meeting to gather the info needed to open a "placeholder" report with Terrafirma about the potential issue at the Traino Preserve.

There was some follow-on discussion about marking of preserve boundaries and standardization of management practices.

8.5. Jack Packers (EC)

[The cave has changed hands, and Folsom has been having discussions with the new owner; we will try to bring the Board up to date on those conversations.]

The Officers brought the rest of the Board up to speed on the discussions referenced by Item 9 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D. In particular, we discussed that the cave is the longest known in Green County with two entrances (one near enough to the Thruway that you can feel trucks going by from inside the cave), and that it has roughly 1,100-1,200 feet of passage, but needs to be resurveyed. It's been described as small, wet, sporting, and a reasonable beginner cave. It was recently sold by a caver, who has put us in touch with the new owner.



8.6 Preserve Manager Credentials (Engel)

Engel raised this topic to get a sense of whether Preserve Managers should have something official, like a letter from the President, stating who they are and what they're allowed to do at our properties. Other possibilities discussed included Conservancy business cards indicating the Preserve Manager title (some of which already exist, though many of us don't have them), special Preserve Manager shirts, or caps. Berger noted that it might be more meaningful if caps actually stated the name of the organization, and also that most often when he visits Knox, it coincides with a visit to New York to work on a dig, go caving, participate in a cleanup, etc., and that he seldom wears his nice NCC shirts to these as he doesn't want to ruin them.

The reason this topic occurred to Engel is that during an encounter with improperly equipped visitors at Clarksville recently, upon telling them that they couldn't go into the cave, he was evidently challenged as to who he was and how he had authority to tell them what they could and couldn't do, and he in fact didn't have proof of his authority to hand them. Various others pointed out that anyone acting this way is entirely likely to be unimpressed by a letter supposedly from the President of the organization owning the cave or a business card saying that the manager's in charge - either could, of course, just be printed. However, it was also noted that our organization does have good relationships with the Sheriff's Office in at least Albany and Schoharie Counties, and if someone is confrontational enough to refuse to listen to the Manager, a call to those offices might be in order. Regardless, the sense seemed to be that business cards for the Preserve Managers would be a good idea, whether for this or for introductions to our neighbors, new karst landowners, etc.

9. Simmons moves to close the Committee of the Whole.

Second by Levinson

For: All

[The Committee of the Whole is closed]

Old Business

[None]

New Business

10. Berger moves: The minutes of the June 7, 2020 Board Meeting are approved.

[The Secretary would like to thank Folsom, Dumont, Rubin, Hatfield, and Armen for sending in their reviews.]

Second by Engel

For: Rest

Abstain: Levinson

[The minutes of the June 7, 2020 Board Meeting are approved]

11. Simmons moves to thank Joey O'Reilly for his service as Preserve Manager of the Sellecks Preserve.

Second by Berger

For: All

[O'Reilly has the NCC's thanks for his years of service]

Informational point: Simmons announces that E. Nieman is appointed Interim Manager of the Sellecks Preserve.

Informational point: Next EC meeting will be Sunday, November 1, 2020 at 10 AM, probably on-line.

Informational point: the Winter Board meeting will be Sunday, December 6, 2020 at 10 AM at a location to be determined (possibly at Speleobooks, if conditions allow for that, but likely online). [There was some discussion of other places we might be able to hold the meeting socially-distanced.]

Informational point: the late Winter EC meeting will be Sunday, February 7, 2021 at 10 AM, probably on-line.

12. Simmons moves: The NCC Spring meeting will be Sunday, March 7, 2021 at 10am, maybe at HRP Associates in a very large room.

Second by Hedges

For: All

[The NCC Spring meeting will be Sunday, March 7, 2021 at 10am, maybe at HRP Associates]

13. Engel moves to thank Bob Simmons for originally offering to host this NCC meeting at his office.

Second by Armen

For: Rest

Abstain: Simmons

[The NCC thanks Bob Simmons for originally offering to host this NCC meeting]

14. Dumont moves to adjourn.

Second by Ingalls

For: Rest

Against: Morris-Siegel

[The meeting is adjourned]

