

## Minutes

September 26, 2021 9:00 AM

Online via Videoconference

Meeting called to order at 9:03am

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, L. Hatfield

3. Absent with proxy: None

4. Absent without designated proxy: None

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 traditionally 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.]*

The Trustees were not prepared to conduct officer reviews at this meeting - see Item 7.15 below.

6. Officers' Reports

President: Attachment A

Vice President: Attachment B

Treasurer: Attachment C

Secretary: Attachment D

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

Second by Nieman

For: Rest

Abstain: Engel

Absent: Drake

[The Committee of the Whole is opened]

Topics:

7.1. New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) scientific research project and other grant updates (Simmons)

*[This is the usual followup topic on progress with the grant project and equipment loans/rentals.]*

The Land Trust Alliance has announced a funding round for this year with an application deadline of December 12. We hadn't yet closed on Salamander during the last round, and so weren't awarded a transaction grant at that time, but now that we have closed, we can try again with an application that's nearly ready to go. We also plan to apply for a transaction grant for [REDACTED]. Simmons and Ingalls will discuss whether it makes sense to apply for funding for the second year of the Human Influences on Caves scientific research project. There has also been discussion between Simmons and the Kingston Land Trust about the possibility of jointly filing a grant application for a trail construction project at our neighboring properties. Simmons also plans to confirm that there is consensus among the Hibernaculum Committee to sell off most of our acoustic detectors.

7.2. Traino Karst Preserve Management Plan review (Hedges)

*[This is the periodic review of this preserve's management plan; the current plan is included in the meeting materials, and the Manager has proposed no revisions at this time.]*

Hedges received some comments from Berger, most of which have to do with correcting the preserve name, making adjustments in language to move the plan from pre-acquisition to post-acquisition, and updating the list of future plans to account for work that has been completed. Morris-Siegel also notes that black locust is considered an invasive in the northeast. All of these changes seem reasonable to Hedges, and are relatively minor.

However, since the rest of the Board has not seen them, the plan is to incorporate the changes and then circulate the updated plan for an electronic vote in the next few weeks.

#### 7.3. New York Land Conservation Conference (LTA) wrap-up (Hatfield)

*[The conference ran online May 5-26, but Hatfield wasn't with us at the June meeting; we'll find out what she brought back to share.]*

Hatfield reports that, as it turns out, she didn't end up attending the virtual event, and so there's nothing to share about the conference.

#### 7.4. National Cave and Karst Management Symposium (NCKMS) (Berger, Drake, Rubin)

*[We'll hear a brief update on our delegation's plans for the conference.]*

Berger reports that he made arrangements for our cosponsorship of the conference, although he's noticed that our logo isn't on the conference website, and so will have to get in touch with them. He's submitted an abstract for a talk on the history of our piece-by-piece acquisition and protection of Clarksville. Rubin and Nieman have submitted an abstract for a poster on the geology trail being developed at Clarksville with interpretive stops that explain the connection between features on the surface and features in the cave below, which Rubin plans to present. And Drake has submitted an abstract for a talk on using time-series bacteriological monitoring of cave water to help understand cave interactions with the aquifer and potentially provide information about surface pollutants.

#### 7.5. NSS Convention wrap-up (Simmons, Drake, Berger)

*[It was held online July 24-30. We'll hear updates from those who attended portions of it.]*

Simmons, Berger, and Davis attended the Cave Conservancies Roundtable, which ran very efficiently, but had no agenda or major discussion topic other than a quick update given by each conservancy on their major news from the past year. Attendance was low at this session in part because of scheduling mishaps. While we appreciated that it didn't consume too much time, it would've been nice to have a bit more substance to share thoughts on. Simmons and Drake attended the NSS Cave Preserves meeting, and not much came out of that to share with us. And Drake tells us that the Board of Governors discussed a future new website.

#### 7.6. Old Timers Reunion wrap-up (Berger)

*[This is going to be an awfully short update...]*

Berger shares that despite assurances that the event was going on as scheduled, it was shut down by the county health authorities two days before opening to the public, when it had already opened for vendors, some of whom had arrived or were en-route (including Speleobooks) when that occurred. Several of us spent a good deal of time and effort (and money) trying to prepare everything for our booth - Simmons shopped for and acquired our new smaller 10'x10' tent, he and Berger did enough driving to pick it up and hand it off that they could've actually driven to West Virginia, Davis and Warner helped Berger load up all of the NCC swag and banners in his car, Drake finished all of the preparations to take the Give and Gear Up Raffle live in time to sell tickets at OTR, Hatfield designed a poster for it, and Berger got it printed in large format. All in all, a fantastic team effort, but sadly, we didn't get to show off what we'd done, and since the event didn't occur, there was no financial return for the money we put into preparing our booth.

#### 7.7. Members' Day wrap-up (Drake, Simmons, Folsom, et. al)

*[This event actually did happen! We'll hear highlights from it, some of which are quite exciting.]*

Simmons tells us that it was a great event, with over 70 people in attendance, and that the spot Berger identified for it was great (Berger, though sad that he couldn't attend due to a mandatory training event, was very happy that his oft-mentioned wish for us to be able to self-host an event at one of our properties worked out well), but that he'll be putting bigger tires on his grill for next time, as getting it up and down the trail was a chore. Folsom tells us that one of the attendees he had a great conversation with subsequently made an extremely generous \$5,000 donation. Drake notes that Davis did an impressive amount of cooking for the event, both beforehand and throughout it, and also that roughly 11 new members joined at the event. Simmons also says that we managed to sell some NCC swag items.

#### 7.8. NRO wrap-up and future plans (Simmons)

*[We withdrew from hosting, and the NRO declined to ask another group to do so. A smaller substitute event occurred in its place. We'll hear updates about that, and discuss what we wish to do about the Spring.]*

Simmons raises the question of whether we're interested in trying again to host NRO in the Spring, and Armen states that he's pessimistic that things will be much better then. Simmons asks if perhaps looking at a different, smaller venue would help. Folsom notes that a significant amount of energy was put into planning our setup for the Harley Rendezvous site, which he'd like to see not become wasted work, and also reminds us that multiple venues were looked at prior to the selection we made this time around, and this was the only one that was willing and able to host our event. Berger is nervous about planning the event at a fixed-cost venue such as this,

because it doesn't become cheaper if the event has lower attendance, and suspects that if we were looking at venues for the Spring soon, more options would be available because it's several months further out than when we were looking for the September event. Simmons suggests that we tentatively plan to hold it in May at the same location, but bring the topic back for discussion and perhaps a more firm commitment at the December meeting.

#### 7.9. Barn Dance (Folsom)

*[It, too, was cancelled quite late, and this will likely also be a very short update.]*

Folsom informs us that both the band and the owners of the Octagon Barn agreed that it didn't make sense to proceed with the event because of the small space it's held in, as well as the number of children who typically attend.

#### 7.10. Minimum group size ("Rule of Three") and our reference to the NSS brochure on safe caving (Engel)

*[At the August EC meeting, it became evident that we had not quite put this issue to bed as some of us had thought back in June, so it's back for further discussion. See discussion in Item 27 of the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Engel is uneasy with us referencing a document that says that the minimum safe group size is 4 when our management plans say that it's 3. Simmons suggests rather than linking to it, just referring to it generally, though Berger doesn't see how this would address the concern Engel raises rather than just making it more difficult for a reader to find the document we're referring to. Dumont suggests that the main goal in referencing such a document is ensuring that we're well-protected from liability, and believes that consistency is important. Berger reminds us that context is important and that while the number 4 is a good general guideline, when dealing with shorter caves such as those we manage, 3 is more logical, and he also points out that it's not uncommon for related documents (like contracts or terms) to have slightly different statements and for the more specific document to control in those circumstances - he doesn't think it's necessarily a problem to mention the NSS guide and then have specific rules for our caves that modify one of those rules. While Engel feels that would be confusing to people who chose to read the documents, Nieman notes that none of the new cavers he's taken underground have been confused by it. The idea of taking and modifying their document for our use was raised by Morris-Siegel, but Berger reminds us that we'd need permission to do that from the copyright-holder, and it doesn't seem likely they'd allow that. Berger also feels that there's a lot of value in the existing NSS document, and distancing ourselves from it because of a number our rules disagree with would be losing a lot that we don't have a good replacement for - the best alternative we have at the moment is the safe caver diagram that C. Snyder produced, which we know he'd rather we not promote heavily. Hatfield asks about the possibility of producing our own guidelines document, which we're of course free to do, but which Engel points out could be quite a substantial amount of work. Armen also notes that it has moved on the NSS website yet again, so the links we currently have are broken. The conclusion was to allow our group size rule to override the guideline in the NSS safe caving document, and to continue to refer to that document for all of the other benefit it provides, and for Armen to proceed with the inquiry he'd made after the previous meeting for permission to host a copy of the brochure on our website to avoid the broken link issue's recurrence.

#### 7.11. Fundraising efforts (Drake, Hatfield, Berger)

*[There are multiple fundraising initiatives, some underway, and others hopefully about to get underway, which will hopefully begin to make up for the opportunities that several event cancellations have cost us. We can discuss and update on these here.]*

Drake is just about to launch the Give and Gear Up Raffle, and expressed thanks to Hatfield and Berger for providing encouragement, motivation, and feedback to get to this point. Once it's live, she'd appreciate if those on Facebook (which she isn't) could promote it there.

Berger recapped the passive fundraising idea developed a couple of EC meetings back: we can design a guestbook webpage lightly customized for each preserve for visitors to "sign" and post a QR code on each preserve's kiosk asking them to sign the guestbook. This would enable contact with any visitor and not just permit cave trip leaders, and if they provide their e-mail address when signing the guestbook, we can periodically (perhaps weekly) send a one-time followup e-mail to anyone who's signed any of the guestbooks since the last time thanking them for visiting, telling them a bit about the NCC and how the caves are protected, and offering an easy opportunity to join or make a donation. Once we've done the initial setup for this, there's no ongoing cost and the only ongoing work is periodically sending e-mails to people who've newly signed the guestbooks. Berger, Hatfield, Drake, and Armen plan to meet to discuss next steps to get this project underway at 8pm tomorrow night.

Hatfield described to us a "dip jar" she's seen another organization use. It's a credit/debit card terminal on a cell network (so, no need for wifi) that can be brought to events and has a recommended donation amount - dip your card, and it charges the recommended donation. Obviously, such a donation isn't mandatory, but when something like this is present at an event, many people easily choose to make the suggested contribution. The whole affair is slightly larger than a small food processor.

Folsom reminds us about Simmons's recent inquiry to the Board about placement options for the old donation box that has been stored at the Gage Cabin for a long while, but used to be placed partway down the

commercial trail at Howe Caverns. We might ask Secret Caverns or Natural Stone Bridge and Caves if they'd be willing to host it for a while. Berger asks if having it at the Schoharie Cabin would work, but Simmons explains that it's not rugged and protected enough to be at an unsupervised location without being burglarized. Engel plans to visit NSBC next week, and will inquire about their interest.

