



The Region Record

Vol. XXII No. 2 Spring 2009

Chairman's Column

As I sit down to write the Chairman's Column, there are so many ideas to write about. The upcoming events of the Region. The Spring meeting at Grand Caverns - please check at registration about cave trips, some of the cave trips' status may have changed due to recent events regarding White Nose Syndrome (WNS). I started to wonder if the reduction of available caves would keep people away. This should not be the case, in my view, because it is a time to share information, see old friends, and have a good time, so come on down.

As most have heard WNS has been found in caves in Bath and Giles Counties in Virginia, along with Pendleton County in West Virginia. There were also some reports from Page and Shenandoah Counties in Virginia. These reports have been checked and no evidence of sick or dead bats were found.

I took part in a 98-minute conference call between the representatives of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage Program, the Virginia Cave Board, Natural Heritage Karst Program, Virginia Speleological Survey, and VAR to go over the draft protocols for the Commonwealth of Virginia. These protocols are the same that can be found on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Web site. There are a few additions to the documented protocols.

The groups have requested a voluntary moratorium on underground activities until April 15th. If a caver chooses not to observe the moratorium, they are strongly urged to follow the new protocols. Once April 15th has passed the moratorium may be lifted.

The new protocols are:

1. Geographic isolation of caving activity and/or gear.
2. Strict adherence to decontamination procedures when moving between caves (even within the same caving area.)

I have heard many cavers say that they were not going to decontaminate their coveralls (super suits) with bleach, so it may mean that we all go back to low-tech coveralls, like when many of us started caving and we bought cotton coveralls secondhand with the mechanic's name of the front. We use that gear in only one cave and we have another set to use in a different cave. Our packs may not say Lost Creek, just U.S. Army.

If we cannot stop the spread, maybe we can slow it down and give the scientists time to come up with answers.

I urge all cavers to strictly follow the posted protocols and to make an effort to communicate them to all the non-affiliated cavers you know or that you meet while out caving

Craig

[Statements on WNS and cave access by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and by representatives of several Virginia cave-related organizations, are included later in this issue. Ed.]

**Spring VAR
April 24-26, 2009
Grand Caverns Regional
Park, Grottoes, Virginia**

NOTE: *The organizers and details of the Spring VAR have changed, but it will still be held at the same time in the same place. Details are still being finalized and some may be changed yet.*

Come shake off the winter, frolic with your friends, and discuss WNS ad nauseum at this year's Spring VAR meeting on April 24-26, 2009 at Grand Caverns Regional Park in Grottoes, Virginia. Do not let disinfection distractions dissuade your decision! Fun will be had regardless.

Registration

Registration has been LOWERED to \$30/\$25/free (adult/5-15/0-4) and pre-registration has been extended until April 18, 2009. If you already registered at the previous higher price, the difference will be

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The *Region Record*

The *Region Record* is the quarterly publication of the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society. Any articles, announcements, or other materials of general interest to cavers in the Region are welcome. **Send all material to Bob Hoke (6304 Kaybro St., Laurel, MD 20707 (301)725-5877, e-mail editor@varegion.org).** Electronic submissions (e-mail or disk) are encouraged, but any form of input is welcome. Non-copyrighted material contained in the *Region Record* may be reprinted by organizations that are affiliated with the VAR or the NSS, provided that proper credit is given to the *Record* and the author. The opinions expressed herein are those of the individual author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the VAR, the NSS, or their internal organizations.

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Region Record Subscriptions

- New NSS members in the Region receive two complimentary copies of the *Region Record*.
- Current NSS members moving into the Region from elsewhere receive two complimentary copies. Current NSS members who move within the Region get no freebies.
- When a subscription is going to expire the last issue will be stamped "Time to Renew." No renewal notice is sent.
- When a person attends a VAR meeting he/she is automatically added to the list to receive the next four issues. If he/she is already on the list, four additional issues are added to the subscription.
- When multiple people live at the same address only one copy of each issue will be sent to the address unless a box requesting individual issues is checked on the VAR registration form or a request is sent to the Circulation Manager.

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Regional Calendar

Apr. 10–12 **20th Annual Grand Caverns Easter Restoration Camp.** See article in this issue.