Meeting adjourned at 2:10pm

**Attachment A
President's Report**

1. [REDACTED]
2. I filed the final report for the human influences on caves grant in July. The report was accepted. As it turns out, we did not spend enough of the budget to meet our total cash match and will need to give back a part of the grant money. I intend to apply for the next part of the grant, which includes the actual data analysis assuming they have a round again this fall.
3. Acquisitions activities have been minimal during COVID. I have been hoping to do a letter campaign to select cave owners to get our name out there/in front of them so that discussions may take place as soon as the COVID-19 restrictions allow face-to-face interactions again. That has yet to happen. There has been some outreach and discussion with the new owner of Jack Packers Cave in Greene County. Still working toward a closing for the Salamander donation.
4. We have several openings that need to get filled:
 - a. Representative in Vermont to push forward several initiatives on a local basis.
 - b. New Manager for Selleck's Preserve (O'Reilly has moved out of the area).
 - c. A New Membership Chair (Youngbaer is stepping back at the end of the year).
 - d. As always, we are in need of a Fund-Raising Chair.
5. As you are all aware, the game cameras identified an incursion into one of our caves over the winter. This topic needs closure under Executive Session. I intend to redeploy the cameras again this year prior to the start of the winter closure season, and using lessons learned from the previous deployment.
6. There was talk of deploying the temperature/humidity loggers into a single cave to get a more complete assessment of the in-cave climate.

Cave Preserve Management Plan Review Schedule

Year	March	June	September	December
2020		Clarksville		Bentleys
2021	Ella Armstrong	Knox	Traino	Sellecks
2022	Bensons	Merlins		Onesquethaw
2023	Spider	Clarksville		Bentleys
2024	Ella Armstrong	Knox	Traino	Sellecks

Note: No MP is reviewed during the September meeting.

CAVE PRESERVE REPORTS:

1. Bensons (Luke Mazza)

Progress: Data loggers removed from the cave on 7/18. On 9/9 the property was inspected, mowed, and small trees and limbs were removed from the trail. Some boundary markers were reattached and/or better secured.

Problems: The kiosk is starting to show signs of aging, but is still plenty serviceable. Something has decided to start chewing on one of posts. The map poster is pretty faded and due for a re-print (this time hopefully with a UV coating).

Another year has passed without establishing a parking pull off or a chain barrier getting installed across the right-of-way. On the other hand, another year has passed without any signs of misuse of the property, and the shoulder parking is wide enough to have served well for the low number of visitors.

Plans: Will plan to refresh the kiosk signage in the spring.

2. Bentleys (Devon Hedges)

Progress: temperature and humidity sensor recovered for NYSCPP grant, kiosk repositioned on new footings and safely secured to tree, good bit of visitors logged

Problems: trails are getting overgrown, due for a weed whacking a few persistently wet areas along trail could use some stepping stones, kiosk signage needs updating, driveway drainage issues (erosion, rutting, etc.)

Plans: work with co-manager Spivak to improve trails (corduroy, stonework) and driveway (broad based dip, water bar, additional stone), update signage, management plan review for December, get Jonah Spivak added to the email alias

3. Clarksville (Thom Engel)

We have a new neighbor at Clarksville who bought the parcel east of the preserve. Unfortunately, he misread his survey and bulldozed across the back end of our parking area. He thought our 50-foot wide strip was his 50-foot wide strip. I had a three-hour conversation with Matt Johnson. I explained that he owned the 50-foot strip east of ours. He acknowledged his error and has since closed the opening. There is still a little work left to do there, but I would rather oversee it, rather than cajoling him into doing it. I want to ensure it is right. I also recommended he post his property which he sort of has done.

Additionally, there was a truck abandoned in the parking area. It was there when I arrived at 7:30AM that morning and was still there at 1:30PM. As I left, one of the servers at Jake Moon flagged me down to tell me it'd been there all night. Concerned that someone might be lost in the cave I called the Albany Co. Sheriff. Typically, they'd run the plates and try to contact the owner. The Vermont plates came back as not having been used since 1980. The VIN was covered but there was an insurance card on the dash. The VIN on that was invalid and the name and address on it didn't exist. The vehicle was towed.

4. Ella Armstrong (Erik Nieman)

Progress: Trail clear. Parking lot being re-claimed from weed growth. Ongoing project. Sign-in log installed at kiosk. Ready for 2021!
Issues: Property boundaries still need to be marked.

Plans: Continue with parking lot. Mark property boundaries.