#### 7.12. Website overhaul (Simmons, Armen)

Simmons notes that this topic is not meant to imply anything about the reliable work Armen carries out maintaining and updating information on the site as Webmaster, but rather to share his sense that the website is "too big" for what we really need in terms of how many pages there are, how many places some information is, and how many clicks one has to work through to find certain things. He suggests that maybe we should plan an overhaul for a simpler version of a website, with a good deal of what we have now pushed down to a "Resources" page. Armen agrees with the idea in general, and Berger notes that while doing as Armen requested and reviewing some recently-made updates last night, he came across some pages that he hadn't recalled seeing in the past, and was rather surprised at this, since he's been regularly referencing and looking up things on our website for about a decade. Nieman tells us that he used to do professional web design. Engel feels that there are two major (and different) questions: what we want the website to look like, and how we want the website to work. Simmons asks that Armen, Nieman, and Berger start thinking about how to modernize the site.

#### 7.13. Board Manual updates (Simmons, Berger)

Our Board Manual is ordinarily supposed to be updated following each meeting to reflect actions taken at the meeting and remain a current collection of information about our rules, motions, personnel, etc. These updates haven't occurred for quite some time (in fact, since Kappler was maintaining it), and Simmons has on and off been looking for ways to get Berger some help with it. Berger explains that there's no new information here that he hasn't previously shared at EC meetings, but that the actual difficulty isn't in making the updates (which, while a tedious, detail-oriented, and time-consuming process, is mostly a mechanical process that involves running down each business item sequentially in each set of minutes, which are clearly spelled out, and making the relevant update in the manual), but in converting the format from the document Kappler was maintaining into one he can work with in the software available to him, getting references to work, etc., and that each time he plans to set aside time to focus on getting over that hurdle, some other NCC project preempts it (and Simmons acknowledges that he's indeed seen those other projects crop up and consume the time over and over). While he appreciates the desire to help, he doesn't really see how this can be done by committee, and points out that once it's in a format he can work with, it's presumably far faster for him to process the updates rather than ask another person to do so, since the task naturally fits in the process the Secretary follows when producing the minutes, and they're fresh on all of that material. Simmons wonders if we could ask Kappler to bring it up to date in the old format, and Berger notes that indeed Kappler had offered to continue maintaining it at the time he stepped down as Secretary, but that there's been reluctance to take him up on that offer because it's supposed to be the Secretary's responsibility, and fits there, and should be much easier for the Secretary to do, and we leaned on Kappler for years to do that when it wasn't his responsibility. With the acknowledgment that it won't be a surprise if something else preempts this, Berger hopes to be able to pivot to this project once his NCKMS talk is finished.

#### 7.14. Newsletter articles, or lack thereof (Simmons, Folsom)

Simmons tells us that we didn't have a newsletter go out this cycle for lack of material, and reminds us of the previous attempt to provide content by having preserve managers write articles about their preserves. Folsom says that back when we were trying to follow that policy, many managers didn't comply with it. Berger notes that as a preserve manager, he always found that policy incredibly frustrating, because somehow, when the policy was started, it seemed to be a good idea to schedule a preserve's article to be due for the newsletter coming out at the same time as the Board Meeting where their periodic preserve Management Plan review was scheduled. When conducting a thorough MP review, a lot of time and work is consumed, and taking on the additional expectation of writing an article at the same time is asking for an unreasonable amount of time; he feels that part of the issue might be solved if the MP review and article schedules were desynchronized, but also notes that sometimes there's something interesting or noteworthy about a preserve that provides good content, and sometimes there's not - you can't really schedule news. He also points out that some people are quite good at producing interesting content, and notes as an example E. Kastning and the articles he submits to the Northeastern Caver. Dumont points out that we should consider what we're leaving as a historical record - people looking back at the NCC may see "holes" in our publishing schedule as gaps in activity even though that may not be accurate. He further suggests that perhaps one substantive issue a year would be sufficient, and the idea of writing articles not simply for a given issue, but rather as topics come up, and filing away non-time-sensitive articles so that there's a collection of articles which could run at any time when we're thin on content is also raised. Ingalls asks who the intended audience of the newsletter is, and posits that if it's "cavers in the northeast," then it's not really clear what they're supposed to get out of the NCC News because they get important news from the Northeastern Caver, and she almost never learns anything from our newsletter. Berger believes that the answer to Ingalls's question is supposed to be that the intended audience for the

newsletter is our membership, rather than northeastern cavers, although of course the vast majority of our membership is in both groups. However, rather than telling readers about exploration and discoveries and such, the point of our newsletter should be to show a high level of activity and work being carried on by the Conservancy, which is in fact the case, and which can translate to members feeling that their donations are being used well and make a difference, and causing them to choose to contribute more. He also thinks it's expected that, as a Board member, Ingalls would almost never learn anything from our newsletter, because she attends Board meetings and receives detailed minutes of EC meetings, and as such is thoroughly aware of virtually all of the goings-on within the NCC, but the newsletter can provide highlights for members not regularly attending the meetings. Hatfield believes that Berger has accurately described who the newsletter should be for and what it ought to be doing for them and for the organization. Folsom feels that much of the responsibility for going out and finding content and getting articles should fall to the publisher, and that that's not really happening. Folsom also notes that he'd asked a couple of folks to gather up pictures and send them in for an article on Members Day, and that that article didn't materialize, either. Engel notes that we use the newsletter to advertise position vacancies, which would be a complication if we decreased the publication frequency. Morris-Siegel feels that we may be doing the wrong thing by advertising vacancies in the newsletter rather than simply sending them out as mass e-mails to the membership, as his experience managing newsletter mailings for the Vermont Cavers Association has told him that the percentage of people who actually click through to open linked content is disappointingly low, but that when something is sent out in the body of an e-mail, the response rate he sees is far higher. Berger suggests something that he's seen multiple other nonprofits do - put together a newsletter, but when sending out an e-mail about the availability of the newsletter, instead of simply linking to it, provide a teaser blurb about each of the articles contained within, which serves to give readers a reason to click through - seeing the teaser causes them to know that there's an article they're interested in even before they decide whether to bother clicking.

#### 7.15. Officer reviews (Simmons, Hedges)

Simmons notes that it's been quite a while since we've had officer reviews occur, and that we're supposed to hold them in September so that the Officers can receive feedback before elections in December, and thus he'd appreciate if we could in fact try to get this done this year prior to December; he feels that we're owed this feedback, and that if all we hear is crickets as we do our jobs, we miss opportunities to understand what the Trustees are happy with and what they might like to change. Though Berger agrees that the process is a good idea and should happen, he doesn't quite think that absent the reviews, all we hear is crickets, as there is some amount of feedback that comes from Committee of the Whole discussions at Board meetings, which is useful. Hedges apologizes that the process hasn't happened regularly, and explains that while he had a lot of enthusiasm for the Governance Committee work when he joined the Board, he's had progressively less and less time to devote to it, particularly over the past year as so much of it has been consumed by preserve management work. He thinks that they can schedule some time to get it done for December. Berger notes that, in line with Simmons's comment that we won't always be the ones doing these jobs, which is part of why regular feedback is important, even absent the review process, the current officers can tell the Trustees one thing we're not doing well right now - coming up with succession plans, as even if we're willing to stand for reelection this December and the Trustees choose to keep us in these positions, this will be the last time we're eligible to be elected to these positions without a break, as we're about to hit our term limits. We're aware of this, but have not yet really worked on succession plans, and we and the Trustees really need to try to plan this out unless we want to leave everything to chance, which doesn't seem like the best plan. Ingalls tells us that she coordinates reviews for the Executive Director of another group, and that the process isn't so difficult if the Trustees spend some time formulating the questions they want to ask the Officers and each other, and that responses are easily collected with Google Forms or some similar tool. Berger notes that we were sort of made aware of the reality that we should have this sort of process years ago because of issues that had been festering for some time, and that this could've provided a pressure relief valve to try to solve some of those issues before they boiled over, and while he doesn't think we're having similar issues presently, there's some luck involved in that being the case, and we can't always rely on it being that way. Morris-Siegel suggests that rather than have this happen at the next meeting, it would probably be better to schedule time for it some evening.

#### 7.16 Structural reorganization of the Science Committee (Engel)

[See Item 17 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D.]

Engel tells us that this topic doesn't really come out of the recent episodes discussed in his comments in the Science Committee report, but that for a long time, he's questioned the idea of simply having one person who happens to be a geologist passing judgment on scientific proposals related to all speleological disciplines. He feels that it would be an improvement if we were to make the Science Coordinator into more of a management role, and to have scientists from various fields serve on the committee. For example, he suggests that if a proposal involving bats came in, we might turn to A. Hicks for input. Rubin feels that this is a good idea. Simmons believes that responsiveness to proposals is a key challenge, as our current Coordinator is generally incommunicado for much of the summer, which is often prime research time as many Principal Investigators are more free of the teaching duties that they have during the rest of the year that the caves are open. Dumont is concerned about the responsibility to

communicate and be responsive becoming a group responsibility where things may not occur as people are expecting each other to take the next step, and Rubin agrees with this concern. As a result, Dumont isn't sure that the structure of a multi-member committee is needed in order to consult experts in the relevant fields. Hatfield inquires whether there's a job description for the Science Coordinator, and Berger responds that it's defined in the Board Manual as are each of the other permanent committees, but that since Engel is proposing adding more structure to the working of the committee, the existing description doesn't spell those things out. Nonetheless, in response to Dumont's suggestion that the added structure may not be necessary, Berger notes that the current description certainly provides the freedom to operate the committee in the manner that Engel is suggesting if the Coordinator chooses to use it that way, but that the real question being asked here is whether the Board should impose the additional structure in order to address some ongoing difficulties. There is already a conversation that Engel has initiated with L. Davis, and he'll continue to pursue that conversation and see where it leads in time to make any necessary adjustments at the December meeting.

#### 7.17 NSF contract (Berger)

*[See Item 21 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D and meeting materials distributed with this agenda.]*

Berger recapped the history of our relationship with the NSF, the contract that both groups believed had been executed many years ago but that neither can find a signed copy of, the new contract proposed several years back, the issues Board members wanted to research and seek advice on at the time, our attempts to make progress on that over the past few years, and more recent developments in volunteer work Berger has done for another group that opened up an opportunity to obtain some of the advice we've been seeking. He explained the EC's current thinking on the issue, and the group agreed that Berger would provide Simmons with a "redline" of his prior "redline" from 2017, and then Simmons would attempt to hash out any needed adjustments to the draft contract with the NSF and get the document into a format both groups could consider executing around the time of our December meeting.

#### 7.18 Plans for our properties to turn over to the NSS or another organization should we fail (Berger)

*[See Item 22 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Berger shared with the group that one of the take-home learnings from a Cave Conservancies Roundtable meeting a few years back was that if a conservancy wants to ensure ongoing protection and stewardship for its properties in the event that the organization were to cease to exist, it's necessary not only to designate a successor for the properties to fall to, but also to enter into an agreement with that successor organization so that they can plan for the possibility of the properties being turned over to them and make a commitment that they'll be able to accept and manage the properties. Our Articles of Incorporation state that should we become insolvent, if the NSS qualifies as a nonprofit that can receive our preserves, all of the preserves will become theirs. However, we've never entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the NSS to ensure that they'd be ready, willing, and able to take on the NCC preserves should the worst happen, and that could put them in a position where they might have to refuse the properties or sell some of them off. Simmons notes that the NSS entered into such a MoU with the Cave Conservancy of Hawai'i last summer, and that he also had a discussion with the NSS AVP when [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Simmons proposes that we begin by taking the MoU that the NSS entered into with CCH as a draft and working towards one we can ask them to enter into with the NCC. Morris-Siegel agrees that we need a formal arrangement, and the group consensus is that Simmons should proceed to open negotiations for an MoU with the NSS.

