

Northeastern Cave Conservancy Newsletter

Volume 3, No.2

May 2001

Next Meeting

Saturday, June 2nd, 1:30PM

Five Rivers Environmental Center

Delmar, NY

Noteworthy

- The proposed Sellecks karst purchase will be featured at the Spring NRO. See article below. Note, the official name for the preserve has not yet been set - talk to the trustees or board members and give them your ideas.
- The Board will adapt a plan allowing the NCC to accept credit cards for donations, dues, and future merchandise. See the minutes from the last meeting for details.
- Several trustee positions will be open at the next meeting. See the minutes from the last meeting for details.
- The NCC recently received a \$250 corporate matching grant from Allegheny Energy and a \$500 donation from Howe Caverns, Inc. We encourage all who work for large corporations to look for such grants and donations since several sources exist. Although these appear to be modest, they represent a steady stream of income to the NCC, and allow us to accomplish our program of cave conservation.

From the Last Meeting

The following is a summary of the March 24, 2001 NCC meeting held at the Howe Caverns Restaurant:

- Attendance - Executive Officers (B. Addis, B. Folsom, C. Hay, J. Levinson), Trustees (C. Cantello, V. Kappler, T. Rider, S. McLuckie), Guests (P. Murphy - Town of Carlisle Planning Board and karst landowner, A. Layman - Town of Carlisle Chairman of Planning Board and interested in karst). B. Miller and P. Murphy were seated as proxies for M. Warner and K. O'Classen who were absent.
- Bob Addis discussed the status of the Sellecks Karst Preserve. See article below.
- Bob also noted that Mary Ann Woodell, Paul's mother, continues beneficial public relations with Pat Walker, the owner of Church & Wagon Wheel Caves.
- Beaver Camp Child Summer Camp would like to come and cave this summer. We need to ensure they have insurance.
- Bill Folsom contacted Peter Quick and management regarding Purgatory Pit in Vermont. Bill asked Dan Werner to contact the Dean of Vermont Law School to investigate the possibility of pro-bono legal assistance.
- Bob Addis was asked to investigate how the Southeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. handles credit card acceptance services. This information along with information on the Electronic Funds Transfer Corporation and Northern Merchant Services will be presented to the Board by April 16th for an electronic vote which is to be concluded by April 30th. Security and liability issues are to be addressed by each plan.
- Thom Engel noted that Western Mass. Cavers have taken 7 bags of garbage out of Onesquethaw Cave over 3 trips. The neighbor has built a garage so he no longer needs to cross the property. Thom also had a conversation with Grange brothers - they farm the land and have been paying rent to the neighbors and did not realize that the neighbors did not own the entire property. There is approximately ½ acre of the land belongs to the Albany County Land Conservancy.

- A report from Emily Davis noted that, as of March 2001, the NCC has a total of 83 members comprised of 59 regular, 4 family, 1 student, 11 benefactors, and 8 institutional.
- Emily also noted that all has been fairly quiet at Knox Cave since the last meeting as the cave has been closed. We have had one report of people on the land by Ken Fortuin who lives near by. They were gone by the time someone went to check on them.
- Bill Folsom stated that the updated membership list is on the web and is not password protected. The Onesquethaw and Knox Cave management plans are also posted.
- Christa Hay received authorization to pay Brooks Barbecue a \$200.00 deposit for the October 26, 2001 BBQ fund raiser. See article below.
- The NCC agreed to join the BZ Foundation.
- Joe Levinson noted that as of March 2001 we have \$4292.11 in our bank account. We also have assets in excess of \$8120.00 being held by the National Speleological Foundation in their general fund. Roger McClure, President of the NSF has the signed contract which will be put before the NSF board the weekend of April 7th. Joe will prepare a financial plan for the proposed Sellecks Karst Preserve purchase for approval at the June 2001 Board meeting. This plan should include repayment, closing costs including survey if necessary by local ordinance, initial capital improvements, and ongoing maintenance.
- Joe also spoke with the tax assessor for the Town of Knox who sees no problem with the Knox Cave Preserve being tax-free. We should have written notification of this sometime in May.
- During the committee of the whole, Thom Engel stated that he would respond to all comments sent in on the Knox Cave Management Plan. Thom noted that there is a misunderstanding of the purpose of management plans. A management plan is the "operator's manual" for the cave and it's property. The management plan should be a living document, amended as needed. For example, the manager of a particular property should only have to look at the management plan and not search through the NCC board manual to find acts affecting the property. Thom is looking to transfer responsibility of preparing management plans to someone else. Ed Lucas has volunteered to assist.
- Craig Cantello asked members if anyone would like to become a trustee as several positions (3 open positions for 3 years plus 1 new position for 2 years) will be open at the June meeting.
- Paul Murphy asked what do other communities do for karst and cave safety.
- Mike Martuscello asked how the McFail's management plan written with respect to technical ability. Tom Rider will check.
- Craig Douglas asked about financing the Sellecks purchase. Specifically, Craig asked why we aren't using the money we have as opposed to borrowing. Answer - The money kept with the NSF will continue to accrue interest. In addition, the NSF gives us a very favorable loan rate.