5. Knox (Mitch Berger)

Progress: Some trail maintenance has occurred thanks to some of our visitors (particular thanks to J. Morris-Siegel, S. Severance, and E. Nieman for their offers of assistance)

11 permits have been issued for the season (including one for Crossbones)

Issues: The pandemic, out-of-state travel concerns related to my workplace, and other events have continued to keep me away from the preserve.

One permit was denied because of a time overlap with another permitted group.

The Great Divide rope is [presumably] still there.

Engel and Berger still need to investigate what may be poison parsnip plants.

A group that visited on 9/13 had a very strange and somewhat troubling encounter with a bat which has led the affected caver to obtain precautionary vaccination for rabies (it's not clear that there was any bite, however).

Plans: Periodic property inspection.

Addition of trail markers and reposting of property.

Boundary marking.

Removal of the Great Divide rope.

Investigation of troublesome plant species.

Contact NYSDEC's Wildlife Diversity Unit to report the above-mentioned bat encounter and seek input.

6. Merlins (Morgan Ingalls & Jacob Morris-Siegel)

It has been a slow summer on the Merlins Preserve. There have been no requests for trips into Merlins Cave. There has been a couple of dig trips into Dome 12 Cave. I had to clear some trees that had fallen across the trail.

We are still looking at acquiring a culvert to place in the entrance to the Dome 12 Sink. The hope is to get that installed before the sink ices shut.

7. Onesquethaw (Thom Engel)

There have been five permitted trips including one to retrieve the temperature and humidity sensors. Have Ellen Schwartz and Christa Hay been added as recipients of e-mail sent to onesquethaw@nec....? I also did a survey of the fallow field vegetation on 7/17/2020.

- common ragweed – *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*
- Queen Anne's lace – *Daucus carota*
- chicory – *Cichorium intybus*
- common milkweed – *Asclepias synaca*
- daisy fleabane – *Erigeron annuus*
- tumble mustard – *Sisymbrium altissimum*
- goldenrod – *Solidago* sp.

- staghorn sumac – *Rhus typhina*
- timothy – *Phleum pratense*
- orchardgrass – *Dactylus glomerata*
- alfalfa – *Medicago sativa*

8. Sellecks (Joey O'Reilly)

Progress: Parking lot and trail maintained up through the first week of September. Lots of vines removed from trail sections to stop the surrounding bushes/trees getting pulled down into trail space

Problems: Current preserve manager, Joey O'Reilly, has moved out of state.

Plans: NCC will need to find a new preserve manager

9. Spider (Kevin Dumont)

Progress: There were a few inquiries about visiting the cave since the last report, which were fielded via email. Otherwise, nothing to report.

Problems: None to report.

Plans: Creation of a trail along both the base and the top of the escarpment is planned for 2021.

10. Traino Preserve (Devon Hedges)

Progress: coordination with Alan's ex-wife on disposition of trailer of digging supplies and contents trailer moved to 1 Front Ave., Albany

We also have some new neighbors who are doing lots of work on their new property, and it looks like we'll get along well with them.

Problems: corn planted in field adjacent to northwest was our property boundary encroached? neighbors that have historically hayed haven't been met yet

Plans: plan, construct/acquire kiosk & changing area, NCC benefit auction of remaining Traino digging equipment and supplies, gear, etc.

OTHER COMMITTEES (PRESIDENT):

Acquisitions (Chuck Porter, Bob Simmons)

Salamander Preserve

COVID has continued to stall progress here. I have spoken with the donor who is anxious to get this done, hold up appears to be her attorney. I owe the Kingston Land Trust (KLT) a response to a recent inquiry.

Vermont Land Trust

Need a lead person to push ahead the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between organizations. A few names have been mentioned but I have not been able to contact anyone at this point.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] nothing new to report.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Nominating (Norm Berg)

No Report

Risk Management (Mitch Berger)

Progress: Received a copy of our new Volunteer Workers Accident coverage.
Worked with the Treasurer and Office to sort out billing and payment for our policy renewals/addition.

Issues: Have not been hearing about issues that potentially could turn into Terrafirma claims promptly.
Still have two Board members who have not submitted Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms, despite multiple reminders.