#### 7.19 New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON) (Simmons)

*[Simmons recently learned of this organization that C. Young now works for, which provides various member services that may be of interest to the NCC.]*

Simmons tells us that his discovery of this organization came out of a suggestion made by Folsom that he consult with C. Young about a draft of our first lease agreement. She now works for this membership organization for nonprofits with a sliding scale of dues based on the member's annual budget (in our case, annual membership would be approximately \$140, prorated for partial years). Membership includes some gratis services, and the organization has departments that provide legal, governance, real estate, human resources, and fundraising assistance. Young is one of their lawyers. Simmons is interested in the NCC joining the organization and trying out some of their services. They have approximately 3,000 members, although there are not many land trusts among them, which can be both good and bad. Membership comes with 45 minutes of legal consultation per quarter, and then rates beyond that are fairly competitive. The consensus is that, especially at the prorated rate for what's left of this year, it seems worth trying this out, and an item will appear in New Business to join NYCON.

#### 7.20 New York State Geological Trail (Engel)

*[See extensive discussion in Item 2 in the EC Meeting Minutes in Attachment D.]*

Engel informs the group that he discovered this bill on its way to being signed that names three of our preserves as suggested sites to place on this trail, and that there's extensive discussion of the topic in the EC Meeting Minutes, but that this topic is mostly here as an FYI. Simmons notes that the bill will create a Board to manage creation of this trail and all attendant responsibilities, and that there's a grand total of one geologist who will serve on it. Engel's main issue with what they've done is that they've included no requirement for the people putting together this trail to consult with the landowners of the sites they may select to be part of the trail. The EC's conclusion was that Engel should draft a letter (which he's done) for Simmons to edit and send and that we should suggest that the NSS AVP send a similar letter expressing our concerns and what we'd like to see happen. Simmons is in the process of editing that letter. Rubin notes that the source the authors of the bill may have used for their list of suggested sites to place on the trail may in fact be a page on the NYSDEC website.

#### 7.21 Draft Management Plan for [REDACTED] (Folsom)

This draft plan, which [REDACTED], was circulated with the meeting materials. Engel reports that he received some comments from Berger, most of which he's accepted as they're simple grammar corrections. However, Berger raises a question to address here: he asks why the Access Policy section calls out the point that caving will be free of charge, when that's the case for all of our preserves and not additionally stated in any of our other Management Plans. Engel explains that there is a significant difference at this property, where [REDACTED] and we want it to be clear that caving activities are not part of that [REDACTED]. Morris-Siegel asks whether [REDACTED]. Berger responds that [REDACTED], because Simmons wanted the terms of the Management Plan to be settled first, as changes to the MP might have affected [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] could've complicated the process. Additionally, Simmons had requested that Berger research the implications of [REDACTED].

Once we approve the MP and Simmons finishes [REDACTED]. Berger explains that he placed approval of the Management Plan on our agenda for today in New Business, as it's a prerequisite to being able to accept an acquisition proposal, which in turn is necessary to sign a contract. We will need to receive a formal proposal from the Acquisition Committee to approve before we can [REDACTED], and he believes we can handle both of those motions one after the other at the next meeting. Simmons agrees with this plan for handling the procedural requirements.

#### 8. Simmons moves to close the Committee of the Whole.

Second by Nieman

For: Rest

Against: Morris-Siegel

Abstain: Hedges

[The Committee of the Whole is closed]

#### Old Business

#### 9. Simmons moves: The NCC-hosted Northeastern Regional Organization (NRO) event scheduled for the weekend of September 17, 18 and 19, 2021 is cancelled.

*[Background: Berger gave a pretty good run down of the why in the draft EC notes provided just last night. When we started planning for this event earlier this year, the COVID situation seemed to be fairly well in hand and we believed it would be "over" for the most part come September. Sadly that has not come to pass, and even in states/areas where there is a high vaccination rate, we are seeing increases. Berger notes that we could possibly run an event with precautions and procedures to minimize the potential for COVID spread. My main concern is that between the COVID situation and the restrictions we would need to implement, there is a high probability that turnout would be low. The venue (the only one we could locate that would/could let us in) has set fees that would need to get paid regardless of the number of attendees. Our hope, when planning this, was that the pent-up demand for activities would bring us a large crowd which would easily cover our costs and make a significant profit for the NCC. I no longer believe that will be the case. People have had the opportunity to get out some this summer already in the "window" between the original spread and the Delta variant. We can't risk a financial loss on the NRO, plain and simple, outside of the health risks. I see no other responsible path for us but to cancel and hope things are better come springtime. This is coming before the Board, as it was a Board motion to host the NRO and so the Board needs to act to cancel it, officially.]*

Second by Folsom

For: Rest

Abstain: Berger, Ingalls, Morris-Siegel, Nieman

[The NCC-hosted Fall 2021 NRO event is cancelled.]

[This motion was handled via electronic vote conducted between 8/25/2021 10:46am and 8/27/2021 11:01am.]

#### New Business

10. Berger moves: The minutes of the June 6, 2021 Board Meeting are approved.  
[The Secretary would like to thank Morris-Siegel, Folsom, and Dumont for sending in their reviews.]  
Second by Engel  
For: Rest  
Abstain: Hatfield  
[The minutes of the June 6, 2021 Board Meeting are approved]
11. Simmons moves: Jacob Morris-Siegel is appointed to the position of Stewardship Coordinator.  
[See item 5 in the updates at the head of the President's Report in Attachment A.]  
Second by Berger  
For: Rest  
Abstain: Morris-Siegel  
[Jacob Morris-Siegel is appointed to the position of Stewardship Coordinator]
12. Engel moves: Act 21-99 (Management Plan Research Rules) is amended to alter the boilerplate language placed into the Research Rules section in NCC preserve Management Plans as follows:

All research carried out on the NCC preserve must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Researchers must initially contact both the NCC science coordinator and the preserve manager(s).
- 2) The goals and objectives of the research must be clearly defined.
- 3) Except for long-term monitoring studies, there must be a clear beginning and end to each project, with the exception of long-term monitoring studies.
- 4) The work must should not cause permanent damage to any caves, natural features, native biota, or historical resources nor interfere with natural hydrologic or chemical processes. Any damage must be mitigated.
- 5) The research plan must assure the maximum safety of all concerned.
- 6) The work must not interfere with the "experience" of other property visitors.
- 7) Unless specifically authorized by the NCC Board, researchers must operate within the confines of the established management plans for each property.

Red is to be deleted. Blue is new text.

[Background: We did not update the rules when we changed the approval process for science projects. I change in rule 1) this. The change to item 3) came out of Bob's review of the management plan for [REDACTED]. I prefer the new wording and it is a minor change. We have or will have a proposal for speleothem sampling. Currently under item 4) one could argue such sampling can't be approved. I don't think that was ever the intent. The minor wording change, I hope, clarifies this.]

Second by Berger

For: Rest

Abstain: Hatfield

[The management plan boilerplate language for research rules in Act 21-99 is amended as specified]

13. Folsom moves: The Draft Management Plan for [REDACTED], as discussed and amended by the Committee of the Whole, is approved.

Second by Engel

For: All

[The Draft Management Plan for [REDACTED] is approved]

14. Simmons moves: The NCC will join the New York Council of Nonprofits.

Second by Hatfield

For: All

[The NCC will join the New York Council of Nonprofits]

Informational point: Next EC meeting will tentatively be Sunday, November 7, 2021 at 10AM if in person or 9AM if via videoconference. This date may be adjusted due to NCKMS-related travel schedules.



Informational point: the Winter Board meeting will be Sunday, December 5, 2021 at 10 AM if in person at Speleobooks or 9AM if via videoconference.

Informational point: the late Winter EC meeting will be Sunday, February 6, 2022 at 10AM at a location to-be-determined, or at 9AM if via videoconference..

15. Simmons moves: The NCC Spring meeting will be Sunday, March 6, 2022 at 10AM at HRP Associates or at 9AM via videoconference.

Second by Engel

For: All

[The NCC Spring meeting will be Sunday, March 6, 2022 at 10AM at HRP Associates or at 9AM via videoconference]

16. Dumont moves to adjourn.

Second by Morris-Siegel

For: Rest

Against: Armen

[The meeting is adjourned]

Meeting adjourned at 1:02pm

**Attachment A  
President's Report**

1. With the cancellation of the Barn Dance and NRO (plus OTR and other events), our fundraising is lagging to say the least. Need to determine if we want to try the NRO hosting again in the spring. We should at least look at the possibilities and the potential availabilities for less costly/constrained venues. The raffle is pivoting from the live events to a more virtual operation and should bring in some needed cash.
2. So far, the NCKMS is still a go for a live event in Texas. Thanks to Mitch, Riley, and Paul for repping the NCC at the event and submitting papers, all of which appear to have been accepted. Sounds like an awesome program in a fabulous location (San Marcos, TX), sorry I can't attend myself.
3. LTA recently announced the availability of a 2021 round for the NYSCPP grants for which we have been planning to re-submit for the Salamander donation. I am hoping to also submit for the [REDACTED] donation costs, possibly doing a joint venture with KLT for the development of the Salamander Preserve/Quarry parcels, and possibly the next (postponed) phase of the Human Influences on Caves Grant (Part II, data analysis). I will be attending the CPP Orientation on-line meeting this coming Thursday 9/20/21 at 10:00 AM on Zoom.
4. Preliminary discussions with the Hibernation Committee have settled on keeping a couple of the bat acoustic detectors for our future use and selling the rest. We should consider deploying the temperature humidity loggers in a cave or caves before the end of the season, if possible. I am still in possession of Leslie's game cameras which could be deployed at certain preserves if anyone has candidates (they have fresh lithium batteries and blank cards installed). Also, speaking of gear, we have the inappropriate light loggers in stock still. At this point, we could use the skills of an electronics tinkerer that could potentially upgrade the units with more sensitive light detectors and have them available for use/loan for visitation monitoring.
5. The Stewardship Coordinator position was advertised, and Jacob has graciously put forth his name (see action item for this meeting). This position will require that he eventually step down from the Merlin's Manager position. Ramon has volunteered to move into a co-manager slot for the Preserve.
6. In anticipation of taking on the duties for the [REDACTED], once the [REDACTED] is completed, Kevin has recruited a Manager Candidate for the Spider Cave Preserve, Adriane Hectus. This slot, as well as the Merlin's slot will be advertised (as required) and open for voting at the December meeting. We have received feedback from the owner of [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] is fine with the draft Management Plan.
7. There has been a little progress over the summer on several fronts under acquisitions as described under the Acquisitions report.
8. NCC was hosting the Fall NRO, which we ended up cancelling. There was an alternate event that same weekend hosted by the Marshall's Cave group and in that area. Some 50 or so cavers attended.
9. The Interim Access Agreement for Salamander Cave is signed, and we have gotten draft comments back from KLT on the Easement language. We are getting very close to completing this and getting it filed. I have signed the KLT Pledge Agreement which binds the NCC to our previously approved \$5,000 donation to KLT once the easement is done.
10. On September 18<sup>th</sup> Terry and I attended a gathering hosted by the Columbia Land Conservancy for property owners where they hold an easement. A lovely affair, and I did get some face time with Troy Weldy, their President, and we will restart the talks concerning [REDACTED] soon. The [REDACTED] owners unfortunately did not attend, but many of the attendees were quite interested in the fact that there is a conservancy dedicated to caves and karst in the northeast; who knows what may become of those contacts.
11. There are a few initiatives I would like us to get working on over the winter and have asked that they be placed into the Committee of the Whole for the start of discussions. In no certain order they are: Our web site, which sad to say needs a major structural overhaul, proofing and updating of the Board Manual, getting a bank of articles in for the newsletter, which is being underutilized, Spring 2022 NRO, and Officer's reviews (as part of Governance discussions).