Kerrville, Texas.

Apr 19–25 Virginia Cave Week. See article in this issue.

Apr. 24–26 Spring **VAR meeting** at Grand Caverns, Grottoes, Virginia. See article and registration form in this issue.

May 9 Spring WVASS meeting un Unus, WV. See details in this issue.

June 15 Deadline for submitting material for the Summer issue of the *Region Record*.

July 19–26 **NSS Convention and the 15th International Congress of Speleology** in

List Your Event Here

If you have a caving event that is of regional interest please send information to the Editors listed above so it can be included in the calendar.

Spring VAR

(continued from page 1)

refunded at VAR. There will be NO additional fee for on-site registration, but pre-registration is highly encouraged to help us order enough food and plan activities. The UPDATED registration form is included in this issue for you to complete and mail in.

Accommodations

The park features ample room for camping, but no hookups for RVs. The pool building will be open for hot showers and flush toilets, and additional porta-potties will also be available.

Activities

Friday night we hope to have cave movies, first for the little ones, and later for the larger ones.

In the spirit of service to caves without fear of spreading WNS, a major sinkhole cleanup is planned on Cave Hill and we can use plenty of help. We are trying to get access to the Crozet Tunnel, and rumors are circulating about a possible speleo-putt-putt tournament on-site. More than a dozen geocaches are located within 5 miles and there are several on the property within walking distance. Anyone up for canoe, kayak, or rubber ducky races on the adjacent South River, or a death-defying venture on the Via Ferrata in Pendleton County, West Virginia?

Have no fear, caving trips will still be offered, but please disinfect your gear before you come to VAR. A list of trips will be posted at registration. There will be a special reduced admission fee to Grand Caverns for everyone. A vertical trip to Sites is planned and other trips are in the works. Please volunteer if you can lead a trip!

Replace your old, worn-out gear or stock up on multiple new cave outfits at the Vendors. Inner Moun-

tain Outfitters and Caver's Connection have confirmed they are coming, and we hope to entice more. Tell your favorite vendor to come!

Saturday Dinner and Party

A delicious catered meal will be served on Saturday night. The menu will be Sloppy Jim's (like sloppy Joes), pork BBQ, vegetarian lasagna, macaroni and cheese, green beans, cole slaw, assorted desserts, tea, lemonade, and water.

There will be an evening program titled "Caving Above Ground: Conservation and Landowner Relations Projects Around the Region." After the presentation, enjoy your favorite cave beverages as DJ John Fox spins the tunes. Squeeze box(es) will be supplied for the masochistic and there will be a fire.

Sunday Breakfast and Meeting

Front Royal Grotto will be serving a pancake breakfast on Sunday morning for an additional \$4, but to prevent us running out of food, breakfast is limited to those who pre-register.

The VAR Business meeting will convene Sunday morning at 9:00 AM. Expect a rowdy meeting! Chairman Craig will preside with an iron ax.

[An updated registration form for the VAR meeting is included later in this issue].

Virginia Cave Week April 19–25 2009

The following is intended as a press release for the general public. Feel free to send it to your local newspaper.

Caves are one of the most beautiful habitats of the natural world, containing valuable geological, archaeological, and biological resources worthy of conservation and study.

Virginia Cave Week promotes the understanding and protection of Virginia's caves and the surrounding limestone habitats called karst. During Virginia Cave Week, all Virginians should know that the quality of water flowing in the western cave counties is not just important locally, but also is vital to downstream Virginia, all the way to the Chesapeake Bay.

The Virginia Cave Board encourages educators of all subjects to actively engage kindergarten through 12th-grade students in an inspired week of environmental learning both in the classroom and in one of the state's numerous commercial caves, if possible. The following show caves are offering a discount if you mention "Virginia Cave Week" when buying tickets: Dixie Caverns, Grand Caverns (see brochure rack), Shenandoah Caverns, and Skyline Caverns.

This year's Virginia Cave Week theme is "Karst in the Watershed Regions."

Visit the Virginia Cave Week Web site at www.vacaveweek.com to get access to a wide variety of cave-related education resources.

