

## Minutes

March 7, 2021 10:00 AM  
Online via Videoconference

Meeting called to order at 10:05am

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, L. Hatfield, E. Nieman, J. Morris-Siegel,  
R. Drake, P. Rubin

3. Absent with proxy: None

4. Absent without designated proxy: None

5. Officers' Reports

President: Attachment A

Vice President: Attachment B

Treasurer: Attachment C

Secretary: Attachment D

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

Second by Morris-Siegel

For: All

[The Committee of the Whole is opened]

Topics:

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

*[This is the usual followup topic on progress with the grant project. If the Board is inclined, a motion may be in order to authorize loaning/renting of equipment acquired for this project to other organizations in need if we are not in a position to use the equipment ourselves for lack of a grant cycle this year. See discussion in the Bat Hibernation Ad-hoc Committee report in Attachment A.]*

Simmons informs us that, as has been the case for quite some time, there's still no news on a round of funding for grants for this year, and we should likely accept that it's unlikely to occur. So, he's asked the Bat Hibernation Ad-hoc Committee if our scientific gear may be able to be put to good use by our renting or loaning it to agencies or land trusts interested in working on projects that are not stuck awaiting grant funding. Davis asked C. Herzog if the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation might want to use them, and he indicated some interest, but we never heard back further with anything concrete. Ingalls notes that the Northeast Bat Working Group conference is this Wednesday, and asks whether she should mention availability of this equipment at the event; there was consensus that she should. Hatfield inquires who would coordinate these rentals, and the Office agrees to do so. Folsom expresses support for seeking some income from other groups' use of the equipment, given how difficult the past year has made fundraising without many of our usual events. Berger notes that while he's in support of making the equipment available for others to use, as it's capital equipment that we've insured, it's probably appropriate for the Board to formally approve loaning or renting it out; he'll prepare a motion to appear under New Business for this purpose.

6.2. Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve Management Plan review (Nieman)

*[This is the periodic review of this preserve's management plan; proposed updates from the Managers should be included in the meeting materials, though the Secretary does not have them, and will be voted on in agenda item 9 below.]*

Nieman inquires about the last item in the current "Future Plans" section, which states that "the conservation rights to the parcel should be addressed to reduce the potential value of the property by eliminating any development opportunities" - specifically, he asked whether the conservation rights had indeed been addressed. Berger explains that the phrasing of that item seems incredibly cryptic, and that he's not sure why it didn't just come out and say what it really meant, but that he's virtually certain it meant "a conservation easement on the property should be granted to a qualified land trust" and dates back to a time when the NCC sought to grant such easements

on all of its properties to protect them should anything happen to our organization which might cause us to lose the land. Since that time, we've obtained updated legal advice (which we've adopted) that has caused us to pursue a risk management strategy that doesn't involve conservation easements, and so we're no longer seeking to grant one at this property. Simmons adds that the Ella Armstrong parcel is also only one acre, and so it would be of nearly no interest to any developers. The conclusion was that the "Future Plans" item in question should be removed.

### 6.3. Merlins Cave Preserve Management Plan review (Morris-Siegel, Ingalls)

*[The Preserve Managers have requested some updates to this Management Plan. Their proposal is included in the meeting materials, and will be voted on in agenda item 10 below.]*

There was significant discussion over the inclusion of bat count numbers in Management Plans. We have, at times, included them in the past. Ingalls removed them from this draft of the plan to simplify the administrative burden of having to revise the Plan and seek Board approval each time a new count is conducted, which (due to the number of preserves we now have) happens at a higher cadence than regularly scheduled Management Plan reviews. Berger points out that if this were the only reason to remove the numbers, we could solve the issue by simply noting which year the listed recent count was from and not feeling obligated to get updated numbers into the plan as soon as they're obtained. However, the wisdom of publishing the counts at all was also called into question by several. Armen and Berger discussed the thought process that led to redacting such numbers from this quarter's Knox Preserve report, which hinged on being uncertain whether we're allowed to publish the known locations of endangered or threatened species if we're the owners of the locations in question (Davis has agreed to follow up on this question with C. Herzog). Berger also raised the point that publishing numbers to be consumed by readers who haven't been given the appropriate scientific background can lead to accidentally implying things that may not be the case - specifically, if we publish counts that show an increase in the numbers of certain species counted at one of our caves, the appearance to the untrained eye may be that these numbers indicate recovery of the bat population. However, the reality may be that the change in numbers is partially due to bats having changed hibernation sites since the previous count, and without additional data, you can't infer how much of the change in a count is due to each of these causes. Giving readers a possibly false impression that the bat population has recovered could lead to terrible conservation outcomes if it causes more people to disregard seasonal closures. Davis adds that publishing numbers may also be bad because counts can be misleading as they don't find many of the bats that hide in crevices, and so we might improperly give the impression that there are only a tiny number of bats in a cave, leading people to conclude that the closures aren't protecting a significant population, when in fact that number is just the set of bats actually seen by the group performing the count. Berger and Morris-Siegel emphasized this point by describing counts they've assisted the DEC with where they've shown the DEC staff areas of certain caves that aren't usually visited when the DEC counts on their own; such visits have resulted in substantially increased counts in the years where NCC volunteers have accompanied DEC staff simply because of the areas visited in the caves rather than an effect on the population. The conclusion was that we won't publish the counts.

Berger inquired about the part of the plan that indicates that Cave Stewards will notify the Preserve Managers of any trips, as he had understood the requirement to be that Stewards had to obtain permission to take a trip on a specific day. Ingalls said that she was also confused by not finding wording to that effect in the existing plan even though that was the understanding we were all under, and what Stewards have been told during cave orientation trainings. Berger notes that the parking lot is only likely to accommodate two groups (one of which may be parking the other in), and that there's known to have been at least one episode where two groups encountering each other in the cave in one of the constricted areas experienced signs of low oxygen levels, likely due to crowding, so it seems that coordination of groups seeking to use Merlins on the same day is desirable. Morris-Siegel and Ingalls agree and will adjust the wording to require Stewards "to receive permission" for proposed trips.

Armen notes that as the Plan (and most of our other Plans) outline that when there's a conflict between recreational use of a cave and digging in a cave, the recreational use has priority, and Dome 12 is claimed to be a "project cave," this designation seems to be in conflict with the use priorities. As Dome 12 has some hazards as a result of its newness and ongoing project work, which is the real reason people shouldn't be visiting it without coordination, the conclusion was that the plan shouldn't call it a "project cave," to eliminate the discrepancy, and it should instead simply require permission to visit just as Merlins does.

Ingalls also wishes to remove the sentence that mentioned the skull under active research by the NYS Museum, as nothing has been heard about that project in several years, and asks if we know who it was given to. Nobody at the meeting did, but Engel agreed to try to track down whether we have that knowledge somewhere in the organization, and suspects that J. Dunham might know.

### 6.4. 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 and a Fundraising Chair. We can discuss advertising and recruiting efforts in this topic.]*

Hatfield indicated that she's willing to talk more with Simmons about the Fundraising role, and asked if there's someone else who's held it in the past to seek information from. The reality is that it's been a long time since

that position was filled in name, and an even longer time since it had a vibrant life. Sassu-Laviero also plans to talk with Hatfield about it.

#### 6.5. Stewardship Coordinator (Simmons)

*[See extensive discussion in Item 4 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Simmons refers us to the explanation given in his motion in Item 12 of this agenda. The President's responsibilities have grown substantially as we've taken on more preserves, and just as he is assisted by having some of what would otherwise be solely his responsibilities delegated to an Acquisitions Chair, he's seeking assistance from another position to help with onboarding new Preserve Managers, working on their Manual, conducting training, and coordinating future plans. He notes that stewardship is one of our core functions, and deserves a dedicated person working on it - most conservancies tackle this issue with professional staff. Having such a position will allow the President to deal more effectively with several of the day-to-day responsibilities. Morris-Siegel feels that it's a good idea, and Dumont also expresses agreement.

#### 6.6. LTA, NCKMS, NEBWG conference participation (Berger)

*[Some of the conferences we regularly participate in will be virtual and some may be in person; we should discuss our plans for attendance and representation. See Item 16 in the EC Minutes in Attachment D.]*

New York Land Conservation Conference (LTA): Simmons notes that the real value in this one for us is usually not the presentations, but rather the networking. Berger notes that of all the things reformatted to be virtual during the pandemic, last year this was the only one he's aware of that *increased* its price, and he's unsure whether that's the case again this year. Registration appears to be \$135. Simmons has looked into the Massachusetts and Rhode Island conference, which this year has also increased its price; Morris-Siegel usually attends it for work, but tells us that he's not going this year. Simmons also tells us that Connecticut hasn't decided whether they'll hold their usual conference this year. Hatfield, who represented us at the LTA conference last year, indicates that some of the informational sessions look like they may actually be good, and mentioned one in particular that seems to have convinced Simmons to attend. A motion will appear in New Business to designate Hatfield and Simmons as our representatives. Simmons also mentions that the Connecticut Land Conservation Council is running a free "bootcamp" of biweekly Zoom sessions on various topics for conservancies over the coming couple of months if anyone is interested in attending any of them.