**Cave Preserve Management Plan Review Schedule**

Year	March	June	September	December
2021	Ella Armstrong	Knox	<b>Traino</b>	Sellecks
2022	Bensons	Merlins	[REDACTED]	Onesquethaw
2023	Spider	Clarksville	Salamander	Bentleys
2024	Ella Armstrong	Knox	Traino	Sellecks

Note: Hedges has indicated that there are no proposed changes to the Traino Management Plan at this time. I have sent around the current plan to the Board for reference.

## **CAVE PRESERVE REPORTS.**

### **1. Bensons (Luke Mazza)**

**Progress:** Visited the property on August 29 to mow and see how the property was faring. It turned out that someone had already mowed (thanks mystery person!), but I still gave it a few passes to knock back the overgrowth on the edges of the right-of-way. The rest of the property was in good shape. 8 permits have been issued for caving this year but the number of trips that went was more like 5.

**Issues:** None to report.

**Plans:** Working with Erik Nieman to see if I can procure some better Bensons photos before getting new posters printed for the kiosk.

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

**Problems:** A few persistently wet areas along trail could use some steppingstones. Visits since last report found no significant changes.

**Progress:** Kiosk & signage materials are being developed.

**Plans:** Improve trails (corduroy, stones), work with Jonah Spivak on driveway (broad based dip, water bar, additional stone), kiosk & signage.

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

**Progress:** Survey is completed but we are awaiting approval of the survey showing the lot line adjustment. Member's Day was held by the Ward entrance. There were 20 e-mail contacts about visiting the preserve.

**Issues:** The middle wall in the changing area needs repair or replacement. Will be scheduled for the spring before the cave opens. Our neighbor has continued to put up posted signs on our property and further mark it with piles of sticks.

**Plans:** Chuck, Mike, and I plan to mark our eastern boundary with boundary markers once we get a copy of the new survey from CT Male. (From last report but still awaiting town approval of the plans.)

### **4. Ella Armstrong (Erik Nieman)**

**Progress:** Trail maintenance/trees cleared.

**Issues:** Weeds in parking area.

**Plans:** Ongoing project to clear the weeds overtaking the parking area.

### **5. Knox (Mitch Berger)**

**Progress:** Inspected the property and did trail maintenance on June 11 and August 29. Facilitated the research permit process for the NYS DEC and Bat Conservation International to install an acoustic monitor prior to the hibernation season. Nieman visited with some trail experts from the Thacher Climbing Coalition to assess the sinkhole trail restoration possibilities (but see Issues, below). Have made contact with C. Gentry and another caver with significant experience building trails for consultation on the project; both have expressed enthusiasm for helping, and one has already made a site visit. **Fifty (50, not a typo) permits were issued for the season** (and there may yet be a couple more) by me (including one to place the acoustic detector), five of which were cancelled. In addition, two Special Use permits were issued, one of which was for the NCRC Level 1 weeklong, and was used by the class.

**Issues:** Attempts to initiate the scientific research permit process did not work the way they're supposed to, and significant effort was required to keep the NCC appearing responsive (see Science Committee in the Vice President's report in Attachment B). The TCC group Nieman brought out to assess the sinkhole concluded that our desired trail restoration goals exceed their current capabilities. A group visiting the cave on September 11 did not display their permit, and caused some serious concern that there might be a trespassing group in need of help when P. Haberland found two cars at the Preserve after 9:30pm. A week later, another visit from the same group forgot a large bag of gear at the bottom of the sinkhole found by multiple groups visiting the following day, and resulting in several people coordinating efforts to get the gear back to its owners. The cave became so popular during the last few weeks of the season that a large amount of time was spent writing back and forth between groups to try to accommodate everyone who wanted to visit without having multiple groups encounter each other at the preserve, per our pandemic permit policy. One trip was denied because they asked way too late on a Friday to arrange for coordination with trips from a weekend event. Another permit was requested and has not yet been issued for a party of 3 including a 10 and 13 year old, as we're discussing safety concerns associated with the ladder, belaying equipment/skills, and ability to send someone for help should there be an injury (see prior concerns raised by Engel about the "Rule of Three"). The Great Divide rope is [presumably] still there. Engel and Berger still need to investigate what may be poison parsnip plants. The path down the sinkhole is degrading and in need of restoration work (in the process of consultation for planning).

**Plans:** Periodic property inspections. Visit the sinkhole with trail experts for consultation; attempt to budget for project in time for FY22 budget proposal. Addition of trail markers and reposting of property. Boundary marking. Removal of the Great Divide rope. Investigation of troublesome plant species. Further attempts at removal of ancient graffiti.

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

**Progress:** Ramon Armen and John Dunham led a Merlins Cave Steward Training trip. 6 people were on their trip. One other trip went into Merlins this Summer and 2-3 more including a video trip by Mike Sandone are planned before the cave closes.

**Issues:** A microburst hit the preserve this summer and several large trees fell across the trail. There are several dead ash trees near the parking area. These trees are not on land owned by the NCC so we probably can't do anything unless they fall into the parking area. Dome 12 Cave sumped this summer, and the sinkhole filled with water to several feet above the culvert. There is now a lot of soil and rock on top of the culvert lid.

**Plans:** Visit the preserve with a chainsaw to clear the trees across the trail. Dig out the top of the Dome 12 culvert. Cut back brush on the sides of the parking area. We hope to get these plans done later this fall.

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

**Progress:** As of this writing we've issued 17 permits so far this year, up from 12 last year.

**Issues:** None at this time.

**Plans:** None at this time.

#### **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 the Onesquethaw Preserve example.

**Issues:** Kiosk is irreparably broken. Kiosk needs new poster with updated information.

**Plans:** Replace kiosk with one stored at Mike Chu's house if available. Update contact info for preserve. New informational poster?

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

**No report.** (Simmons: Negotiations continue with respect to the easement and are coming near completion.)

#### **10. Spider (Kevin Dumont)**

**Progress:** The preserve was visited several times over the summer to better assess the planned series of trails.

**Issues:** None to report.

**Plans:** Trash collection and creation of a trail along both the base and the top of the escarpment is tentatively planned for either fall 2021 or spring 2022.

#### **11. Traino Preserve (Devon Hedges)**

**Progress:** Kiosk construction and installation are in progress. Website content for preserve is posted.

**Problems:** NCC benefit auction items remain safely stored. Making group plans for making parking area and completing kiosk roof hasn't happened yet.

**Plans:** Order and install landscaping fabric and crusher run stone for parking area; Complete kiosk construction; Plan and construct changing area; Potential connection between Slingerland's Hellhole and George's Surprise will be further explored via acoustic probing; survey completion in Slingerland's and approved digging.

#### **OTHER COMMITTEES (PRESIDENT):**

##### **Acquisitions (Chuck Porter, Bob Simmons)**

Vermont Land Trust, Ramon is pushing ahead on the MOU between organizations and has a couple of possible leads for acquisitions and/or management opportunities including [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

**Nominating (Norm Berg)**

Norm's report has been emailed to the Board already. The President's and the Secretary's terms are up in December.

**Risk Management (Mitch Berger)**

**Progress:** Confirmed with the Office Committee that the bill for our General Liability, Directors & Officers, and Volunteer Accident insurance policies was correct so that it could be paid. Filed requests for and obtained the necessary insurance certificates for us to be able to host NRO at the Harley Rendezvous site (and then, of course, the event was cancelled). Researched with our agent the implications of certain terms in drafts of the mutual easement document with the Kingston Land Trust and the [REDACTED], as requested by Simmons, and reported to the EC. Also submitted substantial other comments on the draft [REDACTED]

██████████ Obtained a quote for an Umbrella policy pursuant to one of those discussions, mostly for research purposes; the EC and Risk Management Committee don't feel it should be pursued at this time.

**Issues:** Despite multiple pleas from me, both in writing and at the previous meeting, and insistence from the President that everyone meet the simple obligation, several Board members have not submitted the mandatory annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form required for the NCC to be in compliance with the New York State Nonprofit Revitalization Act of 2013; this is absolutely unacceptable.

**Plans:** Add insurance coverage (G/L and Terrafirma) for: ██████████ when we close, the KLT property adjacent to Salamander when we execute the mutual easement agreement, and ██████████ if/when ██████████. Conduct research on our liability policy related to a question raised about the Knox sinkhole trail restoration project. Discuss with the EC what actions need to be taken to remedy our compliance issue with the NY Nonprofit Revitalization Act. Participate in annual risk management training required for eligibility for Terrafirma discounts. Prepare our Terrafirma renewal application for next year. 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)**

I have exchanged emails with the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy to discuss an update to the Cave Management Plan this winter and negotiate limited summer visitation going forward.

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

We had a live lead for renting our equipment to a consulting firm in Canada this spring that did not ultimately materialize. At this point it seems logical to divest ourselves of most of the bat acoustic monitors, while they still have value and while we can still get a potential decent return. Morgan and I will discuss the possibility of applying for a follow up grant for the second part of the previous study. We will present a proposal (and any supporting motions) for consideration at the December meeting which falls a little over a week before the submittal deadline for the NYSCPP grants.

#### **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

[Thom Engel] Background material for the proposal for speleothem dating was received and distributed. Comments were forwarded to the investigators by Larry Davis. ██████████

Because of the manner in which the science approval process works we should get a proposal for each preserve where work is proposed. From my perspective as a preserve manager I would like such proposals to address the following:

1. What previous work similar to the proposal has been done in the cave?
2. If previous work has been done, can those samples be used for this work?
3. Why was this particular cave selected as a sampling site?
4. Where specifically in the cave will the sampling be done?
5. What sampling method will be used at each site in the cave?
6. How will the sample location be remediated?

I shared this with one of the investigators when Paul Rubin showed him around Clarksville. He thought they were reasonable points to have to address.

**Special Use** (Thom Engel)

Another down year for numbers but not as bad as last year. We've had over 87 reservations for the year to date. Of these 33 were issued, 35 were cancelled before issuance, and 7 were cancelled after issuance. Eight (8) were denied all requested by the same summer camp. This was related to their inability to submit a Notification of Risk despite two additional requests for submission.