Grand Caverns Easter Restoration Update

Meredith Hall Weberg and Andy Reeder
VAR Conservation Committee

Grand Caverns in Grottoes, Virginia, is the site of the Virginia Region's annual Easter Restoration weekend on April 10–12, 2009. We will be doing a variety of things, including work in Grand Caverns.

Because of the possibility of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in our region, we will follow the decontam-

ination procedures outlined here: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/witenosemessage.html>. If you have worn your cave clothes in any northern region cave or any cave closer by that might have been infected, leave them at home. We don't really need cave clothes anyhow since it is a WORK WEEK-END.

Please bring a set of work clothes to wear in Grand Caverns. Grand has a gravel floor, you need to go off trail to come into contact with cave soil; therefore, you don't really even need cave boots (unless they have been soaked in the proper solution).

There will be NO TOURIST or KID TRIPS in Grand Caverns, and Fountain Cave is closed until at least May 1. Do not come to the work weekend expecting to "tour" either cave. This is, as always, a work weekend. We have a good deal of work to do:

- Re-gravel paths in Grand Caverns (as usual)
- Erect bat houses (hopefully they will come assembled)
- Algae eradication
- Paint rails on mini-golf course
- Paint shelters
- Clean steps leading into Fountain Cave

If you are not camping on site, plan to meet at the main pavilion at the main parking lot at 9 AM on Saturday. Yes, that sounds early, but we have a lot to do after the milling-about stage. Lunch and dinner will be provided to workers.

Bring whatever tools you have that might help out with the jobs listed above. Come prepared to work, but also to have fun with fellow cavers and lovers of the outdoors!

Virginia Cave Cartographers

Rick Lambert

President, Virginia Speleological Survey

Several years ago the Highland County Cave Survey helped Carol Peterson, of Old Dominion University, gather the data on Highland County's caves for her Master's Thesis project. We discovered that just having a map of a cave was not sufficient to conduct a scientific study. She needed a Compass file for the cave. [*Compass is a computer program for processing cave survey data. Ed.*] To get the Compass file, we needed the survey notes. Most cartographers cooperated and supplied us with the original notes (one supplied photocopies). Surprisingly, a few would not supply anything. In several cases the survey notes were lost and we had to go back and resurvey the cave because death, divorce, and time were robbing us of our historical data.

The Virginia Speleological Survey (VSS) has completed a database transfer, which has moved the database from the 20th century to the 21st century. With the database transfer complete, we are asking those with survey notes and Compass files (or other computer mapping files) to the larger caves, surveyed in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, to send them to the VSS to be archived for future scientific studies.

We accept that notes may be confusing, or follow standards of decades ago, or be in SMAPS, or whatever. The goals are that if someone, someday, returns to the area or cave, they have the advantage of previous work; and if in a scientific study a computer-mapping file is needed, it is available or can be produced from the survey notes. The previously established practice of "flagging" information as "restricted" also applies to data (and anything else in the files) per the notations of the submitter.

We think the larger and significant caves should be a priority, but we don't want to short-sell the importance of the smaller caves. The Highland County research is again, an example.

We started this program with the VSS's own directors. Now, we are asking those outside the VSS to participate. On February 7, 2009, the database revealed that 1,491 caves had been mapped. As Database Manager for the Highland County Cave Survey I have the Compass files and survey notes for almost 300 of those caves in my computer and file cabinets. When I die, my wife and children will probably not understand the importance of the data and discard it. This has happened many times in the past already and my goal is to try to prevent it from happening again.

Mike Futrell, the VSS's Database Manager, has suggested that we should prioritize our preferences as:

1. Compass (or other format) file.
2. Notes scanned, 300dpi, color, jpg, ~50% compression, (really anything with good resolution is ok). We could probably use a digital camera in place of a scanner. Mike will scan the notes and give them back. (Highland County is donating the hard copies of the notes in addition to scanning them for the VSS.)

Thoughts and comments can be directed to highland@virginiacaves.org (Rick Lambert) or database@virginiacaves.org (Mike Futrell). Notes can be mailed to Mike Futrell, 1580 Oilwell Rd., Blacksburg, VA 24060.