Plans: Add insurance coverage (G/L and Terrafirma) for Salamander if/when we close.
Participate in annual LTA risk management training (required for Terrafirma discount eligibility).
Work on our annual Terrafirma policy renewal application (application period opens December 1).
Assemble the rest of the committee membership.
Pick up other issues that were in-progress with the former ad-hoc committee.

Tory's Cave ad hoc committee (Bob Simmons)

Nothing new since last meeting,

Bat Hibernation Ad hoc committee (Mitch Berger, Emily Davis, Mike Warner, Morgan Ingalls)

No report

Governance ad hoc (Devon Hedges)

Progress: None

Problems: Attrition? Prioritization? Excuses?

Plans: Revisit committee goals, outline areas of interest and share with Board

**Attachment B
Vice President's Report**

Bylaws Committee (Joe Levinson)

Nothing to report.

Education (Thom Engel)

Nothing to report.

Science Committee (Larry Davis)

No report received

Special Use (Thom Engel)

To date we've had only one group this summer. Permits were also issued the NCRC for Clarksville. On the plus side, the statistics this year will be easy to do.

Surprise Cave Committee (Al DeMaria)

"...my last visit was in May. I went up to the Surprise entrance to check the gate. I also checked a spot on the other side of the stream where the old entrance (second entrance) was situated (private land-Janeczko?) It looks like some digging took place."

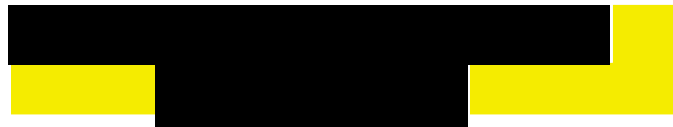
Thacher Park (Thom Engel)

We have this year's permit in place. I briefly spoke with the park manager. I do not expect any openings this year.

Cave Protection (Thom Engel)

No action. Will try again next session.

**Attachment C
Treasurer's Report**





Northeastern Cave Conservancy Inc
 Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual
 January 1 through September 1, 2020

09/13/2020

	<u>Jan 1 - Sep 1, 20</u>	<u>Budget</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense		
Income		
Donations		
Auction Donations	0.00	1,800.00
Donations - Other	3,597.65	7,741.00
Total Donations	<u>3,597.65</u>	<u>9,541.00</u>
Interest Earned	5.63	10.00
Membership Income	1,790.00	2,700.00
Total Income	<u>5,393.28</u>	<u>12,251.00</u>
Expense		
Acquisitions	150.00	2,000.00
Bank Charges	35.91	75.00
Donations-outgoing	0.00	200.00
Dues	0.00	350.00
Education	0.00	50.00
Executive		
President	0.00	100.00
Secretary	0.00	50.00
Treasurer	0.00	50.00
VP	0.00	50.00
Total Executive	<u>0.00</u>	<u>250.00</u>
Grant Expense	399.00	0.00
Insurance	2,437.06	2,516.00
Legal Fees	2,454.50	1,000.00
Licenses & Permits	150.00	125.00
Meeting Expense	0.00	100.00
Meetings & Conferences	135.00	300.00
Membership Expenses	0.00	125.00
Miscellaneous	0.00	100.00
Office Expense	56.00	100.00
Postage	0.00	100.00

Preserves-Maintenance		
Bensons	0.00	310.00
Bentleys	0.00	160.00
Clarksville	0.00	160.00
Ella Armstrong	0.00	160.00
Knox	0.00	160.00
Merlins	0.00	460.00
Onesquethaw	0.00	110.00
Sellecks	0.00	160.00
Spider	0.00	160.00
Traino	0.00	360.00
Total Preserves-Maintenance	0.00	2,200.00
Promotion	0.00	1,500.00
Publishing		
Mailings	0.00	50.00
Website	0.00	60.00
Total Publishing	0.00	110.00
Science	0.00	500.00
Sponsorships	0.00	250.00
Taxes on Properties	283.33	300.00
Total Expense	6,100.80	12,251.00
Net Ordinary Income	-707.52	0.00
Other Income/Expense		
Other Income		
Net Gain or Loss from NSF Fund	409.94	0.00
Net Gain or Loss Vanguard Life	28.40	0.00
Total Other Income	438.34	0.00
Net Other Income	438.34	0.00
Net Income	-269.18	0.00

FYI the NCC has been re-registered as a foreign corporation in the state of Connecticut.