Northeast Bat Working Group (NEBWG): Davis tells us that the conference decided to spend what seems like an exorbitant sum to have a management company set up Zoom for them, which has upset a number of people (and caused various at this meeting to be somewhat stunned, given what's actually involved in running a Zoom conference and some of the plans we're going to be discussing later for our own events), but that there will be no charge for attending the conference, which can still be registered for despite being only three days away, and that there are no sponsors sought, so we needn't take any action. Ingalls will, of course, also be in attendance.

National Cave and Karst Management Symposium (NCKMS): Berger is interested in attending and suspects that it likely will happen in person as it's late enough in the year. Since he enjoyed it significantly more than expected last time, he'll coordinate our group presence this time, too. Davis tells us that Warner was visiting with J. Kennedy (who's chairing the conference) and will return tomorrow, and may bring back updates about the conference's plans. We have significant time to figure out our plans because it's so many months out and sponsorship levels haven't even been posted, so we can make more decisions at the summer meeting. However, Berger notes that this time around, the theme isn't as geared specifically towards us as it was last time (this time it's "Endangered Species, Endangered Caves, Endangered Aquifers"), so if we're to attend, it would be nice to figure out what we might present, as it seemed from the last one that most people who attend give a presentation at some point. Rubin may be able to present on aquifers at our preserves. Simmons is on the fence about attending. Engel feels that we could put together a poster about our first purchased preserve - Sellecks - which was largely to protect the McFails aquifer. More followup will happen at future meetings.

#### 6.7 NSS Convention, International Congress of Speleology, Old Timers Reunion (Berger)

*[As above, we can discuss our plans for participation and representation at these caver events here. See discussion in Item 17 of the EC Minutes in Attachment D.]*

NSS Convention: It's scheduled for the end of June, and they'd like to move it to the end of July, but can't do so until they find out whether the UIS will move back the International Congress and vacate those dates (see below). Whether it will happen in person or remotely is not yet known. Drake tells us that there should be an announcement about it soon. When asked whether people would be planning to go to it if it were in person, Drake indicated that she would, Berger and Simmons will not, Davis and Warner would if it happens in July, and Armen might if it's in July. Our next Board meeting will happen before Convention, but not very much before it, and so Berger's main concern is in planning our organizational presence - what posters, materials, display and handout materials, etc. we'd want to have there and logistics for getting it there and back and staffing a booth as needed. Morris-Siegel suggests that given the circumstances, it would be fine to not worry about having our usual "stuff" there and still counting ourselves as participating if anyone attends. If it happens remotely, Berger and Simmons

also indicate that they'll be happy to attend the usual meetings they often serve as delegates to (and Berger speculates that given how many people will be uncomfortable with travel at that point, even if it occurs in person, there may well be a remote attendance option for those meetings).

International Congress of Speleology (ICS): They'll be deciding at the end of this month whether to push back the conference by a year. Various of us had been planning for years on going, but Davis says she and Warner won't go if it's this year; neither will Berger, and we don't seem to be aware of anyone else in our group who will. If it gets pushed back a year, likely several of us will go. However, Berger notes that the discussion at the EC meeting seemed to suggest that there's not really a role for us to play as an organization at the ICS, and that even presenting anything might be fairly difficult as papers need to be judged and accepted, as opposed to the relatively simple process of having a talk accepted at a conference like Convention, NCKMS, or NEBWG. He mostly raised the topic to check if anyone disagrees, and it turns out that Davis does. She thinks we could easily have a small booth, and recalls an Australian cave conservancy that to some extent modeled their group after our organization and presented about themselves at a prior ICS. She also thinks that it may be easier than we think to get a paper/talk accepted, as she's seen someone present there in the past on the history of the Boston Grotto! She suggests that a presentation covering history or models of American cave conservancies might work out well, and while the deadline for this year is long gone, expects that if they move it back by a year, they'll likely reopen for submissions of additional presentations. If so, Berger has some interest in pursuing this topic, and notes that the last time Davis suggested a topic for him to present on (at NCKMS), it went over quite well, so he's inclined to listen to the advice.

Old Timers Reunion (OTR): We haven't heard anything from the vendor coordinator, and neither has Davis, so we don't really know whether it's happening yet. Given that it's a September event, it does seem that there's a good chance it'll happen, and while conditions may change and these thoughts are somewhat dependent on what sorts of rules the event puts in place for safety if it occurs, Berger is leaning towards going, and Davis and Warner likely would as well. If that's the case, we probably should try to have our usual presence there, but since it's several months off, we can put off making firmer plans until the next meeting.

TAG Fall Cave-In: Though we don't usually have a formal presence there, Berger does typically try to keep us connected with SCCi and other happenings. Given the part of the country it's in, and that it's an October event, he'll be fairly surprised if it doesn't happen in-person this year, and he is planning to attend.

#### 6.8. International Year of Caves and Karst (Berger)

*[We didn't get signed up for it before it began, and are now wondering if there's reason to do so and things for us to offer given the circumstances; it doesn't appear that our peer conservancies are doing so. See discussion in Item 18 of the EC Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Simmons notes that on their published list of events, there was a kickoff event, but not much else, and largely thinks that by not moving it back or tying it to some other major events (it had been intended to be partnered with the International Congress, but that of course is trying to postpone a year, and it surprised many of us that the IYCK didn't postpone as well), the entire program has become a missed opportunity. It's also possible that if the world situation continues to improve, should we want to hold an event later in the year, we'd likely be able to jump in late. General consensus seemed to be that there's no action for us to take right now.

#### 6.9. Members' Day, NRO, Barn Dance, Virtual Bonfire (Berger)

*[We should start making decisions about what events we want to hold and/or run. See discussion in Item 21 in the EC Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Members' Day: Berger described in some detail for the group the sorts of nontraditional ways that Zoom can be used to have a more fun event where the attendees can move around, break off into groups, participate in some planned activities throughout the day/event, and not be tied to one linear everyone-watching-the-same-thing program like most boring meetings that make all of us sick of Zoom. In light of this, and how long it's been since we've held any events, the proposal is that we actually have our Members' Day this year in such a format, where events that people can choose to participate in or not may include presentations of the Certificate of Merit awards, a talk by Engel on LIDAR, slideshows of NCC preserves, watching Davis cook food that we can't eat, etc. Berger highlights the point that the technical details of setting up Zoom for something like this aren't rocket science and don't take terribly long if one knows what they're doing, but just as with any in-person event, the success and fun of it depends mostly on how well the group organizing it plans the activities; while he can handle most of the technical setup and is eager to help with more of the event, he's not a party planner and would need others helping. Folsom gives a thumbs-up, and Hatfield notes that this sounds somewhat like a possibility we'd been discussing last year for a virtual NRO. Drake notes that new members are itching for some sort of event, and we really need to have one.

Morris-Siegel wonders if we waited for late summer whether we could have the event in person. Engel notes that the pavilions at Thacher are limited to a capacity of 50. There's also the issue of competing with other events for dates once restrictions really start to lift, as lots of people are going to be clamoring to get to any outdoors event they can, having been cooped up for 1.5 years. Engel suggests that perhaps if we aimed for sometime around October 2, we could have it in-person at Joralemon Park. At this point, Drake raised her virtual hand, and Berger correctly guessed that her sentiment was going to be that we've been putting off all of our events meeting after

meeting, and that we should not wait *another* half a year to reengage with our members; she reinforces that having no events is making membership retention difficult. After much wandering back and forth between the topics of this event and the NRO (see below), and in-person and remote without real direction, we finally reached the conclusion that we're going to try to hold a virtual Members Day sometime around early June, and that Berger, Drake, Engel, Hatfield, and Sassu-Laviero will work on planning it.