This year we had a few groups that failed to print out the permit for display. I have added a cover sheet for Clarksville and added text to the transmittal e-mail.

**Surprise Cave Committee** (Al DeMaria)

Nothing to report

**Thacher Park** (Thom Engel)

There were two mapping sessions in Hailes and John Dunham produced a beautiful draft map of the cave so far. OPRHP were very pleased with the map.

I plan to have discussions with the park manager regarding having recreational caving in Hailes.

**Cave Protection** (Thom Engel)

No action. Attempts to set up a meeting this summer were not successful. If anyone knows a NYS legislator who might be receptive to this, please let me know. (Admittedly, there were other issues facing the legislature.)

Assembly Bill A4328A (S7071) regarding unique geological features and a geo-trail passed both houses of the NYS legislature but has yet to be signed or vetoed by the governor. Text of the bill can be seen at: <https://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2021/A4328A>.

**Attachment C  
Treasurer's Report**

Northeastern Cave Conservancy Inc

Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual

January 1 through September 15, 2021

Jan 1 - Sep 15, 21	Budget
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Ordinary Income/Expense		
Income		
Donations		
Auction Donations	0.00	2,000.00
Donations - Other	10,286.46	10,553.00
Total Donations	10,286.46	12,553.00
Grants	3,161.00	0.00
Interest Earned	3.34	25.00
Membership Income	2,050.00	2,700.00
Total Income	15,500.80	15,278.00
Expense		
Acquisitions	9,020.50	2,000.00
Bank Charges	44.65	75.00
Donations-outgoing	0.00	200.00
Dues	300.00	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	0.00	250.00
Grant Expense	3,000.00	0.00
Insurance	2,506.06	2,548.00
Legal Fees	1,472.20	1,000.00
Licenses & Permits	50.00	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
NRO Expenses	500.00	0.00
Office Expense	76.00	100.00



Postage	7.79	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	<u>1,745.00</u>	<u>5,195.00</u>
Promotion	781.12	1,500.00
Publishing		
Mailings	0.00	50.00
Website	0.00	60.00
Total Publishing	<u>0.00</u>	<u>110.00</u>
Science	0.00	500.00
Sponsorships	500.00	250.00
Taxes on Properties	524.65	300.00
Total Expense	<u>20,527.97</u>	<u>15,278.00</u>
Net Ordinary Income	-5,027.17	0.00
Other Income/Expense		
Other Income		
Net Gain or Loss from NSF Fund	3,995.29	0.00
Total Other Income	<u>3,995.29</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Net Other Income	<u>3,995.29</u>	<u>0.00</u>

Net Income

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-1,031.88

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0.00

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

**Progress:** Had some great gifts for the dance. Most are so local that they cannot be added to the big raffle.

**Plans:** Plan for 2022. continue contacting donors to see if they want their gifts returned or held for next year

**Problems:** Covid

**Membership Committee – Riley Drake:**

**Membership Renewals and New Members:** The numbers seem to be coming back up! We had a lot of renewals on or around the NCC members day, but still have many members choosing not to renew their memberships. We had a successful Members' Day, many thanks to all that were involved in planning or volunteering. Special thanks to Emily for cooking both at and lots before the event. The database is current as of today, September 19th.

**Current Membership Numbers (Change since April 27th, 2021)**

Life: 63 (+1)

Family Life: 9 (no change)

Benefactor: 14 (no change)

Regular Membership: 77 (net +4, +17 new members, -13 non-renewals)

Institutional: 6 (no change)

Total: 169 (+5)

*The above numbers are accurate to the best of my current understanding according to the membership database on September 19th, 2021.*

**Future directions/plans:**

(1) I am currently working on launching the "Give and Gear Up" Raffle that was planned to start at the beginning of the month. Will be launched on or before September 23rd.

(2) PayPal continues to be a tricky way to receive payment, because (in the current configuration) we have to guess what the donated money is intended for based on the amount. This ongoing issue creates a lot of work for Bill and also makes the NCC look very unprofessional and deeply disorganized when our first communication with a new or renewing members is "so why did you pay us again?" I would like help fixing this.

(3) I have started to clean up the NCC database but have yet to take very drastic measures. I will save a copy of the database as it exists now. Additionally, I am considering migrating the membership database to a more manageable format and welcome any input.

(4) Continue to tell your caving friends that they can join the NCC! I continue to run into several longtime northeast cavers in the past few months that were not aware they could join the NCC.

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

**Progress:** Status Quo

**Plans:** none specifically

**Problems:** None

**Publications – Christa Hay:**

**Problems:** I'm confused on the response to my last report. Is the answer No, it has not been decided on yet or No we will not be doing preserve articles or dropping the amount of newsletters per year?  
[Note from Treasurer: I replied that the Board had not made ANY decisions regarding the above.]

**Progress:** No newsletter due to lack of articles.

**Plans:** Will reach out to board directly for articles or ideas on who can write up something of interest.

**Technology Committee Report – Mike Chu:**

Ramon Armen reports:

**Progress:** Made regular small updates and additions to the website. No major new projects undertaken.

**Plans:** Still plan to renovate the PayPal forms, and go through preserve pages to bring them up to date and make them more informative and engaging.

**Problems:** None at this time

**Volunteer Value Committee – Vince Kappler:**

**Progress:** Year to date totals: 457.5 hours of volunteer work on NCC projects for a total value of \$13,241. Members also reported traveling a total of 933 miles to work on projects.

VV reporting of hours, miles driven, and total value more than doubled this quarter when compared to the first six months of the year. Many thanks to Emily, Mike, and Riley for their work on the Members Appreciation event. And also, Jacob, Luke, and Alvin for their preserve reports as well as committee reports from Office, Barn Dance, Treasurer, and Science.

One member reported a glitch with the on-line VV reporting form and I forwarded the issue to IT.

**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 22, 2021, 10:00am  
Online via Videoconference**

Called to order: 10:37am

Present: M. Berger, T. Engel, B. Simmons, B. Folsom, D. Hedges

**1) Hailes Cave**

Engel tells us that he plans to have discussions with park manager B. Hein after Labor Day about getting the cave open for more recreational caving. Specifically, Engel wants to know how much we can offer NCC help. Berger recalls that part of the original plan for our partnership with Thacher Park called for developing a management plan for Hailes and working towards the Park approving it, and that given our knowledge of the cave, any such proposal we'd make would include recreational caving access. Engel confirms that our production of a management plan was part of what we'd expected to do, but that it never went through, and so we've only been able to access Hailes when operating under the science permit to inventory and map park caves. Part of the challenge is that the Park is now on its fourth manager since we began working with them. Engel does note, though, that the Park has been pleased with our mapping efforts in Hailes. Berger inquired whether he knew if that sentiment is held by the new manager, and Engel confirms that it is, also noting that he forwarded some of J. Dunham's drafts to Hein and the staff member who issues science permits, and both responded very positively. He also notes that when he applied for renewal of our permit this year, the response was almost instantaneous; there've sometimes in the past been lengthy waiting periods.

## 2) NYS unique geological features and NYS geological travel map (S7071/A4328A)

This bill came to the EC's attention a few weeks ago after Engel noticed it, which in turn was after it had already passed the New York State Assembly and Senate, but it has not yet been signed into law. It proposes designation of unique geological sites and features in the state, and creation of a state geological trail to be publicized, and further tasks a new state geological planning and management board with designating the sites on the trail and developing management plans for them. The bill suggests 66 sites to be on the list. They include Clarksville, Knox, and Onesquethaw caves! We were rather aghast at discovering a bill on its way to being signed that implies that the state is going to publicize our properties, invite people to them, and develop management plans for them. (The suggested sites also include the NSS's McFail's Cave, as well as Howe's Cave, the Howe's Cave Quarry, Joralemon Park, and Thacher Park.)

Simmons's read is that opposing its passage into law won't be fruitful because it's already passed both chambers and has so much support behind it, and because the underlying motivation for what they're doing is positive (with the disclosure that he is a geologist licensed in NYS). He believes that our chance to affect things will come as the actual list is being put together by the newly formed geological planning and management board. Berger, confused at having to ask this question, checks whether, short of taking our land by eminent domain, the state even has the legal ability to do what they propose without our permission – namely to invite people onto our privately-owned land and to attempt to manage it. Engel confirms that the state cannot do so. Simmons posits that this isn't really their intent. Engel feels that the biggest problem is that the legislators never consulted the appropriate parties, included sites on their suggested list that are private, failed to list other sites that possibly might wish to be included (one recurring popular NRO site was mentioned as an example), and included commercial sites such as the Howe's Cave Quarry. Simmons notes that the list in the bill is just a set of suggestions, but Engel and Berger believe that without serious effort, the examples given in the bill will simply become the official list.

Berger notes that the concept of a karst trail has indeed worked in other places, when planned in concert with the stewards of the relevant sites. He describes the karst trail in Virginia, which is curated by the Virginia Cave Board (a volunteer board people are appointed to by the Governor, which is made up of geologists, conservancy volunteers, etc., many of whom we know as active members of the cave management community). He points out that we'd likely be reacting differently if the NSS were spearheading the project to put together a karst trail, but he's very worried that the NYS government will not handle this well. Simmons asks if it's time to write a strongly worded letter to the Commissioner [of the newly formed planning and management board]. Engel thinks that both the NCC and A. Weaver (NSS AVP) should write such a letter to the incoming NYS Governor along the lines of “We like the idea, but...” and explain that we have serious concerns about the implementation of this new law, and asking that there be a requirement that landowners be consulted before the governmental agencies do the work described in the bill. Berger reminds the group that, as a nonprofit, there are fairly serious limitations on our ability to do anything that may appear to be lobbying, although if we're discussing implementation issues about a law that directly impacts us rather than its approval, he doesn't think we'd be crossing the line. Simmons says that we'd be writing this as an informative sort of document. Berger asks who has what action items, and Folsom suggests that Engel draft a letter for Simmons to finish and send. Simmons asks whether a unified letter from the NSS and NCC or one from each organization would have more impact. Engel firmly believes that two letters are more effective than one.

## 3) Proposed changes to the standard Research Rules in NCC management plans

Engel proposes to change the language in our management plans about research rules as follows:

### RESEARCH RULES

All research carried out on the NCC preserve must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Researchers must initially contact **both** the NCC science coordinator **and the preserve manager**.
- 2) The goals and objectives of the research must be clearly defined.
- 3) **Except for long-term monitoring studies**, there must be a clear beginning and end to each project, **with the exception of long-term monitoring studies**.
- 4) The work **must should** not cause permanent damage to any caves, natural features, native biota, or historical resources nor interfere with natural hydrologic or chemical processes. **Any damage must be mitigated**.
- 5) The research plan must assure the maximum safety of all concerned.
- 6) The work must not interfere with the “experience” of other property visitors.
- 7) Unless specifically authorized by the NCC Board, researchers must operate within the confines of the established management plans for each property.