Cave Acquisitions Committee Report

from the March 2001 NCC Meeting

Since the last meeting, significant progress has been made on acquiring the Wards property, our overtures towards Carlisle Ice Cave have been rebuffed, negotiations for Church and Wagon Wheel caves are in the initial stage, and we are still waiting for word on South Bethlehem Cave and the Purgatory karst.

The NCC's Executive Committee has offered owners Bill and Debra Ward \$10,000 for an approximately 15 acre parcel which would include Sellecks Cave, Cave 575, Natural Bridge, and probably Levys Cave. This parcel, outlined at the previous NCC meeting, includes the northwest part of Wards' land and a 50-foot wide deeded property (NOT a right-of-way) along their north property line to a public road. Depending on survey results, Levys Cave may or may not lie within this parcel. According to Bob, the Wards sounded enthusiastic about this offer, but must get approval from their creditor, a local bank.

After learning, from the NCC, about Carlisle Ice Cave on their property, the new owners dug open an entrance with a backhoe, leading to 50 feet of tight passage which according to Tony Hopkins ends most unpromisingly. Tony thinks this is not the Ice Cave itself. In any case, the owners seem interested in their new cave and now do not wish to sell to the NCC. Perhaps they will change their minds when the novelty has worn off.

Bob Addis has been in contact with the owner of Church and Wagon Wheel caves, west of Thatcher Park. She is interested in selling her parents' lands, including a house, the caves, and other lands. She felt that the cave properties could easily be sold off separately as a roughly 7-acre parcel. We plan to conduct a preliminary surface survey soon.

Callanan Industries, owner of South Bethlehem Cave in Albany County, still have our leasing proposal on their back burner. Walter Young, a former Callanan employee and NCC member, is keeping in touch with Callanan so that the fire doesn't die out totally. There is little we can do but keep after Callanan, which needs to have their lawyers review the lease agreement for possible liability consequences.

Similarly, we are waiting for the wheels to turn within OMYA, the multinational corporation that owns the Purgatory karst in Vermont. Management in the Proctor, Vt. office of OMYA is interested in providing caver access but approval must come from higher up. Peter Quick is helping the NCC with this, having had former contact with the Proctor officials.

On a related note, the Barrack Zourie Foundation has contacted the Florida owner of the Barn entrance of BZ and she seems interested in working out some kind of arrangement with cavers. I suggest we let the BZ Foundation continue these negotiations, and stand ready to assist them if necessary.

Conserve your Land

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Do you own land that you would like to see remain free from development--for your lifetime and for future generations? Doing nothing to protect it may doom your land to development. Why? Estate taxes are one reason. Federal taxes can be as high as 55% of a property's fair market value, virtually forcing heirs to sell it. And, of course, future owners may be compelled by ever-increasing property values--or simply by a lack of appreciation for the land--to sell it for development. Land trusts are experts at helping landowners find ways to protect their land. Here are a few of the options open to you:

- Conservation easement - A legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently protects land while the landowner continues to own it. Donating the easement can result in reduced income tax and estate tax.
- Land Donation - Donating conservation land to a land trust is a wonderful way to share its beauty with future generations. The donation can even be set up in a way that allows you to continue to live on the land or to receive a life income.
- Bargain Sale of Land - Selling land to the land trust at less than its fair market value can make it affordable for the land trust and provide tax benefits for the landowner.