NRO: We had been planning to host the first one that was cancelled due to the pandemic, and it was in our interests to do so because we'd not yet met our fundraising goals for the acquisitions of the Traino and Salamander Preserves; that situation hasn't improved a whole lot during this 1+ year where we've had no events and our membership has shrunk (in large part because renewals often happen at those events). So, it may still be in our interests to host when it becomes possible to do so again. Since that time, of course, the Helderberg-Hudson Grotto has also had to cancel an NRO, and as the next one would ordinarily occur in May, it's pretty clear that one won't be able to happen in-person, either (nobody was signed up to host that one yet). Beyond that point lies hope. Berger mentions that the Boston Grotto had discussed the idea of one this coming Fall and decided that it was likely to be too difficult to find a suitable sites - some that don't have restrictions are likely to be snapped up by other groups, and others may place many restrictions on use of their facilities that we wouldn't be able to cope with (such as carrying "virus insurance" and assuming liability if there's any transmission at the event - which apparently some venues have tried imposing as a requirement on groups looking to hold events). Hatfield suggests a hybrid format for an event that could still serve its role as a fundraiser - small groups would still go on real trips, but wouldn't come back to a campground afterwards and would instead meet up on Zoom later. Hedges notes that this would be a way to get feedback from the groups. Hatfield suggests that on the same day, there could be some small walks at our preserves (or, Davis notes, property cleanups, and Simmons recalls that we have trees that need addressing at the Merlins Preserve and Levys Cave, the trail that needs construction at Spider, adding interpretive features to the Clarksville trail, etc.). Armen notes that there's a logistical problem with people being able to get to the in-person events and then back home in time for the virtual portion of the event given that unlike when we're at a campground, some people live hours away from the caves. Nieman thinks this likely isn't an issue, as the crowd looking for in-person exploration or project work is likely different from the crowd eager to have a virtual event. Berger points out that much of the fun of an NRO is gathering back together at night to see and hear about what everyone else did, but thinks that this could work fine if it were a two-day event: small groups go on trips on one day, and then there's a virtual gathering the next day. Hatfield notes that prepending a small virtual event to that lineup where people sign up for their activities might be prudent. She thinks we should pick dates for an NRO (Berger notes that absent other arrangements, it's pre-planned to be the third full weekend of May and September). Davis also thinks that if it were going to be a smaller in-person group, it might be possible to hold at Natural Stone Bridge and Caves; Sassu-Laviero thinks the first in-person one is likely to be so large that the Harley Rendezvous site might be appropriate. Folsom feels that we shouldn't waste all of our effort on the first post-pandemic NRO, especially if it's this Fall, because it likely won't get the most bang for the buck as some still won't feel comfortable congregating. Asked whether we'd be collecting NRO fees, Berger stated that if it were held as a traditional in-person event, it's pretty firmly codified that the registration fees for the Region/Host split have to be collected and it's hard to imagine anyone having an issue with paying those, but if it's going to be a virtual event, attempting to collect the registration fees to attend something on Zoom would likely be a crippling blow to attendance, and so if it's held online, practicality dictates that we're going to have to eschew the registration fees and allow all of the fundraising to stand on its own inside the event. Hatfield asks for a straw poll, and it seems that most present are interested in the NCC attempting to host the Fall NRO as a hybrid event. A motion to this effect will appear in New Business.

Barn Dance: Davis indicates that it may happen, pandemic situation pending, and we'll need to stay tuned to see how things are shaping up as September gets closer.

Virtual Bonfire: Simmons had wanted to do this, scheduled it, had to postpone it, concluded he was so sick of virtual meetings that he couldn't bring himself to ask people to attend another one, needed recovery time himself to be willing to deal with another virtual event, and has not yet completed that recovery. Berger told him that he can probably be let off the hook if we simply have this subsumed as part of the Members' Day event, but that this will mean that he has to actually attend it! Simmons agreed, and to everyone's relief, Berger asked Engel to stick a fork in this incredibly lengthy topic, having finally come away with a gameplan for all of our major events!

#### 6.10. Newsletter (Brass)

Brass informed us that he regrets not having produced a newsletter leading up to this meeting, but points out that in order to do so, he really needs content, which has been sorely lacking; everyone understands that, and of course, lack of events and mostly lack of caving have presented some fairly substantial challenges by removing a lot of the typical fodder for content. He also presented the exciting news that he's produced a cumulative index for the NCC's newsletters with cross-referencing. However, Brass can't finish putting this out until some issues are corrected with the webpage, which he had us all look at in our browsers as he pointed out some of the details (dead links, wrong months being listed, etc.). Berger complimented him on having turned it into an interactive topic (and

was grateful that this group tour of the website bought him enough time to draft the various motions and informational items that needed to come out of Committee of the Whole).

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

Second by Hedges

For: All

[The Committee of the Whole is closed]

Old Business

[None]

New Business

8. Berger moves: The minutes of the December 6, 2020 Board Meeting are approved.

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

Second by Engel

For: All

[The minutes of the December 6, 2020 Board Meeting are approved]

9. Nieman moves: The revisions to the Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve Management Plan, as amended during Committee of the Whole, are approved.

Second by Berger

For: All

[The revisions to the Ella Armstrong Cave Preserve Management Plan are approved]

10. Morris-Siegel moves: The revisions to the Merlins Cave Preserve Management Plan, as amended during Committee of the Whole, are approved.

Second by Engel

For: Rest

Abstain: Morris-Siegel, Ingalls

[The revisions to the Merlins Cave Preserve Management Plan are approved]

11. Berger moves: The NCC votes “Yes” on approval of the Third Amended and Restated Limited Liability Company Operating Agreement for Terrafirma Risk Retention Group LLC.

*[During the application process for our 2021 Terrafirma policy, a response was required in the form of a vote to approve revisions to Terrafirma’s Operating Agreement, last updated in 2012. As the NCC is a member and owner of Terrafirma Risk Retention Group, LLC, this vote was properly our Board’s to cast. However, due to the application submission deadline and delays related to our tardy payment for the Salamander addition (see Risk Management Committee report in the December 2020 Board Meeting minutes), and the absence of an option to abstain, the Insurance Liaison cast the NCC’s vote in the affirmative after a thorough review of the proposed changes, which it seems were only accessible during the application process. The only substantive changes proposed were an update to the address of the captive management services provider, a provision to make further address updates possible without revising the Operating Agreement, and an increase on the number of consecutive terms a member of the Members Committee may serve from one to two. All other changes were administrative - mostly updates to section references. This item is for the Board to retroactively handle the question posed by Terrafirma.]*

Second by Hedges

For: All

[The NCC votes “Yes” on approval of Terrafirma’s Third Amended LLC Operating Agreement]

12. Simmons moves: The position of Stewardship Coordinator is created under the President. The duties of the Stewardship Coordinator shall include: Onboarding of new preserve managers, production of and updates to an “NCC Preserve Managers Handbook,” the collection of preserve reports for each Board meeting for inclusion in the Presidents Report, providing assistance with Management Plan updates, ensuring that Management Plan updates and all Board-approved common language/statements are included in each Plan and that updated plans are posted to the website, and assisting Managers with specific resources and projects.

*[We now have eleven preserves and hope to continue to grow that number going forward. The Preserves are our whole reason for existence and need to be the showcases of conservation for our members and the public at large. The day-to-day responsibilities of the President are such that many initiatives are slowed or stalled, based on lack of available time. Having a person dedicated to these efforts is very common in other land trusts as it represents one of the core functions of all such organizations.]*

Second by Armen

For: All

[The position of Stewardship Coordinator is created under the President with the duties described]

13. Simmons moves: The Office Committee is authorized to make loans and/or rentals of scientific equipment belonging to the NCC and acquired for the "Human Influences on Caves" research project, as recommended by the Bat Hibernation Ad-hoc Committee.

Second by Hedges

Simmons and Morris-Siegel encourage Ingalls to inquire what the typical rates are for such rentals at the upcoming NEBWG conference.

For: All

[The Office Committee may make loans/rentals of equipment recommended by the Bat Hibernation Committee]

14. Engel moves: Hatfield and Simmons are designated as the NCC's representatives to the 2021 New York Land Conservation Conference.

Second by Armen

For: All

[Hatfield and Simmons are the NCC's representatives to the 2021 New York Land Conservation Conference]

15. Hatfield moves: The NCC will host the Fall 2021 NRO meeting.

Second by Folsom

For: Rest

Against: Nieman

Abstain: Morris-Siegel, Berger, Ingalls, Hedges

[8-1-4: The NCC will host the Fall 2021 NRO meeting]

Informational point: Simmons appoints Berger, Drake, Engel, Hatfield, and Sassu-Laviero as the Members Day Organizing Ad-hoc Committee.

Informational point: Next EC meeting will be Sunday, April 25, 2021 at 10AM, probably on-line.

Informational point: the Summer Board meeting will be Sunday, June 6, 2021 at 10 AM, likely on-line.

Informational point: the late Summer EC meeting will be Sunday, August 22, 2021, maybe in person (location TBD). The meeting is planned to begin at 10am if in person, or at 9am if held via videoconference.