**Red** is to be deleted. **Blue** is new text.

Background: We did not update the rules when we changed the approval process for science projects. I change in rule 1) this. The change to item 3) came out of Bob's review of the management plan for Jack Packers. I prefer the new wording and it is a minor change. We have or will have a proposal for speleothem sampling. Currently under item 4) one could argue such sampling can't be approved. I don't think that was ever the intent. The minor wording change, I hope, clarifies this.

Simmons and Berger both noted that the proposed changes seem fairly unobjectionable, and there was no substantial further discussion. Berger will convert this into a motion for the next Board Meeting.

#### **4) Viability of holding the Barn Dance and NRO**

Simmons has the sense that a number of organizations are trying to get their various events in during the window before we shut down again because of the Delta variant. Berger believes that, largely for economic reasons, we're not actually going to see a large-scale shutdown again, and also notes that he's seen events that seem much riskier than ours continuing to run (as an example, the WV State Fair was in full swing last weekend).

Folsom confirms for Simmons that the band for the Barn Dance has also not made a firm commitment yet and is watching the situation; the event has been planned, and hasn't yet been publicly cancelled. Davis has expressed to us in e-mail that she feels holding the Barn Dance would be a "very bad" idea (and that holding NRO would just be a "bad" idea). Simmons notes that the Barn Dance involves a bunch of physical contact with others in a close indoors space, and Folsom points out that it also typically involves a significant number of kids who can't be vaccinated yet.

Folsom reminds us that the purpose of the two events is different - the Barn Dance isn't intended to make money so much as to be a community event to help foster good will, whereas our intent in running NRO is to make some money for the NCC to assist with its fundraising goals. Berger expresses a concern about whether we can expect responsible behavior from attendees at events we bear responsibility for (we became aware of a vaccinated person who fell ill 2-3 days after Members Day with a set of symptoms described to us that can fit the COVID profile, who did not go get a test and instead decided that it was probably the flu; this is precisely what's not supposed to happen, and were it COVID, prevented contact tracing from happening promptly). Hedges feels that people who make decisions like that are misunderstanding that the organization hosting an event has some responsibility that they need to help us to carry out, and instead thinking that it's just their personal responsibility to decide what they need to do.

Both events are ~1 month away, and it's pressing that we make final go/no-go decisions really soon. Engel underscores this point by telling us that he had lunch with B. Addis and M. Nardacci last week, both of whom pointed out that they haven't heard anything about whether NRO is in fact happening. Engel thinks that the decision about the Barn Dance is ultimately going to be taken out of our hands (because either the band is going to decline to come, or the Octagon Barn owners will tell us that they're not comfortable with the event going forward), but that whether NRO happens is our choice. And Folsom agrees that we're going to be unable to effectively control what happens after the event (referring to Berger's concern about whether anyone who gets sick will do the responsible thing, get tested, and let us know).

Berger notes that at the moment, VAR is going to happen, and he believes that it's possible for us to run NRO as a relatively safe event, because it's primarily an outdoor camping event at a place where it's trivially easy to set up tents well distanced from each other, to socialize outdoors separated by several feet even at campfires, etc. There are some riskier portions of a typical NRO that we could do some work to mitigate. Specifically, he believes that the typical congested dinner service line where people are up against each other for lengthy periods, leading to a serving area with (e.g.) open crockpots that everyone's passing by and being served out of, is a risk. That could potentially be addressed by instead putting together individually pre-packaged portions and handing those out. The indoor auction is another significant risk. That could be mitigated by holding it outdoors, and handling the challenge of hearing the auctioneer by using a good set of outdoor speakers from the band.

Despite all of this, we know that a number of people won't go because they're uneasy with the situation (both from common sense, and from Berger watching discussions among various grottos about which of the folks who typically attend things like VAR and OTR will and won't be doing so this year). This is fine and responsible, and we have to be okay with it. On the one hand, it decreases crowding at our NRO if we run it, which makes transmission less likely. On the other hand, it also makes it more likely that we'll lose money if we go through with the event due to low attendance. The venue we're at this time is one where there's a large venue reservation fee rather than one where the site collects camping fees from each attendee. So if our attendance falls below a certain amount, we lose money. While it's likely that the Region would make us whole if that happened, that won't achieve our goal of earning fundraising money. However, Berger points out that we received an extremely generous individual donation from a Members' Day attendee as a result of a conversation that happened there, and if just one such thing happened at NRO as well, it would entirely address the question of whether the event was financially worthwhile. Folsom notes that at the moment, if we pull out of holding the event, we won't lose money - the t-shirts we had printed don't have dates on them (as a hedge against this possibility, they're reusable for a later NRO), and we can get our event venue deposit back. He also notes that because he halted organizational work about two weeks ago when it looked like it might not be wise to spend anything else as it was looking more likely that we'd have to cancel, he hadn't yet nailed down a commitment for anyone to run the second breakfast and contribute proceeds to the NCC, nor had he received an answer to a

question he asked about how CCG has previously handled online registrations.

Folsom inquired about the benefits of having online preregistration. Berger explained that, having managed online prereg for the Boston Grotto's last two events, the benefits are: 1) having way less cash on hand to worry about at the event, 2) guaranteed income because when people don't prereg and prepay, they sometimes flake out or don't attend due to weather, etc. but when they pay online, they're essentially committed, and 3) more solid estimates of the quantity and distribution of t-shirt sizes needed for the event.

Folsom asks how to make this decision. Berger points out that no matter what we do, we're probably not going to be able to make most people happy, because there's one group of people who won't come if we run the event, and another group of people who will be angry with us if we don't run it. Berger is also worried that we will lose money if we go through with it, given the current climate. Simmons says that we're not into running NRO to lose money. Berger reminds us about the large donation from Members' Day and that this event is an opportunity for us to showcase the NCC and perhaps entice another such donation, and that it does seem like the major risks could be mitigated.

Simmons asks if we have to have a Board meeting to cancel it, since the Board approved hosting it. Engel asks if the online process absent a Zoom meeting will take too long to be able to give straight answers to people asking if it's happening. Simmons asks what Berger thinks should happen, and if he wants to provide input as NRO Chair. Berger is conflicted about what to do, both by his positions as an NCC Board member and an NRO Officer, and by his personal thoughts about the event. He feels that he clearly has a conflict of interest between the Conservancy and the Region, and would abstain from a Board vote at this point because he thinks their interests differ. Asked for his personal thoughts, he says that he thinks we could run the event without it being a major risk, but that we'd lose money if we went through it at this point. He also thinks that though we could run the event safely with some changes (e.g. pre-packaged meals, outdoor speakers and setup for the auction, etc.), we could only pull off all of the necessary changes if people's hearts were in it, and since both Davis's and Folsom's clearly are not, we're unlikely to succeed.

Folsom isn't looking forward to being the one to have to deliver the bad news; Simmons says that he'll take the hit and do so if we cancel. Folsom doesn't think the event should happen. Simmons doesn't think it should happen if we won't make money. Engel and Berger are both conflicted about whether it should happen (and Berger additionally has a conflict of interest). Simmons will write a motion to the Board proposing cancelling NRO. If someone feels we need to get on Zoom and discuss live to expedite the discussion and decision, we'll do so, but Berger will attempt to make it easier to avoid that by writing up the minutes for this topic early to bring the Board up to speed on all the background that's been discussed here prior to the motion's discussion period beginning.

#### **5) Status of Clarksville survey**

Simmons tells us that the survey is complete, and has been given to the Town's planning agent to bless the proposed subdivision. Their Planning Board meeting was scheduled for the 19th, but we haven't heard back yet. They may or may not need a couple of things to be added to the map. We haven't had C.T. Male produce the mylar copies yet because the maps may need slight tweaking when the Planning Board review is complete. The new corner markers have been set in the ground.

#### **6) Update on Salamander and the KLT Pledge Agreement, easement progress, etc.**

Simmons tells us that he has a revision to KLT's proposed Pledge Agreement, taking into account feedback from our Board, and from the Board discussion, it sounds like he has approval to sign it. He'll send that revision around for us to see before signing and sending it over to KLT. There's been some minor back-and-forth discussion about the easement. In particular, KLT has asked whether we need to have a survey in order to fix up the parking area before moving forward, though Simmons is trying to resist holding things up for further survey work. Engel happened to drive by a few weeks back, and was surprised with where it appears that they placed the parking lot; he thought they'd put it down by the low spot, but it seems to be up the hill a bit.

#### **7) Onesquethaw winter bat protection device**

Berger notes that we're approaching the end of August, and that his recollection from last year is that in order to be able to keep the cave open over the winter, we'd need to have the device installed significantly before the winter closure begins, and so asks where we are with steps needed to keep the cave open this winter. Engel says that "it takes at least two to tango," meaning that things have been sent to the USFWS, and have received no response. Berger expresses exasperation with this game being played year after year, and suggests that if they don't feel like responding to anything for years when the responsible NYS governmental agency has agreed that our proposal is the correct way forward, we should try a different tactic, such as forwarding again the written support from the NYSDEC along with a *notice* (rather than a request) that we plan to install the device and keep the cave open this winter unless we hear back about a problem with that plan. Engel says that he's sort of asked our DEC contacts if we can do something along those lines, but that it doesn't seem likely to work. After some further discussion about other organizations (not in the cave conservation context) which have had success with that general approach to government regulating agencies, Engel agreed to have some more conversations about whether something like that can perhaps be done. Simmons jokingly asks about applying for a "Take Permit," though Berger points out that this could be viable. Simmons reminds us that doing so requires proposing some form of mitigation that we'd likely have trouble providing satisfactorily. Berger recalls that some mitigation proposals have included things like closing and stewarding karst areas, and that potentially we could offer something along those lines for the quarry on the KLT land near Tree Cave, as we'll already be doing stewardship out there for Salamander and perhaps for Tree.

### 8) Status of the Traino Preserve NYSCPP obligations

As Simmons reminded us at the last Board meeting, the grant we received for the acquisition of the Traino preserve required that by the end of July 2021, we complete certain tasks, including installing a bunch of infrastructure (kiosk, parking area, trail, etc.) and ascertain presence/absence of some species in the cave. This topic is here to check on our progress. Simmons tells us that much of the infrastructure work has been completed – the kiosk is up, and the parking area has been designated, though he doesn't think we've yet seen a bill for paving, so that likely has yet to occur. There's a specific species of amphipod that we're supposed to determine presence or absence of in the cave. Engel tried to contact one suggested biologist about making this determination, but hasn't heard back yet. Berger had been under the impression from prior descriptions that we were expected to complete a more thorough biological inventory, but it sounds now like the required work is fairly narrowly scoped. Engel says that if it's just one certain amphipod we're looking for, Nieman could likely do this for us. Simmons notes that Morris-Siegel has also volunteered to take care of this task. He points out, though, that we haven't simply had any of them go do it because we'd been hoping to have a PhD or at least a speleobiologist do the work. Folsom suggests that absent the professors we've been reaching out to, perhaps we can see if Drake is interested.