WVCC Adopts WNS Policy

by Bob Hoke

White Nose Syndrome was a major topic of discussion at the West Virginia Cave Conservancy's Board meeting on March 15. Some Conservancy members felt that the Conservancy should follow Virginia's lead and close the Conservancy's caves until more is known about WNS.

After considerable debate, the Board decided to follow official closure recommendations provided by appropriate government agencies.

The Board then agreed to close Island Ford Cave since it's in Virginia and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has requested a moratorium on wild caving in the state. The closure will remain in effect until the Virginia caving moratorium is lifted; signs giving WNS information and explaining the reason for the closure have been posted at the cave entrance.

Dave Cowan is the Cave Manager for Lobelia Saltpeter Cave, which is owned by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc., but managed by WVCC. Dave said that Craig Stihler of the WV Division of Natural Resources informally had told him that endangered bats have been observed in the cave in the past so Dave requested that, with SCCI's concurrence, Lobelia Saltpeter be closed. The Board agreed with this request and that cave is now considered closed.

The other six caves owned or managed by WVCC remain open for now. None of the Conservancy's caves contain significant bat populations.

Spring WVASS Meeting

by George Dasher

The spring meeting of the West Virginia Speleological Survey will take place at Bill Balfour's home in Unus, West Virginia, on May 9th. The meeting will start at 3:30 PM, and will include the area coordinators' reports. This is an open meeting, and anyone who is interested in surveying West Virginia's caves should attend. There will be a cookout after the meeting. Please contact Bill for more information at 304-497-0859 or bal4karst@hotmail.com.

Bill Biggers says Thank You

I would like to thank the entire VAR for receiving the Outstanding Service Award. The award means very much to me as a member of the caving community.

Bill Biggers

Minutes of the Fall VAR Region Meet September 21, 2008

Meeting was called to order at 9:10 AM

Reports

Secretary - Carol Tideman

A motion was made by Bubble Cave to accept the minutes as published in the *Region Record*. Tri-State seconded. Motion passed.

Treasurer - John Fox

A financial report was presented. A motion was made by Bubble Cave to accept the financial report, Dingo seconded - Motion passed.

Vice Chair - Judy Fisher

No report.

Chairman - Craig Hindman

No report.

Conservation Co-Chair -

Meredith Hall Weberg

Recycling bins are at the event.

Spring monitoring project - continuing survey of karst springs in Virginia. VAR members cleaned up a sink for the Land Trust Authority.

Goodwin's Cave Management -

Mary Sue Socky

Requested it be taken off the agenda.

VAR Outstanding Service Award

- Meredith Hall Weberg

Awards were presented to Bill Biggers, Annie and Whitt Whittemore. Need nominations sent in by next summer. Please include a paragraph citing accomplishments. Nominations forms are on the Web.

Landowner Recognition Awards-

Janet Tinkham

Charlottesville and Blue Ridge

Grottoes presented to Pat Mac-

Namarra owner of Blue Springs

Cave. Please send in nominations.

Forms are on the Web.

Landowner Legal Support Committee -

Bob Hoke

No news is good news.

Region Record - Bob Hoke

Send articles - Deadline Dec. 15th.

VAR List Server - Walt Pirie

No report.

VAR Web Site - Jim McConkey

If you have an event of Region-wide interest, please send it in for the calendar.

Cave Bucks - JC Fisher

Send in your dollars.

VSS - Rick Lambert

No official report. Virginia has 4,421 caves.

WVASS - George Dasher

No report.

WVCC - Bob Handley

They are buying Maxwellton Sink Cave. \$7K was raised at OTR. They have grants, but still need contributions. Hope to finalize in the next few weeks. They are working on acquiring Sinks of Sinking Creek and preparing a landowner brochure. The annual banquet will be on Nov. 15 in Lewisburg. The next meeting will be at Lost World Caverns on November 16, 2008.

<The meeting was suspended while a noisy train passed.>

Virginia Karst Program - Joey Fagan

It has been very busy this year. They have been involved with hydrological studies and biological inventories. Dye tracing materials are available and study assistance is available.

SCCI - Walt Pirie

No report

Grand Caverns/Cave Hill - Jim McConkey

The dig continues in Fountain. New leads have been found in Grand that require digging and removing debris discarded into a pit by earlier cave development.