16. Simmons moves: The NCC Fall meeting will be Sunday, September 26, 2021, maybe in person (location TBD). The meeting is planned to begin at 10am if in person, or at 9am if held via videoconference.

Second by Engel

For: All

[The NCC Fall meeting will be Sunday, September 26, 2021, location TBD, with a start time depending on whether it is held in person or via videoconference.]

17. Berger moves to adjourn.

Second by Hedges

For: Rest

Against: Morris-Siegel

[The meeting is adjourned]

Meeting adjourned at 2:34pm

**Attachment A  
President's Report**

1. I filed the updated paperwork for the NYSCPP Transaction Grant for the Traino Preserve purchase, and the check for \$3,000 plus, should be on its way soon. There have been no announcements of availability for a 2021 round for which we have been planning to re-submit for the Salamander donation. With no grants available at this time, if we are to continue the "human influences on caves" project in some meaningful way, we will need to find alternative sources of funding unless they announce a 2021 grant round.
2. We still have openings that need to get filled:
  - a. Representative in Vermont to push forward several initiatives on a local basis. I have emailed all of the folks I know in Vermont and three have indicated they would help, but were not in a position to take the lead on this (Peter Youngbaer, John Dunham and Ken Moore).
  - b. As always, we are in dire need of a Fund-Raising Chair. Hatfield has offered to help on fundraising.
  - c. If approved at this meeting, we will be looking to appoint a Stewardship Coordinator, said position would be advertised before the next Board meeting in June.
3. There are several projects that we need to complete or should complete at several of the preserves. I will ask each preserve manager to start scheduling workdays for socially distanced projects to begin as soon as the weather allows, so we are ready for the preserves to reopen in May. I know I could use some time in the woods with everyone, even from a distance and with masks on!
4. I have been toying with the idea of having "liaisons" designated for a number of fellow land trusts. This would not be someone through which all things must be channeled, but more about keeping the NCC in the eye of these LTs, staying abreast of what they are doing and what projects they may be involved in and where we could help with caves, possibly be a part of the deals. I would also say that a lot of what I have learned about land trust operations and such, has been in large part from my association with other LTs in the region. The short list I'm thinking about right now includes: Mohawk-Hudson, Columbia, Rennsalar, Schoharie, Kingston, Orange, Vermont, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Northwest Connecticut.
5. Thom and Jacob have volunteered to work on the draft Preserve Managers Handbook that was drafted some time back by Bob Addis, thanks guys. Cara Gentry works with the Wallkill Valley Land Trust and has some suggestions from monitoring reports produced by that organization, and will be contributing as well.
6. All in all, I remain behind on a number of initiatives that need to be pushed ahead. I have not had anywhere near the amount of time needed since our last meeting to make any serious headway and my backlog continues to grow. To help on this, I would like to create a Stewardship Coordinator position and have included a motion to that effect.
7. It is time to start thinking ahead for the Spring, Summer and Fall. This includes planning work days, get togethers (as possible) and events attendance. Will there be an NSS Convention, any NROs, a Members Day, a Barn Dance, an OTR? NCKMS in Texas in November, I'm thinking of going as Covid should be manageable by then.
8. Money, we need to find ways to get some! Plain and simple. Expenses go on (and on). Please think of ways we can increase funding. We have lost out a couple rounds of NRO auctions now. Has anyone explored on-line auction sites such as Ebay for Charity? We need to get creative.

**Cave Preserve Management Plan Review Schedule**

Year	March	June	September	December
2021	<b>Ella Armstrong</b>	Knox	Traino	Sellecks
2022	Bensons	Merlins		Onesquethaw
2023	Spider	Clarksville	Salamander	Bentleys

Note: Erik has sent his proposed changes to the Ella Armstrong management plan for this meeting. Jacob will also be sending out proposed changes to the Merlins MP, primarily to address the Dome 12 dig (cave).

**CAVE PRESERVE REPORTS:**

**1. Bensons (Luke Mazza)**

Nothing new to report.

**2. Bentleys (Devon Hedges, Jonah Spivak)**

**Problems:** a few persistently wet areas along trail could use some steppingstones. Haven't made time to visit more than cursory checks on parking area & log book.

**Progress:** I've not accomplished anything here in the last few months

**Plans:** Boundary marking in late winter. Improve by spring, early summer 2021: trails (corduroy, stones); driveway (broad based dip, water bar, additional stone); and kiosk & signage



### 3. Clarksville (Thom Engel, Chuck Porter & Mike Chu)

**Progress:** Cave has been closed since last report. Nothing to report.

**Issues:** Our new neighbor has been placing his posted signs on our property.

**Plans:** Chuck, Mike, and I plan to mark our eastern boundary with boundary markers. Per NYS law I will then move our neighbor's signs to more appropriate locations. I also plan to make more of a barrier to ensure that visitors returning from the Ward entrance make the turn onto our trail rather than wandering onto our neighbor's property.

**Note:** Simmons has asked three surveyors for quotes to accurately locate some of our missing/unmarked boundary corners at Clarksville.

### 4. Ella Armstrong (Erik Nieman)

**Progress:** No progress since last meeting.

**Issues:** One downed tree lying over the trail at the cave entrance. Two dead trees near entrance that could pose potential danger to somebody on the trail or near entrance, should they fall. If winter doesn't tip them over, will look into them in spring. Recent heavy rains have begun/continued eroding the soil north of the cave entrance. The appearance is that there is a new sinkhole forming. Upon closer inspection, it is merely topsoil being eroded and washed away.

**Plans:** Remove fallen/dead trees. Mark property boundaries. Observe erosion north of cave entrance.

### 5. Knox (Mitch Berger)

**Progress:** CT Male has completed updating the survey of the preserve to add missing pins for the northern parcel. DEC performed their biannual bat count on January 5, and reports the following:

[REDACTED]. They have also provided the 2019 results we were previously missing for comparison: [REDACTED].

**Issues:** Travel restrictions have continued to keep me away from the preserve - my last visit was at the end of the NCRC course several months ago. We received an e-mail from someone stating that they know the cave is closed "til April" and asking for a late April or early May permit, and believing that they did not get a reply when they asked for a trip before the end of last season; in fact, they requested a Sunday in September that was already booked on 9/10/20, and the same day, we offered them any of the other Sundays in September, but never heard back about which one they wanted. The Great Divide rope is [presumably] still there. Engel and Berger still need to investigate what may be poison parsnip plants.

**Plans:** Periodic property inspections, possibly by local volunteers. Addition of trail markers and reposting of property. Boundary marking. Removal of the Great Divide rope. Investigation of troublesome plant species.

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

**Progress** Morris-Siegel visited the preserve yesterday. He found a couple of dead ash trees by the parking lot, signs of snowshoeing usage of the Preserve, and signs of lots of porcupines in Merlins.

**Issues** None reported

**Plans** We are working on updating the management plan to include Dome 12 and a draft of that should go out to the board in the next couple days (note, before the meeting).

### 7. Onesquethaw (Thom Engel, Christa Hay & Ellen Schwartz)

**Progress:** Cave has been closed since last report. Engel e-mailed with C. Herzog about the proposed bat protection device to keep the cave open next winter, and has heard back. Herzog says that if the device is in place, then there would clearly be no violation of the Endangered Species Act by entering the cave in the winter. The remaining question that must be addressed is whether excluding the bats from the cave is a harmful act in itself, and he cannot speak for the US Fish and Wildlife Service on that topic. We will have to prove the damage caused to the bats by flooding if they're allowed to enter the cave.

**Issues:** Nothing to report.

**Plans:** I plan to do a spring vegetation survey to see what I may have missed in last fall's survey.

**Note:** I have asked the committee to revisit the concept of a "bat protection device" to exclude bats from entering the cave to hibernate so they are not killed by flooding. This would have the added advantage of having the cave open for winter visitation.

### 8. Sellecks (Erik Nieman, Tony Vasile)

**Progress:** Temporary sign with updated contact info placed at kiosk, along with a QR code that leads directly to the Sellecks Preserve

page on the NCC website. (following Onesquethaw Preserve example). Trees blocking the trail have been cleared. Remaining treetops and branches in Levys Cave sinkhole remain to be cleared. Plan for that this coming spring.

**Issues:** Contact information at kiosk is out of date. ie. Jason Siemion was listed as preserve manager with private email address. Recent large storm knocked down many trees at Levys Cave. They are blocking the trail and overlie the sinkhole and the cave entrance.