### 9) Future of the NYSCPP acoustic detectors

Berger placed this topic on the list as a check-in from the previous meeting, where we concluded that we should either have kits with the detectors ready to be rented out for the Fall, or be working on attempting to sell most of them before they're completely obsolete. Simmons says this had been delegated to the Ad-hoc Hibernaculum Committee, and that he hasn't heard anything on this front lately, but that he's still of a mind to keep a few and sell the rest. He will check in again with Ingalls and Davis to get a final decision on what to do about this equipment. Then, he'll likely end up proposing that we get rid of most of the detectors. Berger asks to check whether it's okay for us to sell off items that were bought with a grant for a specific purpose, but assumes that it's fine as they're now years old and have depreciated significantly. Simmons also reassures us that it's fine because they were indeed used for the purpose that the grant funded them for. Berger notes that we acquired property insurance primarily because of the value of these detectors, and though it's fairly inexpensive coverage, just for thoroughness raises the question of whether we should drop that coverage once we've sold most of the detectors, or keep it under the assumption that at various points in the future, we'll have more items worth insuring. The group for the most part feels that it's worth keeping the coverage.

### 10) Positions needing to be filled (Fundraising, Stewardship)

Simmons tells us with some excitement that he's gotten an offer to take on the Stewardship Coordinator role from Morris-Siegel, and plans to take him up on it. That will practically necessitate Morris-Siegel transitioning out of his Preserve Co-Manager role at Merlins, and he's had some productive discussion with Armen about potentially taking over that role. Regarding Fundraising, following on the heels of the work she's done getting us set up with Give Lively, Folsom broached the topic of taking on the position with Drake, but she didn't immediately go for it. Berger asked whether we've reopened the question of whether Hatfield would be interested in doing it remotely, given our learnings about working remotely over the past 1.5 years, and Simmons says that as of a month ago, he'd not managed to sell her on the idea, and notes that she has lots of balls in the air right now. Berger suggested that if the number of balls in the air is what's holding her back, and several of them will land in the next year or two, given how long this position has been vacant, he'd be supportive of waiting for Hatfield to have more time if her heart will be in it than trying to twist someone's arm into filling the position in name, but not taking a particularly active role. Folsom agreed.

### 11) Vermont Land Trust Memorandum of Understanding

Simmons tells us that Armen has communicated back and forth a bit with VLT on this topic, and that it's not moving super-fast, in part due to the pandemic, but that it's moving in a positive direction. Armen has also provided updates on a couple of leads. One is

That conversation is very preliminary, but positive. The other is

and VLT has been helping to investigate the possibility as well.

### 12) Knox sinkhole trail restoration possibilities

Nieman went out to the sinkhole with some of his contacts from the Thacher Climbing Coalition to assess the situation and what they may be able to help with or recommend. Unfortunately, their assessment is that our project is beyond their current capabilities to do well, largely because there isn't much of anything in the way of structure to build on at the base of the sinkhole, so anything like steps they'd try to build would simply slump down into the sinkhole in a couple of years. There's the possibility of building a "half pyramid" staircase against the bedrock, but it's an enormous undertaking that they're not prepared to take on. They recommend either trying to fix what's there or let it return to a natural state and turn into a rappel. Berger feels that the latter suggestion is simply not viable for the NCC, as it would essentially cut off access from those without specialized equipment and training to what's currently

one of the best beginner-level cave experiences our properties have to offer. He has a couple of people he plans to reach out to to seek further assessment and advice: one is an alumnus from SUOC who used to do work building trails, and another is C. Gentry who has significant experience in this area from work with another land trust. He placed this topic here both as an update on what's been learned so far, and to ask advice on other leads.

Engel wonders whether the liability we'd be taking on if we built something is a problem. Berger points out that while there's always the risk of being sued (even without merit), we carry good liability coverage, and there's also already exposure by knowing about a trail that's degrading if we don't address it, and given that there's potential (but low) risk regardless of whether we address the problem, he'd rather end up in a situation where we've visibly taken care of the property and made it safer for visitors. Given that, Engel suggests a novel approach – we could consider installing a ladder on the far side of the sinkhole where there is a bedrock wall, much as a ladder was installed in the cave. Berger is intrigued by this idea, but notes that he'd expect such a project with a suitable ladder that will withstand the weather abuse we know it'll take to be quite expensive. Simmons reminds us that this would likely require essentially creating the same situation as it turning into a rappel because we'd probably have to require or recommend belaying down that ladder. However, Berger points out that adding a ladder as a more structural option on the far side of the sinkhole doesn't preclude others from navigating the natural slope where the current trail is if they feel able to do so. Engel also notes that there's a unit at the DEC that does trail work, and that we may be able to ask our usual contacts in the Wildlife Diversity Unity to introduce us to someone in the unit that handles trails, explaining that we're not asking them to do the work, but would appreciate some consultation if they're willing. Folsom also mentions that one of our neighbors near the Merlins property, who was enrolled in the recent NCRC Regional course (where Berger met him) and is a DEC Forest Ranger, may be a good contact. Having come away with two more leads than he came in with, Berger will work on pursuing them.

### **13) NSS Convention recap (Cave Conservancies Roundtable, etc.)**

We didn't have a whole lot to provide updates on. Berger, Simmons, and Davis were at the Cave Conservancies Roundtable, which had been left off the schedule, then was suggested to be a Saturday meeting (after the Convention would've been over), and then in an attempt to retain attendees was hastily placed in the Friday afternoon slot (where it usually is). It had far lower attendance than last year (likely due to a combination of Zoom fatigue and scheduling confusion), but was actually a rather efficient session, partly because there was no agenda or major discussion topic. They went around the room and allowed each conservancy to give a brief update. Simmons highlighted the upcoming Clarksville addition for us. And the meeting wrapped up and closed in just about a half hour. The Nature Preserves meeting did not get scheduled for during the Convention, and is slotted to be held at some later date. We had no updates from others who attended other sessions, though perhaps we will at the next Board meeting.

### **14) NCKMS**

Berger took care of arranging our co-sponsorship with the organizers, as agreed upon at the last Board meeting. At this point, Rubin and Drake have registered and have planned topics for talks (Rubin on geologic features forming a new interpretive trail he hopes to establish at Clarksville, and Drake on time-series bacteriological monitoring of cave water and information it can provide about surface pollutants). Berger hasn't aborted plans to attend, but has been dragging his feet on committing to flights because of all of the pandemic developments. He also still hasn't settled on a talk topic, and asked if anyone wanted to offer suggestions, as reprising the same talk really doesn't seem right. After a bit of talking, Folsom suggested a history of the progressing piece-by-piece protection of Clarksville Cave. Though it's not subject matter that Berger is expert on, the several chapters in the NCC's acquisitions of ever more of that cave are something he thinks could be interesting to work with, provided that some others like Engel will have time to be "interviewed" for deeper understanding. Engel says he's happy to do so. Berger's planning to chat with Rubin to ensure that even though both of their proposed topics are about Clarksville, they'll be able to avoid colliding, and will also likely ask to use some photos from Chu's and Nieman's collections.

### **15) Multi-preserve scientific research proposal on speleothem dating**

Berger placed this topic on the list for two purposes: to check on whether the evaluation of the proposal is proceeding apace and whether any tasks are needed or desired from us to facilitate that (such as the Secretary summarizing the feedback from the Board discussion for L. Davis to use and share with the researchers, though Davis ended up added to the e-mail cc: list partway through the discussion); and to ask whether the new streamlined research approval process (where an ad-hoc committee of the Science Chair, President, and Preserve Manager(s) vet and approve) makes sense when several preserves are involved, or whether at that point reverting to the Board as the approving entity is more efficient than going through the process once per preserve.

In response to this topic's appearance on the list, someone who misunderstood it as an agenda item to consider approval of the proposal (or parts of it) made some suggestions and forwarded along some supporting correspondence, in which we learned

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This fairly clearly provides the answer to whether it would be helpful for the Secretary to attempt to summarize that discussion: not anymore! And it very obviously leaves us with a different issue, which Engel will address.



As for the question of whether the Board is a more efficient place to consider approvals of proposed projects complex enough to involve several of our preserves, Engel worries that the Board might end up imposing on the Preserve Managers' authority to make decisions about what goes on at their preserves, which it has the *right* to do, but many would argue it ought not to. He suggests that if we were to do this with input from the Preserve Managers, it might be okay. Berger and Simmons asked whether Preserve Manager input was in fact omitted from the prior typical process that the Board followed when considering proposals before the process was modified to be streamlined. Engel confirms that typically, by the time a proposal made it to the Board for consideration, the Preserve Manager(s) had indeed offered input. Simmons suspects that this proposal may end up needing to be elevated to the Board anyhow. Engel continues to be unclear about why L. Davis sought input from four specific preserves' managers – Clarksville, Knox, Onesquethaw, and Bensons – as the document provided by the researchers doesn't specify sites they'd like to sample from. Simmons suspects that it follows the sites sampled in the Lauritzen and Mylroie study from a couple decades back. *[Ed. Simmons subsequently looked through that study and found that, in fact, Onesquethaw was the only cave now owned by the NCC that was used as part of that study, which leaves us still unclear about how and whether the researchers have in fact selected four of our caves.]*

#### **16) Knox Bat Conservation International acoustic research project**

As followup to the bat research they conducted last year, accidentally without having actually received permission to install their equipment due to a bunch of confusing communication, K. Ritzko at the DEC contacted Berger this year to let us know that Bat Conservation International was interested in installing the same equipment this year in early August to remain throughout the hibernation season. Berger told her that, though he expected such a request would encounter little difficulty in being approved and that he would support it, he could not grant approval on his own, and asked that a proposal be sent to our Science Committee to trigger the streamlined review process. Ritzko did so, including an introduction to the primary investigator from BCI, and outlined the timeline by which they'd need to install an acoustic detector in order to obtain meaningful data for the project.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Berger communicated the approval to the researchers, [REDACTED] asked that they share any publications with us to highlight on our website's Research page, and conferred with them on a desired installation date and issued a permit. The detector has been installed, and they plan to visit once during hibernation season to replace batteries.

#### **17) Science proposal process**

This topic was largely intended to discuss how to address the bigger picture of the issues described in the prior two topics, which Engel has previously noted we've struggled with for quite some time. The current sole member of the Science Committee (its Chair) is frequently incommunicado all summer. Additionally, he's a geologist, and may not be the best person for consultation on other types of science projects (e.g. bat research). Engel feels that the function of the Science Committee would be better served if it actually acted as a committee with multiple members from different disciplines. As an example, Engel suggests we might approach Palmer for hydrology. Simmons suspects that he's not likely taking on new commitments right now, and that we may want to approach the younger generation of scientists chomping at the bit for involvement in this sort of work, as opposed to the tenured professor crowd. He's also received a suggestion from Dumont of someone who may be a good fit for this committee.