Virginia Cave Board - Dave Socky
Virginia Cave Week has been moved to April to be held in conjunction with Earth Day. Working with state on new storm water regulations. Cave sign program has 500 new signs. Help will be needed to get them installed. The first priority will be to install them in the most significant and high-traffic caves.

Wilderness Proposal - Bob Handley

The House of Representatives has passed its version of the bill. The Senate passed the House version. The trouble is getting the resources committed and the final bill needs to be passed by the complete Senate - hopefully by the end of September. This bill is bundled with approximately 90 other land bills. The coalition is still alive and well. The National Forest owns the surface only - no mineral rights.

Virginia Karst Trail - Joey Fagan
Going to work with the Virginia Cave Board. Warren County has an area they are interested in being included in the plan

Cave Conservancy of the Virginias - Joey Fagan
Still active in funding projects. Conducting a surface study of the Powell Mountain Preserve. There will be a short CCV meeting after this meeting.

Host Report - Blue Ridge and James River Grottoes
There were about 273 attendees. Thanks for coming. Bubble Cave moved to thank Blue Ridge and James River Grottoes. BATS seconded - passed.

Old Business

The Spring 2009 VAR will be held on the weekend of April 25th. Proposed sites are Natural Chimneys or Grand Caverns.

Fall 2009 - BATS backed out

Spring 2010 - Bubble Cave will host the event on the last weekend in April at the State Fairground in Fairlea, West Virginia.

New Business

Fall 2009 VAR meeting - no volunteers.

Fall 2010 VAR meeting - no volunteers.

Grant Requests

None received.

Elections

Bubble moved to reseal the current slate of officers. Front Royal seconded - passed.

D.C. Grotto made a motion to thank the officers for their efforts. Unanimous second - passed.

Announcements

- Mary Sue Socky and Bob Hoke have updated the Region's closed cave list. Printed copies are available.
- Evelyn Bradshaw is doing well in an assisted living facility - she has Alzheimer's.
- Mary Sue Socky announced that Dixie Caverns will be doing the Haunted Cave - anyone can help. The cave owners allocate \$2K for the grottoes to use for conservation. Primitive camping is available. This will be on Friday and Saturdays only - Oct. 3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 24-25, and 31.
- A sinkhole cleanup is scheduled for September 27. Mountain State is sponsoring. Please come out and help at Pink Helictite Cave Take advantage of court-ordered community service individuals when performing sinkhole cleanups or other conservation projects that need no caving skill.
- RASS is hosting the BOG in Richmond in November. Contact Ted Kayes.

Adjournment

Bubble moved to adjourn, Blue Ridge seconded.

Meeting Adjourned 10:03.

Respectfully submitted:
Carol Tideman

The following is the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries press release on WNS. It was posted on their Web site at www.dgif.virginia.gov/news/release.asp?id=210 on March 9, 2009.

Virginia Investigating Possible Cases of White-Nose Syndrome in Bats

Asking Cavers, Owners of Caves to Help by Reducing Cave Traffic

Richmond, VA — The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) is investigating two recent potential occurrences of white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats in Virginia. While conducting winter surveys of caves where bats hibernate, known as hibernacula, biologists and volunteers from VDGIF, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Virginia Speleological Survey discovered bats that showed signs of WNS in Breathing Cave in Bath County. Soon after, similar symptoms were found in bats in Clover Hollow Cave in Giles County. Specimens were collected and sent to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, for analysis. It will take from two to three weeks for results to be available.

White-nose syndrome was first found in the winter of 2006-2007, when bats in several caves around Albany, New York, displayed a white fungus growing around their muzzles, ears, and wings. By spring 2008, thousands of bats had died, and conditions had spread to other sites in New York and adjacent states. By the winter of 2008-2009, WNS had spread to bats in Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and West Virginia, and is suspected in New Hampshire. Scientists have been alarmed by the rapid and far-reaching spread of the syndrome. Little is known about WNS, but

one common symptom in these cases is the presence of this newly-identified fungus. How the fungus affects bats remains unclear. No known human health issues have been identified.