Barn Dance Subcommittee - Emily Davis & Mike Warner:

Plans: Cancel for 2020

Problems: Covid

Progress: Plan for 2021

Investment Committee - John Fioroni:

No report received

Membership Committee - Peter Youngbaer:

Progress:

Membership Renewals and New Members:

With no Old Timers' Reunion nor gathering of the Northeastern Regional Organization of the National Speleological Society, in person opportunities for membership renewals were/are absent. Our numbers are suffering, as a result. That said, we have many renewals pending at this time. Hopefully, quite a few will show up at the NCC office soon. All renewal notices for memberships up through the end of September have been sent. It has been nice to see a few members returning to the active rolls over the past few months. The database is current as of today, September 11.

Our current membership stands as follows, compared to the baseline of April 22, 2012:

September 11, 2020	April 22, 2012 (baseline)
Life: 63	Life: 18
Family Life: 9	Family Life: 0
Benefactor: 6 (+2)	Benefactor: 10
Regular: 62 (-14)	Regular: 88
Family: 14 (-5)	Family: 16
Institutional: 6	Institutional: 3
Total: 160 (-18)	Total: 135

Note: Total in June was 178; February was 179; November was 173; September was 175; June was 176; March was 178; November, 2018 was 173; September, 2018 was 180. High point was 209 in March, 2017.

Institutional Members: *Boston Grotto, Central Connecticut Grotto, Vermont Cavers Association, Met Grotto, New Jersey Initial Response Team, and Helderberg - Hudson Grotto.* **If your grotto or organization isn't listed here, please urge them to renew or join. Thank you.**

Problems:

None

Plans:

Normal Operations: I am hereby giving notice that I will be stepping down as Membership Committee Chair as of the December NCC Board meeting. My work is all-consuming, and I have had to make some choices about what I continue doing. So, this is my next to last report. I will continue to send renewal notices, as well as second and third notices, as applicable, and hope we can swell the membership rolls a bit more prior to the end of the year. I am happy to assist in orienting and training any successor.

Peter Youngbaer, Membership Chair Reminder: email address: pyoungbaer@gmail.com

Office Committee Report - Emily Davis & Mike Warner:

Problems: None
Progress: Status Quo
Plans: none specifically

Publications – Christa Hay:

Nothing to report for publicity

Newsletter: there will be no newsletter. The Editor reviewed 1/2 page of content.

Technology Committee Report – Mike Chu:

Status quo; no issues to report.

Volunteer Value Committee – Vince Kappler:

Vince Kappler
volunteervalue@necaveconservancy.org

Progress:

Year to date totals: 329.25 hours of volunteer work on NCC projects for a total value of \$10,645. Members also reported traveling a total of 2491 miles to work on projects.

Although VV totals were severally impacted by the coronavirus lock down some members were still able to record time working for the NCC. The Treasurer and Office committees reported on their work from home or virtual meetings held to conduct NCC Business. DeMaria also reported some hours as our liaison for the Surprise agreement.

Plans:

I will send periodic VV reminders to the membership and monitor data collection.

Problems:

None at this time

**Attachment D
Secretary's Report**

**EC Meeting Minutes
August 23, 2020, 10:00am
Online via Videoconference**

Called to order 10:12am

Present: R. Simmons, B. Folsom, T. Engel, M. Berger, J. Morris-Siegel

1) Upcoming NCRC modular Level 1

This was announced and plans for it surfaced fairly rapidly a couple of weeks ago. They are planning to conduct the class by combining two Zoom sessions and three in-person weekends. Engel reports that they applied through the Special Use permit process, and so far have only requested use of Clarksville. Berger informs us that he was asked to instruct, and agreed to do so, though he assumed that (as with everything else in the world), it would not pan out and would end up cancelled. He tells us that there has been lots of discussion about the number of people who might take and teach the class, how to try to minimize transmission risk, what caves would be used, the added risks related to how long we haven't been underground, what would happen if a real rescue needed to happen, exhaustion and oxygen levels related to wearing masks underground while performing strenuous tasks, etc. Engel mentioned that the actual permit hadn't yet been issued, though preliminary agreement had been reached, and asked whether there should be specific special conditions on the permit, for example, use of masks. Berger outlined the draft COVID risk mitigation plan that's already been shared with the instructors, and indicated that though he's fairly nervous, the precautions (including an objective scored risk interview everyone takes on arrival each weekend with a threshold below which you get sent home immediately, splitting the class into two "cohorts" that stay with each other separate from the other cohort during exercises and having each instructor tied to one cohort, requirement to wear masks at all times except while eating, and including underground time, eye protection as appropriate, carrying out certain exercises above ground that would ordinarily happen in-cave, spread out sleeping accommodations with most attendees being local and discouraged from staying on-site, scheduling the weekends two weeks apart to allow time to identify transmission, no buffet-style or make-your-own-lunch meals, quantitative risk assessments of Albany and Schoharie County and the home county of each student and instructor in the week leading up to each in-person weekend, etc.) are sufficiently thorough that there would be no point in us tacking on additional conditions to our permit, as anything we'd consider asking them to do is already going to be done per their approved risk mitigation plan.