**Plans:** Update contact info for preserve. New informational poster? Clear remaining trees in the Levy's Cave sinkhole

## 9. Salamander (Cara Gentry, Erik Richards)

**Progress:** Nothing over the winter so far

**Issues:** Securing an access agreement with KLT. Build out of infrastructure (kiosk and changing area).

**Plans:** Working up draft easement agreement to provide to KLT as a new point of discussion which incorporates the Board's previous comments on the draft access license agreement put forth by KLT. Will schedule a meeting with KLT staff immediately upon having it completed. Update the Management Plan based on agreement particulars. Drafting a web page mockup for eventual posting on the website, based on other preserve examples.

## 10. Spider (Kevin Dumont)

**Progress:** A visit to the preserve on December 28, 2020 found everything to be in order and as expected. No inquiries about visitation were received this quarter.

**Issues:** None to report.

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

## 11. Traino Preserve (Devon Hedges)

**Progress:** Hite Surveyors completed a professional and detailed survey of the preserve lands including highly visible survey markers (Deep thanks to Pres. Simmons). Directed two potential visits to the preserve; one trip (Dunham, Ingalls, & Morris-Siegel) yielded 250' of surveyed passage in George's Surprise Cave. December 2020 thaw event produced considerable flood debris (branches, uprooted stumps, straw, fill, etc.). A cleanup improved the area a good bit and another should finish the job! Some website content exists. Hedges communicated with our neighbors about farming activity, and there seemed to be clear understanding and no issues with understanding that the survey boundary markings also indicate the limits of the land that may be farmed.

**Problems:** Planning and coordination of NCC benefit auction of Alan's trailer has not moved along much. Some surface collapse of insurgence slot needs assessment.

**Plans:** Construct/acquire kiosk & changing area. NCC benefit auction of remaining Traino digging equipment and supplies, gear, etc. Coordinating with teams to continue survey & mapping efforts.

**Note:** As part of the NYSCPP Acquisition Grant we are receiving for the Traino Preserve, we need to complete the infrastructure build out this summer (kiosk, parking gravel & changing area) and also need to have the cave system surveyed for potential cave-adapted amphipods.

## OTHER COMMITTEES (PRESIDENT):

### Acquisitions (Chuck Porter, Bob Simmons)

Porter is now almost fully vaccinated, and expects to be able to pick up his activity level soon.

No specific projects are in the advanced stages at this point, other than the potential addition to one existing preserve. I have solicited survey quotes for the necessary survey and monumentation work which I hope to have in time for the Board meeting.

Vermont Land Trust: Still need a lead person to push ahead the MOU between organizations and be the "Front Person" on this. I have reached out to the list of people I know or have been directed to in Vermont. Three people have indicated a willingness to help, but not to take the reigns (Peter Youngbaer, John Dunham and Ken Moore.)

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[REDACTED]

**Nominating (Norm Berg)**

The search is on for Trustee candidates to run in the Spring 2021 election. An announcement for Trustee candidates will be in the next NCC News (went out on the Mailchimp instead). This year's voting will use Google forms and connected applications. Below is the schedule, using June 6 as the next board meeting date:

- May 14 (Friday): Last day to submit candidate bio/platforms.
- May 15 - 16 (Saturday - Sunday): Ballots and bios/platforms are emailed to the membership.
- May 29 (Saturday): Voting closes at the end of day ET.
- May 30 - 31 (Sunday - Monday): Results are provided to NCC Board, Notify candidates of results.
- June 6 (Sunday): First Board meeting where newly elected members are seated.

**Note:** Armen, Morris-Siegel and Hedges's terms are up this year.

**Risk Management (Mitch Berger)**

- Progress:** Our 2021 Terrafirma application was submitted, and has been approved
- Issues:** The Terrafirma application required casting of a vote on amendments to their LLC Operating Agreement that we were not warned of ahead of the application. There will be a motion at this meeting to address the action taken.
- Plans:** Handle renewal of our General Liability and Directors and Officers insurance policies
  - 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, will reach out to the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy to see if limited summer visitation can be restored this year.

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

I had asked the group if there was anything we might wish to consider doing with our accumulated gear this spring and what we think might make sense, as it does not look like there will be a grant cycle for Phase II of the data project this year. I mentioned that I am looking around to see if I can locate any other sources of grant money, and asked if they would please pass along the request for ideas through networks. We could consider renting out or lending out our gear as well.

Davis replied that she did mention the equipment to C. Herzog but had not heard anything back. She suggested that maybe an official invitation to use it come from the President. There is an online meeting coming up in March for the NEBWG.

Ingalls added: I agree with Emily that if DEC has use for some of it, that would be excellent. Right now, there's a push to create region bat "hubs" around the US, where universities/states/federal agencies/etc. can connect to share all kinds of resources including equipment. The Northeast does not currently have a hub (although the Mid-Atlantic does, and there is some talk about expanding that to include the Northeast), but if we ever do, that seems like the sort of place where we could rent/lend equipment.

"NEBWG is also coming up in ~2 weeks, but with it all online, I am not sure how well the usual networking part will go. If I get a chance, I will certainly pass along the word to DEC folks that we would be happy to lend them detectors if they have a need. If they do not want to use them, we could also check with Alyssa Bennett in Vermont and see if she's doing any acoustic work and needs extra detectors."

**Note:** I have emailed Herzog at DEC to see what ideas he may have for using our gear and if he had any thoughts on other potential funding sources.

Berger inquired whether there was any news on the process we'd been told was underway to list the Little Brown Bat as endangered in NYS. Engel indicated that there had not been any updates. Ingalls tells us that the Federal status may change this summer for the Tricolored and Little Brown Bats and that the USFWS is also planning to review the "4d" rule for the Northern Long-Eared Bat's listing as Threatened.

**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)**  
There was no activity in the science area.

**Special Use (Thom Engel)**  
It is hard to predict how many reservations we will have this year. We currently have only two slots reserved for all preserves for 2021 as well as tentative reservations for the June NCRC. It was announced that in New York overnight summer camps will be allowed to reopen in June, so more reservations may come in.

**Surprise Cave Committee (Al DeMaria)**  
Nothing to report.

**Thacher Park (Thom Engel)**  
I have applied to renew the permit. The former contact is back.

**Cave Protection** (Thom Engel)

No action. Will try again after the budget passes.

**Attachment C  
Treasurer's Report**

Northeastern Cave Conservancy Inc  
Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual

	<u>Jan 1 - Feb 26, 21</u>	<u>Budget</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense		
Income		
Donations		
Auction Donations	0.00	2,000.00
Donations - Other	1,258.01	10,553.00
Total Donations	<u>1,258.01</u>	<u>12,553.00</u>
Interest Earned	0.50	25.00
Membership Income	250.00	2,700.00
Total Income	<u>\$1,508.51</u>	<u>\$15,278.00</u>
Expense		
Acquisitions	1,405.50	2,000.00
Bank Charges	3.84	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>
Insurance	870.00	2,548.00
Legal Fees	1,472.20	1,000.00
Licenses & Permits	0.00	125.00

Meeting Expense	0.00	100.00
Meetings & Conferences	0.00	300.00
Membership Expenses	0.00	125.00
Miscellaneous	0.00	100.00
Office Expense	0.00	100.00
Postage	0.00	100.00
Preserves-Maintenance		
Bensons	0.00	200.00
Bentleys	0.00	200.00
Clarksville	0.00	100.00
Ella Armstrong	0.00	100.00
Knox	960.00	2,060.00
Merlins	0.00	100.00
Onesquethaw	0.00	50.00
Salamander	0.00	600.00
Sellecks	0.00	100.00
Spider	0.00	100.00
Traino	785.00	1,585.00
Total Preserves-Maintenance	1,745.00	5,195.00
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	524.65	300.00
Total Expense	\$6,021.19	\$15,278.00
Net Ordinary Income	\$-4,512.68	0.00

I sent the NY State forms and associated documents to the Tax Assessor of the City of Kingston for the Salamander parcel; going forward it will be exempt from local taxes. I also applied to SEFA (State Employees Federated Appeal) so that the NCC can accept bi-weekly donations from any NY State employees who choose us from an annual catalog of approved charities. April 30<sup>th</sup> is the notification date for acceptance into SEFA.

**Barn Dance Subcommittee - Emily Davis & Mike Warner:**

**Plans:** See if it will be safe for September or early October dance

**Problems:** Covid

**Progress:** None

**Membership Committee – Riley Drake:**

Progress:

Membership Renewals and New Members:

With no in person events, in person opportunities for membership renewals continue to be absent. Our numbers are continuing to suffer. Though I've been sending renewal reminders, responses have been limited. I'm hoping to see an influx of membership renewals in the coming months, as the weather warms and caving is more top-of-mind. All renewal notices for memberships up through the end of February have been sent. The database is current as of today, February 20th.