During the summer and early fall in Virginia, bats feed on insects and build body fat reserves critical for successful hibernation and survival through the winter months. Bat colonies consume thousands of insects in a single night, including mosquitoes and beetles. During hibernation, the metabolism of bats slows dramatically, virtually shutting down, to conserve fat reserves. Bats emerge in the spring ready to consume insects, give birth, raise their young pups, and continue their life cycle.

Bats collected from known WNS caves have depleted fat reserves; some even have appeared to starve to death. Bats suspected of having WNS appear to arouse more often and are more active during the hibernation period. Reports of bats found flying outside of mines or caves, apparently trying to find food, at a time when they should be hibernating, are symptomatic of the syndrome. WNS is almost always fatal to affected bats.

The impact of white-nose syndrome on bat populations could be highly significant if the condition cannot be controlled and continues to spread. Some WNS caves in New York have experienced declines of more than 90% of the bat populations. Losses in bat populations of this magnitude will cause a substantial ripple effect due to the important role that bats play as insect feeders, as a food source for other animals (hawks, owls, raccoons, skunks, and other animals that prey on bats), and with their contributions to cave ecosystems.

How WNS is spread is under investigation, but it is suspected that transmission of the syndrome can occur by both bat and human traffic in caves. Many of the caves

where WNS has been confirmed have been popular sites for recreational caving. Huge geographical leaps in WNS occurrences beyond the migration distances of bats, and in popular recreational caves, indicate that people who visit caves may inadvertently play a role.

Due to concerns about spread of WNS, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has closed the caves on its wildlife management areas until more is known about the transport of the syndrome. The Department will be asking private landowners with caves on their properties to consider closing their caves temporarily. Caving groups and individuals who enjoy caving are being asked to respect this temporary closure of Virginia caves and to suspend recreational and research caving activities until more information about the cause and spread of WNS can be determined.

The USGS National Wildlife Health Center is currently conducting experiments to determine how white-nose syndrome is spread between affected bat colonies and healthy bat colonies. Research is being conducted on soil samples to learn more about the fungus. The scientific community is well aware that, with the rapid spread of WNS and the high mortality, answers to the mystery of WNS and solutions to address it are of the utmost importance. Because of the potential impact of WNS, the VDGIF urges cavers and cave owners to help Virginia's bat populations by reducing cave traffic until more is learned about this syndrome.

For more information about white-nose syndrome and about the bats of Virginia, visit www.dgif.virginia.gov.

It is the mission of the VDGIF to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related out-

door recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; to provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

(Released 3/9/2009. Contacts are Rick Reynolds, 540-248-9360 and Ray Fernald, 804-367-8364).

The text below is a statement issued on March 9, 2009, by representatives from a number of caving organizations in Virginia. The statement was distributed via e-mail and subsequently posted on the Web at www.caves.org/WNS/WNS-VA.pdf. The statement is two pages. This is the first page and the second page follows it.

Recommended Caver Practices and Equipment Protocols for Reducing the Risk of Transmission of White Nose Syndrome by Humans

March 6, 2009

Prepared by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Natural Heritage Program in consultation with members of the caving community and staff from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). This statement is supported by the Virginia Cave Board,

the Virginia Speleological Survey, the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, the Board of the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society, and the Butler Cave Conservation Society.

White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is a condition that has resulted in the deaths of hundreds-of-thousands of bats in the northeastern United States since 2006. It is associated with a *Geomyces spp* fungus that grows at cold temperatures and colonizes the skin of animals in cold environments. This is consistent with properties predicted for a causative agent of WNS-associated cutaneous infection. More on WNS can found at http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html.

This winter cases of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) have been confirmed in Pendleton County, West Virginia. In February, surveys of significant bat and recreational caves in adjacent Highland and Bath counties in Virginia discovered what appears to be WNS in Breathing Cave in Bath County, located near the Highland County border. On March 3 in response to caver reports of dead bats, a survey of Clover Hollow Cave in Giles County identified a second apparent WNS outbreak. Specimens from both sites have been sent to USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin for analysis.

This winter, 18 Virginia caves in Giles, Bland, Page, Wise, Lee, Bath, and Highland counties have been surveyed for WNS. So far, signs of WNS have only been observed in Bath and Giles counties. However, since Highland County lies directly between Bath County and Pendleton County, West Virginia, along the same belt of karst, it is likely that WNS is present there as well.