2) NSS Convention recap

Simmons indicated that he was glad the Convention Committee tried to hold the online event and scrambled to arrange a number of sessions. He, Berger, and Morris-Siegel attended the Cave Conservancies Roundtable. At that meeting, there wasn't much substantive - no major topics. Zoom introductions and logistics took a very long time. Morris-Siegel reported that the Cartography Critique session ran well. Simmons said that the NSS Preserves meeting was well-run, having a topic, planned presentation, and handouts which were distributed the night before the session. They looked over a proposed template for management plans, which seemed to look very much like a set of access policies, and there was some concern that it doesn't satisfy the broader scope of objectives that a management plan should. Engel watched videos every morning, and tells us that there was one on Gage (though it ended with a donation request for the filmmaking venture that produced the video rather than for the NSS). He thought the video work was excellent, and that had it not been for COVID, he might have wanted to pursue discussions with the filmmaker about assistance

replacing our classic slideshow with a “Caves of the NCC” presentation. Dunham presented a well-received talk on the Dome 12 dig - Folsom posted it on the NCC Facebook page.

3) COVID & visitation

Berger stated that things have been largely quiet at Knox (at least in terms of permit requests). While Engel has been at Clarksville a lot, he’s also not seen many groups there. Nieman and Engel began a surface survey at Onesquethaw to locate sinks. Simmons explained that there are mixed messages that have been coming out of the NSS from their “management” and “lower management” - they have people going caving, yet their upper management has said that people can’t go caving. However, contrary to what some of us had understood to be the case, their preserves are open. There is a new AVP (A. Weaver), and as we understand it, a survey is going to be taken of what’s required to get a permit for their various preserves, and the results will be published in the NSS News. Morris-Siegel was recently at Merlins with the Columbia Land Conservancy for their annual easement monitoring visit. The trails at that preserve were not worn. Simmons and Berger have both not been in the area of our preserves for months.

4) Virtual members event?

Simmons has been overwhelmed by work as of late. There was a group document that Hatfield sent out, and Folsom had contributed to it by adding a suggestion of L. Botto’s band. We’re unsure what’s happened with planning. Engel knows that Hatfield and Schwartz have been out at their place on the Cape.

5) Virtual NRO?

Hatfield had led us in a discussion of this topic at the last Board meeting, and circulated e-mail about it afterwards. Berger replied with an offer to help as well as a note that the amount of time he could put in was likely limited. Berger also reports that he has received official word from HHG that their plans to host the Fall NRO have been cancelled (we all expected this, though). Morris-Siegel suggests that while it sounded like a nice idea at the time, he feels that everyone is burned out on virtual events, and probably doesn’t want to have any more of them while the weather’s nice and you can actually go for a hike or something. Perhaps we should consider an event in the winter, instead.

6) Virtual Barn Dance

Much the same story as above. If the sense is that people are sick of virtual events at this point and we don’t want to hold them, we should probably let Hatfield know so she doesn’t put much more work into thinking about them. Simmons will reach out to her.

7) Bentleys incident

Berger expressed regret that he didn’t argue more forcefully that the Board’s Executive Session meeting should happen immediately following the last Board meeting, as instead a poll was sent out and never acted on, which was what he’d feared would happen. That meeting needs to occur. The EC briefly went into Executive Session to catch up on the issue at hand. We plan to use the time that would have been occupied by officer reviews before the upcoming Board Meeting to hold the Executive Session meeting on this topic (or to hold it in between officer reviews and the regular Board Meeting in the event that officer reviews are happening).