Since I officially took over the membership chair position from Peter I've only processed a handful of renewals (6) and new memberships (4) and sent many renewal reminders.

Current Membership Numbers (Change since Dec 20th, 2020)

Life: 63

Family Life: 9

Benefactor: 13

Regular/Family Membership: 58 (-3, 7 non-renewals, 4 new members)

Institutional: 5

Total: 148 (-3)

(as a membership chair I am still getting used to using the database, I believe these numbers to be correct according to the current database)

Institutional Members: Vermont Cavers Association, Met Grotto, New Jersey Initial Response Team, Helderberg- Hudson Grotto and Boston Grotto.

A suggestion was made to pass along the list of lapsed members to the Board, so that they may be able to make personal connections with some of the members we've recently lost and encourage them to renew. Davis also suggested that reminders encourage people to make use of the PayPal option (however, Drake points out the complication that poses at the moment, described in the "Plans" section below).

Problems:

Coronavirus has severely cut into in-person caving and caving events, thus hindering membership outreach activities. Since vaccinations in the US are ongoing, I am hopeful about the prospect of distanced outdoor events (and thus opportunities for in-person renewals) as the weather warms.

Plans:

At present, donations and dues received through Paypal do not include information on what the payment was intended for. As a result, many of the emails that I send to new members or donors are to ask them what they intended to send us money for, which does not make our organization look particularly professional. Ramon has been tasked with creating a better front end using paypal's API software and I look forward to its creation.

#### **Office Committee Report - Emily Davis & Mike Warner:**

Problems: None

Progress: Status Quo

Plans: none specifically

#### **Publications – Christa Hay:**

Publications – Christa Hay:

Problems: Lack of articles, some is obviously due to covid. Has the Board decided yet if we are going back to having preserve managers send in a report? Used to be on a rotating schedule. That would help somewhat or possibly drop the number of newsletters per year.

Progress: There was no newsletter for this quarter due to lack of articles. Request for nominations was the only item and that already went out via MailChimp (reminder will be sent in March). President was informed.

Plans: continue to ask for articles.

#### **Technology Committee Report – Mike Chu:**

Progress: Sent out the new preserve web pages to preserve managers for review. Updated the information on the NCC site about NSS Preserves to link to the NSS site for more details, and removed outdated information about those preserves. Updated email aliases to reflect new preserve managers and committee chairs.

Plans: Continue working with preserve managers to get preserve information and management plans onto the website and launch the sites for the new preserves. Add additional contact fields to Paypal donation and membership forms so we have better knowledge of the source and reason for donations.

**Volunteer Value Committee – Vince Kappler:**

Progress:

The below table shows that NCC volunteers continued to support the mission of the organization during the pandemic that curtailed most caving activities.

	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>Dollar Value</b>
2006	1389.5	20,862	\$29,955.00
2007	1571.5	14,607	\$35,542.00
2008	1680.5	14,143	\$36,926.00
2009	1440.5	10,442	\$39,564.00
2010	1234.0	10,949	\$42,211.00
2011	1546.0	14,118	\$54,684.00
2012	1483.5	13,951	\$51,605.00
2013	1916.5	20,522	\$70,268.00
2014	1481.0	18,621	\$48,757.00
2015	1634.75	15,664	\$58,450.00
2016	1563.25	12,303	\$52,341.00
2017	2106.5	10,234	\$64,058.00
2018	1533.5	13,899	\$54,393.00
2019	1480.5	13,284	\$64,394.00
2020	646	4036	\$22,415.00
			<b>\$725,495.00</b>

2021 VV to date: \$2723.00. Many thanks to the Treasurer, Office Committee and Paul, all who sent data for 2021.

Plans:

The IRS has decreased the business mileage rate from \$.575 to \$.56 for 2021. Note that this is not the rate that can be deducted from your personal taxes. The NCC adopted the use of the prevailing business rate when it modeled its VV program after the original NSS-USFS VV agreement which permitted the use of the business rate instead of the charitable donation rate.

I will continue to use the \$27 amount to calculate VV hours during 2021.

Problems:

None at this time



**Attachment D**  
**Secretary's Report**

**EC Meeting Minutes**  
**February 7, 2021, 10:00am**  
**Online via Videoconference**

Called to order 10:10am

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

**1) Conservancy liaisons**

Engel had previously asked the EC for thoughts about the idea of having individuals appointed as liaisons between the NCC and other conservancies we may interact with. Berger expressed some concern that this might add to already-existing confusion about the proper channels through which other groups communicate with the NCC (see, for example, the recent confusion caused by multiple parties trying to help the NYS DEC obtain permission to install scientific equipment in one of our caves). He noted that at present, our committees are organized around responsibility for certain subject matter (e.g. insurance, scientific proposals, specific cave preserves, bylaws, etc.) rather than by which other parties they may interact with. Were we to assign a liaison to each other conservancy, it could become unclear whether those conservancies should approach their liaison or the committee chair responsible for the topic they'd like to discuss with us (and the latter is likely the proper choice anyhow). He also mentioned that it might seem strange or awkward for another conservancy to be told that we've appointed a liaison to interact between our organizations when they were not expecting that and had not done similarly. Folsom in general agreed with these reservations. Engel raised this topic to attempt to clarify what he had in mind.

Engel explains that his basic idea is that we should have someone keeping their ear to the ground to be aware of what other groups with overlapping missions, areas, etc. are working on, and as an example cites the way he's tuned in to what the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is up to. He isn't suggesting "formal" liaisons in the sense of telling other organizations that they should talk with their specific liaison when they want to reach us. He sees this role as a person who would help to keep us visible to other organizations and informed if they're doing work of relevance to our mission - basically to serve as an observer or ambassador who'd report back to the NCC when relevant. Some of this is already in play to some extent with the Vermont Land Trust and the Kingston Land Trust, where we expect that there'll be more formal arrangements moving forward. Engel offers as an example that if MHLIC were to do something with a cave issue, it might be appropriate for the NCC to be involved at some level. Folsom pays attention currently to the Bashkill Conservancy and the Land Trust Alliance. Berger asked if we're aware of there having been news that we're not currently getting from places that we'd like to. Engel suggests the goal may be achievable simply by putting out a request in the newsletter asking if any of our readers are members of other conservancies doing work in our area, and if so, whether they'd be willing to keep us apprised of relevant news and opportunities for cooperation on an ongoing basis. Simmons believes there are three main areas of interest: 1) the idea just discussed above - ears to the ground for news, 2) NCC visibility, and 3) learning (about topics related to operations, fundraising, etc.). Berger points out that for this to work, we might need an action plan in order to get a report for Board meetings and a designated person to collect information for that report from the various liaisons. Engel feels that this can be less formal, and liaisons can simply report in as they feel is necessary. Berger expressed some skepticism that if managed less formally, we'd be likely to end up receiving any information we don't already hear from anyone who doesn't typically attend all the Board meetings. Morris-Siegel suggests we might reach out to land trusts in karst areas to remind them of our availability and eagerness to be involved in karst-related opportunities. Berger points out that this can work well for organizations in our geographical area, but wouldn't make much sense or keep us connected with conservancies in other regions, and notes that he's learned much (and tried to bring that learning back) from interacting with organizations like the West Virginia Cave Conservancy and the Southeastern Cave Conservancy. Folsom inquired whether we can donate to other conservancies for karst acquisitions. Berger replied that while 501(c)(3)s need to be quite careful about donations, they can donate to other 501(c)(3)s with overlapping missions for those purposes, and notes that this model is followed heavily in the Virginias where the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias often provides funding for other conservancies to acquire caves, but he also questions whether we're really in a position to do that given that we haven't met some of our own acquisition fundraising goals in the past couple of years. Simmons notes that the newsletter deadline is next Wednesday, and Morris-Siegel also suggests putting the call out in the Northeastern Caver, because it has a wider readership.

[Ingalls was wished a happy birthday in absentia at this point.]

**2) NCC Preserve Manager manual**

This topic came about, oddly enough, because Engel had been asked by Rubin why the snow hadn't been cleared at Clarksville such that he could easily walk around the preserve. There was a first pass at a manual written by Addis in 2015, which we believe is on the website somewhere. Engel inquired whether we formally approved it, and Berger responded that there wasn't any formal Board action associated with it - it was an attempt at increased engagement, which the Board had requested at the time. Engel thinks it should be taken off of the website if it's not a document associated with a formal action. Berger's recollection is that the first draft seemed like an attempt to produce a one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter manual, and perhaps as a result, was somewhat thin on details. Simmons reminds us that prior to the pandemic, he had wanted to hold a gathering for all of the preserve managers, and one of the

topics was to have been taking that document and figuring out what to do with it, providing guidance on checking boundaries, how to report issues, etc. Berger recalls our recent discussion about the Insurance Liaison not hearing of issues that may be subject to reporting deadlines in case they turn out to be problems requiring a claim, and notes that the manual could've been the right place to document such topics, and that a document with such guidance may be particularly important for volunteers who aren't generally in attendance at all Board meetings (where these topics are more often discussed). Morris-Siegel indicates that he's willing to work on the document, as is Engel. Engel will provide Morris-Siegel with a copy of the 2015 document, and perhaps some updates will be ready to present at the next meeting.