There is mounting evidence that humans may play a significant role in transmitting biological agent(s) responsible for WNS in bats. The strongest such evidence is that WNS is showing up first in the Virginias in recreational caves with high visitation. It is known that some of those cavers visiting the affected West Virginia Caves had previously visited WNS affected caves in New York. While it is unlikely that humans are the sole or even the primary vector, transmission of the disease by humans may increase both the rate of expansion and geographic extent of WNS.

The Virginia Cave Board and Natural Heritage Karst Program are asking for a moratorium (a voluntary ban) on all underground caving activity in Virginia until April 15, 2009. A new statement will be issued on or before that time. Please note that at that time, we may ask to further extend the moratorium. During the moratorium, three tasks will be accomplished.

1. Scientists from DGIF and DCR will work to identify significant bat caves to which access will be limited in an attempt to slow the spread of WNS by humans. A significant bat cave is defined as a cave used by rare or endangered bat species, significant numbers of common bat species, and/or a high diversity of bat species. Input from cavers is sought and encouraged (Carol.Zokaites@dcr.virginia.gov). A list of these caves will be posted on the VAR List of Closed and Limited Access Caves. Please note that many of the significant bat caves are already gated, closed, and/or have limited (seasonal) access.

2. Additional caves will be visited by biologists to better assess the current extent of WNS in Virginia. We will work to temporarily restrict access to caves in which WNS is present.
3. DGIF and DCR scientists will work with other biologists studying WNS to establish and refine protocols to reduce the possibility of transmission of WNS by cavers. The two major protocols under consideration are listed on the next page. Comment on these protocols is welcome, especially during the moratorium period (Wil.Orndorff@dcr.virginia.gov). Cavers choosing not to observe the moratorium are strongly urged to follow these draft protocols. Once the moratorium is lifted, all cavers will be asked to follow protocols to reduce the risk of transmission of WNS.

The text below is the second page of the March 6 notice from various caving organizations regarding WNS.

Draft Protocols to Reduce Transmission of WNS in Virginia by Humans

1. Geographic isolation of caving activity and/or gear:

Cavers are requested to limit their caving activity to one caving area as defined by a county or group of counties. The designation of caving areas appears at the end of this document. We are asking this because sterilization procedures are likely not 100% effective, especially since neither the specific causal agent nor mode of transmission has yet been definitively identified. Cavers choosing to cave in more than one of the defined caving areas are asked to dedicate a specific set of clothing and caving gear for each respective caving area. If you must go caving in multiple areas, complete disinfection of vehicles is recommended between trips to different areas. Special care should be taken to segregate any cave clothing and equipment dedicated for use in a given area from all other sets of clothing and equipment dedicated for use in other caving areas.

2. Strict adherence to decontamination procedures when moving between caves (even within the same geographically designated area)

After exiting one cave and prior to entering another cave, even within a designated caving area, decontamination practices as outlined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must be strictly

adhered to. **ALL equipment must be cleaned!** These procedures are posted at:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html#containment>

To reduce the risk of harboring or carrying the disease on their persons, cavers should thoroughly clean and scrub themselves with soap and hot water following each trip to each cave. All clothes worn while traveling to and from the caving area should be laundered as soon as possible following caving trips.

List of Virginia Caving Areas

Alleghany Highlands: Alleghany, Bath and Highland counties

Shenandoah Valley: Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Shenandoah, Rockingham, Augusta, and Page counties

Middle James and Roanoke River basins: Botetourt, Rockbridge, Roanoke, Craig (except RT 42 south of Newcastle) counties

New River North: Giles, Montgomery, and Craig counties (only RT 42 south of Newcastle)

New River South: Bland, Pulaski, and Wythe counties

* Holston: Smyth and Washington counties

* Clinch: Scott, Russell, and Tazewell counties

* Powell: Lee and Wise counties

* - These areas are in the upper Tennessee River basin, and include the northeastern boundary of the range of the Gray Bat (*Myotis grisescens*). This species is not yet affected by WNS. If you are caving in these areas, please only cave in these areas. If you are not caving in these areas, please do not start.