8) Clarksville incident

Engel went up to the preserve and saw that a new road had been bulldozed through the back of the property line at the parking area in the lower parking lot. He thought it might have been one of June’s neighbors, but it wasn’t. It turns out we have a new neighbor there who bought the adjacent property. Engel started parking in front of the access point daily, until someone asked him to move. They talked for three hours. The new neighbor plans to build a house somewhere on the property. He misread his survey and thought our 50’ strip of land was his. The new road is sort of closed up, but there’s more work to be done when the weather gets cooler. Engel contacted the other co-managers of the Clarksville Preserve and copied Simmons, but acknowledges that others should’ve been told. Berger and Morris-Siegel were surprised to hear this incident that they knew nothing about referenced at the Cave Conservancies Roundtable. Aside from the surprise, Berger also reminded the group that there are notification deadlines by which we have to report potential issues to our insurance carriers in order to be eligible to file a claim if a situation doesn’t end up resolved amicably. We agreed that the Board and all the property managers should be reminded of this fact as well, and that realistically, it makes sense for the whole Board to be apprised of these sorts of things. Engel shared some photos of the bulldozed area with us. It’s now closed up with vegetation. Perhaps we should put together a checklist for property managers for when they have an “encounter?”

9) Jack Packers

There have been no updates since the last e-mail in the relevant thread. Folsom isn’t sure that he’s looking for money anymore. If that’s the case, Berger asks, is it still worth going down the path of arranging a lease? The property is encumbered by a lending institution. The ideal scenario would be us either accepting it as donated land or accepting a conservation easement on it. Folsom will talk with the owner. Engel suggests that if we acquire it, Dumont might be interested in managing it.

10) Salamander

[REDACTED]

11) Papers on NCC preserves

Engel thought that Dunham gave a fine talk at Convention, but feels that it would have been nice for us as an organization to know ahead of time that it was coming (and notes that he might have missed the talk if it had been at a real physical Convention). Simmons notes that if we'd known, we could have promoted it, and Engel thinks even a link on our website would have been nice.

12) LTA grants

For the NYSCPP bat monitoring scientific project grant, Simmons wrote our two-year closeout report and filed it (it has been accepted). We got off to a great start, with an incredible amount of volunteer effort. Reconciling the plans we stated in the budget with what was actually spent was quite an exercise. In the end, we got more money from them than we spent, to the tune of a \$3k difference, which will have to be given back. It's all about the cash match portion. LTA didn't make a big deal about the light detectors we started out with which didn't end up working for our purposes. Simmons talked with our contacts at LTA about the upcoming cycle. As far as they know, they're funded for the grant program, so we can proceed to put in an application for phase 2 of the grant project.

13) Drones in caves

After the latest round of e-mail that came in from various preserve managers about the requestor contacting them asking to shoot video of a drone in the caves, Engel e-mailed the person and told him that he must go through the Special Use process. He also noted that none of the passages are lit, etc. Engel notes that he doesn't have a problem in principle with drones in caves, but there is an issue in that they wouldn't have exclusive use of the cave for this project. Berger notes that if we allowed this to occur without exclusive use of the cave, there's a real danger of collisions with and injury of other parties, especially if the drone is flying out of sight of the operator. If the film project is for pay (and it sounds like it's part of a marketing plan for this drone technology), then they definitely need a Special Use permit. Not only would flying it in a cave without exclusive use present a danger to other people in the cave, but flying it at all may present a danger to formations in the cave. If it's performing mapping with LIDAR sensors, then the difficulty of control may also lead to risk of a laser damaging someone's eyes. It seems that this person didn't contact all of the preserves, but he did hit a bunch of them, starting with Clarksville and Bentleys. Engel was shown a storyboard for the video they wanted to make - it's about a drone to help with search and rescue operations.

14) Monitoring equipment

We own 11 acoustic detectors, temperature/humidity detectors, and light monitors that essentially don't work. A couple of them actually failed. We're looking for something we can do with all of these things. Some of the game cams that were recording outdoor stuff filled up their capacity and ran down their batteries, but we could mostly set and forget them over the winter. Simmons plans to put them out again. Ingalls would like to pick a couple caves to instrument with the temperature/humidity sensors to look at microclimates.