### **3) NCC website info for new preserves**

Engel doesn't believe that the webmaster(s) should have the job of pulling together the material for a new preserve's presence on our website; he feels that it's their responsibility to post it, but not to create the content. He notes that we have well-established rules about needing to have proposed acquisitions surveyed and management plans drafted, and feels that we should also have clear responsibility assigned for pulling together the materials to put on the website. Berger notes that our existing acquisition requirements (which often feel cumbersome in the moment) relate to understanding and mitigating the specific legal risks involved in a potential acquisition before we become committed, and feels that content preparation for an upcoming acquisition's web presence can take place between our approval of an acquisition and the closing on the property. Engel agrees on the timing Berger suggests (legal issues squared away before Board approval of an acquisition, website content preparation between then and finalizing the acquisition), but points out that we've currently got two preserves that aren't documented on the website. Berger suggests that documentation of this responsibility should be in the aforementioned Preserve Managers Manual, and that it should be one of the major things that the interim Preserve Manager(s) are working on, and that if they're not, the officer for the Preserves (currently the President) should become involved. Simmons looked over an example of one of our preserves' pages (Knox) and highlighted what the basic elements of these pages are currently. Berger points out that the only critical failure with respect to the Traino Karst Preserve was that for lack of information on the website, someone wanting to visit needed somehow to know that they had to get in touch with Hedges, and as a result of needing someone to tell a prospective visitor that, access to the preserve was artificially restricted. Simmons will get in touch with managers of new preserves. He asks what the appropriate timeline would be for web content to be prepared, and asks if within a month of the acquisition would be reasonable. Berger feels strongly that the page should be up and visible at the time when we put out a press release about a new acquisition, because it's a public relations thing, and that's the time when people are most likely to look for it. There was general agreement on this point.

### **4) Preserves committee**

Engel raised this topic, which he feels has fluttered around for a long time. He reminds us that we now have eleven preserves, and asks if it would help Simmons if we had a person other than him for the Preserve Managers to report to, and have that person report to the President. Simmons acknowledges that there are a lot of people reporting to him, and that things are falling through the cracks. He has been working on figuring out how to pass the President role along to whoever the next person may be, explain to them what the job actually entails (which is more daunting than he'd realized when he stepped into the role), and be more proactive. He wonders if what we need is more along the lines of a Stewardship Manager, and notes that some other conservancies have that as a main function, sometimes even as a paid position (we've heard in the past from Engel that MHLC has one person like this rather than individual Preserve Managers for each of their properties, which would be the other extreme end of the spectrum). Berger mentions that in incident management training, we learn of what's referred to as "span of control" - the number of people reporting to someone in a hierarchy - and that the optimal range for this number is almost always 3-7 - any fewer and there likely wasn't a need to delegate and create more bureaucracy; any more and managing what's going on becomes too difficult. Berger also suggests looking at the size of Attachment A at Board meetings and comparing it with the size of Attachment B and C to see the disparity in how many folks the President is trying to coordinate at a single level. However, Berger cautions that we must be very careful when laying out this sort of position to specify what happens to the autonomy that Preserve Managers have now. He posits that we don't intend for anything to change about that autonomy, but without specifying, it might be unclear whether the Stewardship Manager suddenly has authority over all of the preserves, whether Managers need to seek permission for things they don't currently, or whether it's just a coordinating and facilitating role. Morris-Siegel wonders whether the Preserve Managers have too much power presently. Berger notes that the way our organization is structured right now, the hierarchy places authority in the Chairs of the various permanent Committees, each of which is approved by the Board. Simmons notes (without necessarily suggesting that we follow suit) that the NSS recently did away with all of their formal preserve committees. It sounds like we're leaning towards a Preserve Coordinator, and that this would be most appropriate as a Committee of the Whole discussion item. Engel wonders if we should add another officer for this role, as the preserves are the key reason our organization exists. Berger points out that making such a change leads to other complicated questions like what constitutes quorum, etc. Morris-Siegel suggested balancing it out by reducing the number of Trustees by one. Berger's response to that was to point out that upon doing that, elections no longer have the desired staggering because the number of Trustees is no longer divisible by 3, and related a story about another organization he's involved with which shortened the term of their Board members without planning this carefully, and ended up with a three-year staggered election cycle where one of the three years is always significantly harder to run for the Board because only half as many seats are up, and this has very undesirable properties for Board turnover and new engagement rate. Simmons feels that there's got to be some easy way to create a suitable position, and believes that it's to create an ad-hoc assistant for the President initially.

### **5) Bentleys Preserve incident update**

Berger inquired whether the planned communication had gone out. Simmons reports that it did, and that he hasn't heard anything back since then.

#### **6) LTA grants - Salamander, Traino, human influences research project**

Simmons reports that there is still no news about opening a 2021 round of grant funding (he most recently inquired this week). He did the necessary paperwork for the Traino Karst Preserve's acquisition grant, which we were awarded, and notes that this fact has at long last been publicly announced, which means we no longer need to avoid discussing it. The first year of the research project has been successfully closed out with our submitted report having been approved, but as there's no new grant round for this year so far, we have no data about prospects for continuing the project yet. There will be a closeout report required for the Traino grant, which we've promised to submit by the end of the summer. Things in that grant proposal that we haven't completed yet include constructing the trail, establishing a kiosk and parking area, etc. There was also a commitment in that proposal to perform a biological inventory of the cave system, and Simmons isn't sure what that will consist of. Berger inquired who our "designated" biologist is, and Engel suggested that we might contact Kathy Lavoie of SUNY Plattsburgh, who's long been a biospeleologist. Folsom suggests reaching out to Luis Espinosa, and Engel agrees that if anthropods are found, we should touch base with him as he worked on a project in Clarksville having to do with anthropods. Berger asked how these inventories typically are taken. Engel explains that because of glaciation, we don't have much depth to the troglobitic ecosystem in our area - unless there are animals that can be frozen, all of the animals got wiped out some 13,000 years ago, which is why we don't have cave-adapted salamanders, etc. He believes that a reasonably attentive person could make a collection of samples and send them off for identification. He also notes that certain species are found in virtually every cave with a stream. At this point, the conversation turned briefly back to the research project grant, and when asked about the budget for our primary investigative scientist, Simmons says that \$3,000 was in the budget for this for the first year. Berger and Folsom are confused by this because of the plan for when the acoustic analysis was expected to happen (mostly in the second year). Despite this, Simmons is sure that money for the scientist was in the year one budget and can be paid presently, and Folsom will take care of it.

#### **7) Recruiting to fill vacant positions - Fundraising, Vermont Land Trust liaison, Investment Management Committee**

Simmons reports that there's nothing new to share since the last Board meeting. He is going to send e-mail to the following people asking for their recommendations of who might be able to help fill the VLT liaison role: P. Youngbaer, J. Dunham, M. Ingalls, J. Keogh, D. Stanley, K. Moore, J. Flewelling. Folsom also suggests that S. Hazelton and P. Quick may have some ideas.

#### **8) Surveys and filing for Knox and Traino**

Simmons reports that the surveys are done, the monumenting is completed, and the filing copies are with the Office Committee. They still need to get filed with Albany County, but Simmons hasn't been able to get up there to do it, and needs to talk with officials about how to go about filing them during the pandemic. Morris-Siegel suggests that Hedges should go out and bang a couple of posts in near the pins at Traino so that tractors don't run over them in the spring. Simmons thinks the idea is to put a line of fencing along the property line to demarcate what can be plowed and what can't. Engel wants to amplify the urgency of taking care of this sooner rather than later - at Onesquethaw, planting and plowing began earlier than we expected them to, so this should get done by the end of this month. The concern is that the tractor may rip out the pins. Folsom recalls that at our first purchased preserve (Sellecks), the Board opted to sink all the pins in concrete. Engel notes that he's having issues with a neighbor who has put up Posted signs on our land at Clarksville, and that the Preserve Managers there plan to mark the boundaries when the weather shapes up.