**18)** [REDACTED]

#### **19) Acquisitions**

Thook: The survey is done, the Town is processing the paperwork, and we should have approval of the minor subdivision coming soon, possibly this week. Then we can get the mylar copies of the map, get it stamped and input to the county's GIS, and file it with the county. [REDACTED] We have the draft deed and forms ready. Simmons has held off on sending it to our attorney, because until everything else is in place, he doesn't want to incur legal costs. However, those costs should be a very modest sum this time around. Berger asks how much land and cave we're acquiring, as there had previously been multiple options under consideration. Simmons responds that the addition will be 4.76 acres of the 7 that were being considered, and that we will then own all of the cave that's on the property being subdivided, though there is some other limestone we won't have. *[Ed. Since the time of the meeting, Simmons reached the Town of New Scotland's land use agent, J. Cramer; who informed him that he'd accidentally not gotten the application to the Planning Board in time for the meeting, which means we have to wait for the September 16 one. Simmons has given this disappointing news to Hatfield.]*

[REDACTED]

## 20) OTR, tent, etc.

As far as we know, the event is happening, although Engel had heard that it was “on the cusp of being cancelled.” [Ed. Berger later talked with a friend heavily involved in TRA and the event, and has been told that though there may be additional precautions on top of those already announced, the event is happening.] Berger's plans to attend and represent us on Vendors Row haven't changed, and he'll communicate with Hatfield and Drake to try to undo some misinformation they were given that we were not setting up there. We plan to try to sell tickets for the raffle Drake is organizing as a Give Lively campaign, and Hatfield had offered to produce some publicity material before being told that we wouldn't be setting up a booth. As for the tent, as we'd agreed to downsize to a 10'x10' space, and don't own such a tent, it's time to finally make that acquisition we've been talking about for a couple years. Simmons had spoken with M. Warner some time ago about this, and the conclusion was that we should get a regular commercial tent with the assumption that it'll likely only last a couple years at a time, and is likely to get damaged. The sort of tent we're looking for isn't the type it'd be easy for Berger to grab at a Walmart; we're thinking of something more like what might come from a Cabella's – a beefier one with side walls. Simmons will find one and figure out how to get it to Berger in time. [Ed. Both of those tasks have since happened.] Berger will acquire the more mundane furniture (tables, chairs, etc.) probably from the Walmart near the event site. And it seems that after Members Day, all of the swag and our banners went to Speleobooks, so Berger will have to deal with either retrieving those or seeing if they can be transported with Speleobooks.

## 21) NSF contract

## 22) Plans for our properties to turn over to the NSS or another organization should we fail

A handful of years back, one suggestion that Berger brought back from the NSS Cave Conservancies Roundtable was to recognize that planning for protection in perpetuity of a cave conservancy's properties in the eventuality that the organization ceases to exist for whatever reason really requires two parties. The organization simply specifying in their organizing documents that their property will revert to, for example, the NSS, upon dissolution, does not guarantee that the NSS will accept that property. If the NSS has not made plans to accept those properties, they may find that their resources at the time require them to (for example) sell off some or all of the properties. We'd briefly discussed this shortly after that Convention, but haven't since acted on it. Berger reminds us that we really should hammer out a plan. Engel asks if we're sure the NSS is the right place for our properties to fall to in the event that the NCC should fail, because he points out that they're not really a land trust, and feels that as such, they shouldn't even own the cave preserves they do; he believes that they should spin conserving cave preserves off into something like a National Speleological Conservancy the same way they spun off investment management to the National Speleological Foundation. While not disagreeing with the principle Engel suggests, Berger asks what other organization that exists today would realistically be a viable one to take over cave properties in this part of the country and manage them in a manner consistent with the NCC's desires? No serious suggestions were put forth. Simmons notes that this has come up in other contexts, for example, after the NSS's Memorandum of Understanding with the Cave Conservancy of Hawai'i was executed, and he also had a discussion with the NSS about an acquisition after

. We will bring this up as a topic for the next Committee of the Whole.

## 23) Member Appreciation Day recap (including a major donation, event risks, etc.)

Folsom tells us that the event had 71 attendees, and Simmons reports that having it at a preserve worked well to draw people in. Logistically, wet weather made getting gear up and down a mess, but people enjoyed it and went caving, and it was a great spot to engage with other visitors. Our neighbors to the north came over and visited and went caving. And Schwartz went into the Thook entrance for her first time. We also received an extremely generous \$5,000 donation from one of the attendees. Folsom sent some personalized words of appreciation along with the standard donation acknowledgment letter. Simmons wrote to the donor as well. As for event risks, the issue of someone getting ill after the event was described above in topic #4.

## 24) Fundraising update

Folsom reports that the \$5,000 donation we received following Members Day significantly helped our situation (which had been severely hampered by the pandemic as of the last Board meeting). We also received a \$300 donation from the Kapplers. Berger still plans to work on the passive fundraising strategy discussed at the last EC meeting.

## 25) NCRC Regional recap, and upcoming National Weeklong

Berger reports that the Regional Level 1 course went well, despite severe weather wiping out an entire day of field exercises and construction activity totally blocking access to the cliffs the course had planned to use. The class made use of Clarksville on two days (including for the mock rescue) and Knox on one day. However, the majority of people who participated got sick – someone came to the course with a cold, and after a few days, each time the group would sit down to eat in the cafeteria, they'd discover that another few people had come down with it. Fortunately, either everyone or nearly everyone was fully vaccinated, and a couple people tested negative for COVID during the week (one just before becoming sick and another just after), so we're sure it was not COVID. However, Berger notes that he wished anyone unconvinced about how easily COVID can spread were able to watch the meal-by-meal spread of this cold like wildfire through the class. Unlike when we held the Modular Level 1 at the same site back in August 2020, this time vaccination allowed us to work with minimal precautions (e.g. we only had to use masks in very limited circumstances). Sadly, the pandemic situation has taken a turn for the worse since then, and Engel informed us that the National Weeklong course scheduled to begin in just over a week has just been cancelled entirely.

## **26) Preserve videos project**

Simmons tells us that he's spoken with M. Sandone, who has several projects in the works at the moment, one of which includes reopening an old barite mine near Simmons's home. He's just released a new video on MassHole as well. Folsom notes that Sandone's Clarksville video isn't up on our website yet. Simmons says that Sandone will be happy to keep working on videos of our preserves, but, of course, only as his schedule permits.

## **27) NCC references to the NSS Guide to Responsible Caving**

Berger placed this topic here to check whether there had been any news on the plan he thought we'd agreed on at the last Board meeting – namely, for Armen to seek permission from the NSS to “re-host” the brochure on our own website, and update our links to point to that copy to avoid it being moved and causing broken links again, and to avoid a document we reference being changed without our knowledge. Engel does not recall us agreeing to take that path, and raises an objection to referencing that guide, because of a conflict between it and our preserves' rules – that guide discusses a minimum group size of four, and our management plans specify minimum group sizes of three. So, Engel feels we need to either change our rules or stop referencing that document. Simmons asks why we don't refer to it, but just link people to the NSS website without a direct link to the brochure, so that people will just search for it and not have to worry about website reorganizations breaking links again. Berger reminds us that at our last meeting, Armen and he voiced concern about another organization (in this case, the NSS) being able to unilaterally alter a document we've essentially incorporated by reference into our policies, potentially without us even knowing about such changes, much as it's unlikely they'd make a change we disagreed with. Engel asks what if we were to take the NSS one and “fix it up” to match our standards. Berger agrees that “rolling our own” would be a solution to the dilemma, but also points out that it feels like reinventing the wheel and taking on what may turn out to be a fairly substantial project. Simmons says that he believes in “separation of church and state,” meaning that as much as possible, we should be independent of the NSS. Berger is tasked with checking with Armen on what (if anything) he's done so far, and asking him to hold off if he hasn't yet approached the NSS.

## **28) IRS 990s**

The IRS has been massively behind on processing certain submissions since the pandemic started. Some time back, we received a letter from them telling us that our 2019 submission was overdue, though Folsom is sure that it was submitted by the deadline. So, we waited. More recently, Berger was looking at online records of nonprofit filings for other reasons, and noticed that a number of other nonprofits have their 2019 and 2020 submissions already recorded and visible online, so he became more worried about whether something may not just be behind, but may have gone missing. Folsom tells us that he's tried reaching out to the IRS multiple times to pursue this, but that after navigating the phone tree to the correct place, it tells you that there are no people available to handle inquiries and hangs up on you. We briefly discussed the various types of unfortunate things we know of that have happened to other organizations when the IRS doesn't receive their filings. Folsom will continue to try to pursue a human being there. *[Ed. Since the meeting, Folsom has made contact with someone at the IRS, and is pursuing getting their records sorted out.]*

## **29) Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms**

Despite pleas before and during the June meeting, Berger is still missing these legally required submissions from several Board members. The issue has been handed off to Simmons to try to get everyone else to meet the obligation. *[Ed. Since the meeting, Simmons has sent requests to those whose forms are still outstanding, as well as sent in his own missing form.]*

## **30) New York cave adventures article**

Engel circulated an online article that he stumbled over to a bunch of us describing ten recommended caving adventure sites in New York. Five of them are our caves – Clarksville, Knox, Ella, Onesquethaw, and Sellecks. Much of the information provided about them is also hilariously inaccurate... Knox, apparently, is well-known not to be suitable for beginners, but Ella is great fun for anyone 12 and up! Berger brought this up here to see whether anyone felt there was anything we should do. Engel feels that it's an older article (although updated earlier this year) and that there's no real hope that asking for it to be taken down would get anywhere. Simmons suggested that we could send in comments correcting the misinformation, but Berger strongly disagrees, noting that adding comments to the page is going to attract further attention to it by making it appear more active, bumping it higher in search results, and also potentially prompting other internet denizens to “disagree” about any facts we present and begin arguing with us in the comments.

So, essentially, nothing to see here. Engel does suggest that preserve managers need to make a point of searching for their caves online somewhat regularly. Berger asks if that ever leads to anything other than disappointment, and Engel reports that it does not.

### **31) Survey filing updates – Knox and Traino**

Simmons tells us that all of the mylar copies got straightened out and filed.

### **32) Seed collection at NCC preserves**

A representative from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank (MARSB) has contacted the Clarksville, Knox, and Onesquethaw managers for permission to collect seeds sustainably at those preserves, and has been given permission to do so, with a request that he report to us what species he encounters and collects while at each preserve. Engel has given him some guidance on where he's likely to find the species MARSB is specifically interested in this year. This topic is mostly an FYI.

### **33) Report scheduling and September meeting venue**

The meeting is on September 26, so Berger would like Officer sections by September 20, which means that Officers need committee reports by September 13, and a first notice requesting reports should go out by September 6. The meeting was originally scheduled for the day after the Barn Dance with plans to hold it at the Octagon Barn. Given the current pandemic situation, it's going to either have to be at a much bigger indoor place, or outdoors with a suitable covering for weather and internet connectivity, or virtual. The Octagon Barn is not really ideal for social distancing with the tables, but it might be doable. At the time of that meeting, booster shots will just barely be beginning for the frontline healthcare workers. Much as this is unthrilling, Engel suggests that we just hold it as a virtual meeting again. Folsom agrees that that's what we should announce. We also briefly discussed technology to enable remote participation at future in-person meetings, noting that except when we're in something like a conference room with an actual telepresence setup, it's quite difficult to involve remote participants, both because you typically need a fancy microphone setup to actually enable the remote participants to hear what people all around a room are saying, and because a laptop on Zoom with a camera doesn't show you the whole room. Berger notes having learned of a device called a Meeting Owl that apparently is quite good at solving this need, though it's rather expensive. Folsom suggests that perhaps in a year or so, there'll be used ones for half what they cost now and we might consider acquiring one to keep our more distant participants involved as they have been during the pandemic.

End: 5:35pm