15) Bat Conservation International / NYSDEC data collection at Knox

There was an e-mail thread between one of our DEC contacts and Emily, the President, and the Knox Manager about a proposed research project by someone working with BCI. During the course of this discussion, early on, offers of use of our acoustic monitoring equipment were made, as were suggestions that it might be able to be considered related to our existing science project for the NYSCPP grant (even though it's not really). As a result, Berger felt he was left in an awkward position because we're supposed to follow the Science Permit process for something like this, but instead of saying that, many comments by others were made that likely resulted in the DEC inferring that they could simply proceed with allowing the researcher to carry on the project and that the only remaining question was whether they need a date-specific permit or can go any day they want. Of course, telling them that they can't use the cave because they haven't followed the required application process would likely strain our relationship, especially if they feel that they were misled. There isn't a permit issued yet, and Engel points out that we streamlined the Science Permit process such that many things don't require Board approval, but an application is still required. There was also some discussion about our failure to receive data/papers from some previously approved scientific projects, and how the Science Coordinator really should have centralized responsibility to collect and publicize results and papers so that we can publicize how our resources and organization have contributed to the scientific community. Engel is interested in seeing a bat person and biospeleologist on the Science Committee; L. Davis is a geologist by trade. Simmons will follow up with the DEC to try to get an application submitted for the streamlined process expeditiously.

16) Acquisition updates

Nothing has really happened other than the updates previously covered about Salamander and Jack Packers. Simmons has had no time to revisit the discussion with [REDACTED]. He's heard nothing back from [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]. Folsom notes that the NSS had some press releases from land deals recently, and wonders if these were in the works long ago, or happened post-lockdown as people were thinking about what to do with their land.

17) NCC / Kingston Land Trust Access to Property Agreement update

Simmons has been holding off on this discussion since we don't have the Salamander property yet. He has conveyed to them that we're looking for something more than just a gentleman's agreement (for example, an easement). An arrangement we're comfortable with is the last condition that needs to be satisfied before contributing to their purchase of the land; we should probably not conclude this deal until we have Salamander.

18) NCC / Vermont Land Trust Draft Memorandum of Understanding update

Simmons says he's fallen down on this, and that we need someone to take over representing us in Vermont. Originally Youngbaer was handling this with the expectation of some help from Dunham. Youngbaer has backed out because of time commitments, and Dunham declined. Figuring out who we can turn to is on Simmons's to-do list.

19) Sellecks Preserve Manager opening

O'Reilly is leaving the area for Maryland due to a job opportunity. The last time we were advertising, M. Martuscello offered to help. Folsom mentions that C. Sandonato was also interested at one point.

20) Thank you letter for Paul Dower bequest

Simmons couldn't find anyone anywhere to send a meaningful letter to. Perhaps we can put a mention in the newsletter.

21) Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms

Berger reported that there are still two Board members who have not turned them in, despite multiple requests and reminders with escalating severity. Not collecting these will cause us to not be in compliance with a New York law. Simmons will help extract these documents from the relevant parties.

22) Letter to the membership

Simmons will write one in his spare time. Berger asks if we got the grant we'd applied for with the intent to use it for a postal mailing; it sounds like we didn't. The question was raised of whether we should buy stamps anyhow. Engel thinks this is especially important since everything's virtual these days, and suggested that he might help if there's a shortage of funds to buy stamps with. If you have stuff to work into the letter, get it to Simmons.

23) NSF contract

24) September meeting

Simmons could host from HRP and set up a socially-distant room, but we'd really have to have a virtual offering for those who don't want to come, so it's unclear that there's much point in having the in-person option. We discussed GoToMeeting and Zoom. The conclusion was that Berger will host the meeting on Zoom. We also discussed the report schedule for the agenda. Reports will be due to the officers by September 6th, and due to the Secretary the weekend of September 12-13.

25) Thacher Park addition

Last fall, Engel was asked to look at an adjacent piece of property that was for sale, which contains coral reef with fossils, beautiful bioherms and biostromed. There are none of those in New York that were in public hands until now. Thacher has added this 33 acres with the finances provided by the Open Space Initiative. There is one cave totally within the reef - the walls are just fossils. It has a sinking stream as well. This area is going to be attached to the Thompson's Lake segment of the park (it shares a 2000' boundary). We'll likely do some mapping there, though Engel isn't sure of plans for trail building.

End: 2:58pm