Spring 2009 VAR MEETING AGENDA

Sunday, April 25, 2009 9:00 AM

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. DELEGATE REGISTRATION
- III. DISTRIBUTION OF AGENDA
- IV. CALL FOR INDEPENDENTS
- V. OFFICERS REPORTS:
 - A. SECRETARY: Carol Tiderman
 - 1. Motion to accept Fall minutes
 - 2. Other
 - B. TREASURER: John Fox
 - 1. Current financial report
 - 2. Other
 - C. VICE-CHAIR: Judy Fisher
 - D. CHAIRMAN: Craig Hindman
- VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS
 - A. CONSERVATION: Andy Reeder / Meredith Hall Weberg
 - 1. Report on activities
 - 2. Other
 - B. VAR OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD: Meredith Hall Weberg
 - C. LANDOWNER RECOGNITION AWARD: Janet Tinkham
 - D. LANDOWNER LEGAL SUPPORT COMMITTEE: Bob Hoke
 - E. *REGION RECORD*: Bob Hoke, Pauline Apling
 - F. VAR LIST SERVER: Walt Pirie
 - G. VAR WEB SITE: Jim Mcconkey
 - H. CAVE BUCKS: J.C. Fisher
 - I. VSS: Rick Lambert
 - J. WVASS: George Dasher
 - K. WVCC: Bob Handley
- L. VIRGINIA KARST PROGRAM: Joey Fagan
- M. SCCI: Walt Pirie
- N. GRAND CAVERNS/CAVE HILL: Jim McConkey
- O. VIRGINIA CAVE BOARD
- P. WILDERNESS PROPOSAL
- Q. VIRGINIA KARST TRAIL: Andy Reeder
- R. CCV
- S. SPRING SURVEY PROJECT: Charlie Maus
- T. OTHER _____
- VII. HOST GROTTO REPORT: VAR members
- VIII. OLD BUSINESS
 - A. HOST GROTTO FOR THE SPRING 2010 MEETING: Bubble Cave
 - B. OTHER _____
- IX. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. HOST GROTTO FOR THE FALL 2009 MEETING
 - B. HOST GROTTO FOR THE FALL 2010 MEETING
 - C. HOST GROTTO FOR SPRING 2011 MEETING
 - D. OTHER _____
- X. GRANT REQUESTS: SUBMITTED TO CHAIR
 - A. REQUEST FOR SECURITY POPULATION OF VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BATS
- XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS
- XII. ADJOURNMENT

SPRING VAR 2009 REGISTRATION FORM

APRIL 24-26, 2009

GRAND CAVERNS REGIONAL PARK

GROTTOES, VIRGINIA

HOSTED BY MEMBERS OF THE VAR

Name _____

Others you are paying for _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Grotto/Organization _____

Adult (16+ years)	\$30	x	_____	=	_____
Child (5-15 years)	\$25	x	_____	=	_____
Infant (0-5 years)	Free	x	_____	=	Free
Saturday Day Pass (Dinner & VAR fee)	\$20	x	_____	=	_____
Sunday Morning Breakfast	\$4	x	_____	=	_____
			Total Due	=	_____

Make checks payable to “**Sligo Grotto**” and send to:

Spring VAR 2009
c/o Jim McConkey
604 Shirley Manor Road
Reisterstown, MD 21136-2319

The new Pre-Registration Deadline is April 18, 2009

There will be NO additional fee for on-site registration, but pre-registration is highly encouraged so we can better estimate food and plan activities. Pre-registration has been extended until April 18th. Pre-registration for Sunday breakfast is encouraged, but cash will be accepted that morning.

Alcohol is technically not allowed in the park. Please exercise discretion and do not display bottles or cans in public. Pets must be on a leash and well behaved at all times.

WNS remains a serious concern. Please disinfect all cave gear before arrival according to the recommended protocols. Bring multiple sets of gear if you are planning to visit multiple caves.

National Speleological Society
6304 Kaybro St.
Laurel, MD 20707-2621

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Spring 2009 Regional News

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Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-mail _____

Grotto (or other caving organization that I claim as my primary caving affiliation) _____

Please make checks payable to VAR and send to:
Meredith Hall Weberg, 8061 Kittiwake Ct., Springfield VA 22153