#### **9) News on the [REDACTED]**

#### **10) Terrafirma update**

Berger explained that as he was working on our annual Terrafirma application very close to the submission deadline (in part because we were unable to file it earlier due to our outstanding payment owed for the addition of coverage for the Salamander Preserve), he was surprised to discover that in the middle of the application process, a question requiring an answer was asked about whether our organization votes in favor of or against revisions currently being proposed to Terrafirma's Operating Agreement (which is essentially the contract under which they obtain and provide services, describes their governance structure, etc.). We hadn't been warned that these updates were pending, nor that we'd be required to cast a vote in the middle of our annual application (the document was last revised in 2012, so we haven't been through a previous revision). When an organization is insured by Terrafirma, it becomes a member and holds an ownership stake in Terrafirma, and so is empowered (and evidently required) to vote on these issues. There was no option to abstain, and while such a vote is properly the Board's to decide, there was not enough time remaining for Board action when Berger became aware of this issue. Thus, he reviewed the proposed revisions and reluctantly cast our vote unilaterally, and felt the need to disclose to the NCC what had occurred, even though it is implausible that our actual vote would have been controversial if presented to the Board. Berger reports that the only substantive changes to the Operating Agreement were a change to the address of the captive management services provider, a provision to allow future such address updates to be made administratively without a vote on revising the document, and increasing the number of consecutive terms a representative may serve on the Members Committee (Terrafirma's rough equivalent to our Board of Trustees) from one to two; the remainder of the changes were administrative updates, mostly updating section references, terminology, etc. Berger cast the NCC's vote in the affirmative.

Engel inquires whether we need to have an Act of the Board to authorize representatives to cast our votes on such matters without having to come to the Board for full consideration. Berger notes that while this might have been convenient here, he has some reservations about entrusting one person to unilaterally vote without asking the Board for input. Simmons suggests that as respects the current vote, an item can be placed on the next Board Meeting agenda to ratify the vote that Berger cast.

**11) Acquisitions**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## **12) Surprise Cave**

Simmons had a conversation with [REDACTED], who's very interested in the project to try to reopen the historical entrance to improve suitability of the cave as a hibernaculum for bats in the spring. [REDACTED]. Simmons also spoke with Herzog to update him. Berger talked with NJIRT, and they've agreed that the organization would like to be involved in working on the project.

## **13) NCC / Kingston Land Trust (KLT) Access to Property Agreement update**

Simmons is still cleaning up the proposed easement language, and needs to have a sitdown with KLT's representative fairly soon to make sure they're on-board with where we're heading with this proposal.

## **14) NCC / Vermont Land Trust (VLT) Memorandum of Understanding update**

We've got a staffing issue, so there's unlikely to be progress on this topic until we figure out who's able to take on the liaison role for us.

## **15) Winter bat counts**

Berger reported on the results of the count that had recently been conducted by the DEC at Knox, and which will appear in the next Board Meeting's Knox report. At this time, he's unable to compare it with previous data, because we don't seem to have the results of the previous count; he's inquired about those numbers. Berger also asked (of us) whether we know of other counts in our caves happening this year; he recalls that these counts used to be coordinated and scheduled, but hasn't heard of any other counts this year. We know that Clarksville and Onesquethaw had counts conducted last year, and don't think any others are planned at our caves this winter. Simmons is curious how the longevity of the batteries in the scientific equipment installed at Knox is working out; Berger had no information about that.

## **16) NCKMS, NEBWG, LTA conferences**

This topic was raised by Berger to try to plan our presence at the conferences we usually attend, if they're happening, in whatever form they're happening.

LTA: The date to submit papers has already passed, and the opening of registration is still about one month away. The conference is going to be virtual in May and last a month. If we're interested in sponsoring, the lowest level would be a "Friend" which costs \$500 and confers no major benefits.

NCKMS: It's scheduled for November 1-5 in Texas. Given the timing, there's a real chance that this one may actually occur in-person. Berger plans to read up on it thoroughly and follow up. We looked briefly at their website during the meeting and saw that the abstract submission deadline isn't until September 15, so there is clearly time. The focus isn't targeted at us like it was at the last conference - it seems to be focused on endangered species, caves, and aquifers this time. Berger is interested in attending, and Engel points out that we can figure it out at the summer meeting because there's time, and see how risky it is to go in November as that gets closer. If we're not up to submitting talks this time around, there's also the possibility of submitting posters.

NEBWG: The last meeting they have listed on their website is the one in 2019. Normally we'd have heard from Davis inquiring whether we wanted to donate/sponsor by this point, so we're not certain what the plans are for NEBWG, but can almost certainly find out from Ingalls and/or Davis.

## **17) NSS Convention, International Congress of Speleology, Old Timers Reunion**

We should ask people at the March meeting about their plans to attend Convention. Berger asks, regarding the ICS, whether we've had an organizational presence in the past and whether we should now. It was last in the US in 2009, and we didn't do anything significant as an organization then. Simmons and Engel aren't sure there's really anything for us to do... even submitting papers is complicated, as they have to be judged to qualify - it's a different animal than Convention. As far as OTR goes, we haven't heard any news yet and haven't had contact from the Vendor representative.

## **18) International Year of Caves and Karst**

Berger notes that due to lack of time, he hasn't gotten us registered though the year has started, and asks whether we should still register. It was also noted that this was intended to coincide with the International Congress of Speleology, which itself is attempting to cancel and move back a year. We took a look at their webpage, and Engel noted that there's really not a whole lot there in terms of events - the NSS Convention is listed, but that also may not be occurring. Simmons notes that there don't appear to be other conservancies in the US listed for any events, and that participation seems to be happening at a higher (country/NSS) level. We didn't conclude that there was much for us to offer, and that we don't seem to be getting left out as our peer conservancies aren't signed up, either, and we're not sure what we'd offer as events given the pandemic.

## **19) Letter to the membership**

Berger noted that we keep not sending out this appeal year after year, and that we're missing out on one of the good opportunities for donations that other conservancies seem to regularly make good use of. Simmons had planned to do this, and cites having run out of time, though he had written mostly what would've been that letter and published it in the newsletter. He showed us that he'd even gone so far as acquiring the labels and address list. Berger lamented that the rest of us were unaware that it was stuck at that point, and suggested that printing and stuffing envelopes could've been delegated to us if we'd known it was this far along. We need to look at this more seriously at an EC meeting towards the end of the year.

20) [REDACTED]

### **21) Virtual or non-virtual events (Members' Day, NRO, Barn Dance, virtual bonfire)**

It was pointed out that the appeal of the Members' Day is mostly about being able to go off to the side and talk with someone and catch up, and that this doesn't really mesh with the typical format of videoconferences. Berger described less traditional ways that Zoom meetings can be used for a more fun event where people can move between various venues and break off with people they want to catch up with, events can happen for people to wander in and out of, and that he'd recently helped organize and run one of these events as a holiday party for another caving organization after introducing the concept to them. It's something to think about.

An in-person NRO is obviously not happening this Spring, but it could potentially in the Fall. Do we want to host such an event? Would doing so serve our fundraising goals? Berger notes that attendance is likely to be higher than usual at the first one that actually happens in person after the pandemic, because people are going stir-crazy at home and desperate for the return of in-person events. Engel thinks perhaps we should shoot for hosting in Spring 2022, and is unconvinced that Fall 2021 will be doable.

Simmons will ask if Davis is considering holding the Barn Dance, though it seems unlikely; we should know by the summer meeting if it's going to be a possibility.

Simmons was so sick of virtual meetings that he couldn't bring himself to have the virtual bonfire event he was talking about at the last meeting. He's still not ready to go back that way, and probably won't be for some weeks yet.

### **22) Report scheduling and March meeting venue**

The meeting's going to be held remotely again. Simmons suggests we should be putting out the initial call for reports in the next week. Officer sections should be sent to Berger by the 27th, which means they need to be to the officers by the 20th.

### **23) Discussion about officer succession plans**

Simmons notes that some organizations that have outgoing officers give them "emeritus" status to be able to easily work with the new officers, etc. Berger notes that were we to do something like that, it would change the term commitment from 2 to 3 years. Engel notes that making the preserves committee idea happen (see Item 4) would make the President position more palatable. Folsom notes that the increased commitment required speaks somewhat to the (paid) Executive Director topic that's come up a few times when discussing growing as an organization. We'd been at this meeting for an enormous portion of the day at this point and were rather wiped out, so we didn't discuss much further upon realizing that we were not yet reaching our term limits at the end of this year (there was a brief bit of concern that half of us might be obligated to retire imminently, but we were off by one term). However, we know that we need to come back to this and put some serious work into it less late in the day at some point.

End: 4:10pm