Looking for Donations

Is that tax refund burning a hole in your wallet? Are you looking for itemized deductions for next year's return? As we all reflect on this past tax season, please consider giving a little extra to the NCC in preparation for your 2001 return next year! In addition, while you filling your cave packs with new gear this spring, don't forget that 5% of all sales made through Karst Sports will go to the NCC. You must, however, use the following link: <http://st18.yahoo.com/cgi-bin/clink?karst+nVVjvT+index.html>

Volunteers Needed

Remember the NCC will be hosting a Brooks Bar-B-Q on October 26, 2001 at the Wal-Mart on Altamont Ave, Rotterdam, NY (near Schenectady). We will need volunteers to sell tickets and help serve dinners. Brooks does all the set-up, cooking and clean up. The time will be sometime between 3:00pm and 7:00pm and will be firmed up closer to the date. There will be more information on this event as the time gets closer. But please keep October 26 open. This is on a Friday so that means some people might have to take time off from work to help.

This is also a good time to talk with the public about the NCC and its mission and hopefully get more members. It would be a good idea to have caving equipment and demonstrate their use, have the squeeze-box available and possibly put a photo album together of caves and people having fun caving.

We will need at least 12 volunteers to work and as many members as possible to come and support the NCC by buying some chicken dinners and spreading the word around. If we can get enough members to donate goodies, we could also host a bake sale.

Please help the NCC and volunteer some time on October 26! If you can volunteer please contact Christa Hay at c.hay@ctmale.com.

The Proposed Sellecks Karst Preserve

by Bob Addis

What will it be? When approved by the Board, this will be a \$10,000 purchase from the Ward family for 15 acres, more or less, that contains a scenic and important karst area. It will be walking access by a 50-foot wide corridor of deeded property from Kniskern Road. The idea of a karst preserve is multi-faceted - We are preserving a valuable scientific asset for generations to study, we are protecting more of the McFail's watershed, and we continue to allow access for recreational caving.

What is contained there? Selleck's Cave, Natural Bridge, Cave 575, and if the survey shows it to be on the Ward's property, then Levy's Cave as well. If Levy's Cave is on the adjacent Rogers' land, they have agreed to allow access to it as well as Kniskern (the Rockhouse) Cave by signing a waiver of liability. The NCC has forged some excellent landowner relations in this area, and in fact, the Rogers encourage cavers to park near their old barns until we get a culvert and stone in place to build a parking area on our future land.

The concept of the proposed karst purchase is a 0.5 to 1 mile self-guided nature trail through an interesting karst area. Hydrologically, the water passing through Selleck's Cave has been shown to connect with the stream in the Northwest Passage of McFail's Cave, the longest cave north of the Virginias. This means that the NCC would have influence on protecting an important watershed. Historically, the caves of the Ward's property were on the cutting edge of speleology for the past 150 years, and they were visited by the most famous of the day's scientists - T. N. McFail, Cook, and Van Voris to name a few.

What about the cave names? Selleck's Cave; Clay Perry, in Underground Empire states "Dr. Cook tells us that George Sibley and J. C. Sellick first visited this cave in the year 1841 and that they reported that 'it afforded the visitors fine specimens of spar' ". Cave 575, named after a number, has one of the most extensive displays of fossils in any cave of the Northeast. Natural Bridge could be said to be Schoharie County's shortest cave! During the melting of heavy snows this spring, the Natural Bridge sinkhole had the largest resurgence of the above three caves in spite of the fact that no known cave passage is below.

At the June 2 NCC meeting, the Board will approve the management plan presented by Thom Engel and Ed Lucas. This will be posted earlier on our website, and should contain more detailed cave descriptions and maps. They will also approve a detailed financial plan prepared by Treasurer Joe Levinson outlining the payment of the purchase price.

Fund Raising for the proposed Sellecks Karst Preserve includes:

1. We have recently received \$250 from Allegheny Energy for volunteer contributions by their employee and our charter member, Aaron Jarvis of West Virginia.
2. \$500 has been donated from Howe Caverns, Inc. for use in cave conservation within Schoharie County.
3. Spring NRO Dinner headed by Emily Davis, Christa Hay, and other volunteers.
4. Brooks BBQ on 10/26/01 @ the Rotterdam Wal-Mart parking lot, organized by Secretary Christa Hay.
5. Vice President Bill Folsom has been applying for grants from several sources.
6. Loans (which will have to be repaid) from the National Speleological Foundation (NSF) against our assets held by the NSF.
7. Your Donations! There is no doubt that the NCC will have to depend on the generosity of its membership to accomplish its mission of cave conservancy. Please Give!