

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News

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September 2015

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a not-for-profit corporation committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features. To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, land-owners, and conservation officials.



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Next Board Meeting

Sunday, September 13, 10:00 a.m.
Gallupville House
Route 146 Gallupville
Schoharie County

December Board Meeting
Sunday, December 6, 10:00 a.m.
Speleobooks - Schoharie, NY

The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a not-for-profit corporation committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical, or aesthetic features.

To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials.

The NCC programs are focused mainly on the preservation of caves and karst. Outreach includes education in schools and local communities, establishment of park spaces on karstlands, and educational messages about the significance of groundwater pollution on this sensitive underground ecosystem.

NCC members assist in the exploration, survey, and protection of these natural resources, and manage them so you can explore them yourself.



NORTHEASTERN CAVE CONSERVANCY, INC.

June Minutes - Summary

June 6, 2015 Board meeting held at John Boyd Thacher State Park, Voorheesville, NY

The NCC had two guest speakers early in the meeting:

Carl Herzog, NYS DEC, Endangered Species Unit. Discussions about the Northern long-eared bat being placed on the Threatened Species List. It has been seen in all NCC caves except Sellecks and the new acquisition, Spider Cave. This is based on old and questionable bat surveys and will be investigated in the future.

Laure-Jeanne Davignon, Friends of Thacher State Park. Ground has been broken for the new Visitor Center. The State pays for the building shell and the Park must raise \$1 million in private donations for the displays in it. \$400,000 has been committed, and Thom Engel has offered a \$5,000 matching-grant challenge to the NCC (\$10,000 total). The NCC is being given two displays for our outreach to the public on the importance of caves and karst.

The Minutes of the Meeting Summarized: Full minutes will be on the website after being approved by the Board at the next meeting.

Election results – Thom Engel, Alan Traino, and Jacob Morris-Siegel elected. Peter Youngbaer thanked for his years of service to the Board. Peter continues as the very capable chair of the Membership Committee.

Knox Cave Preserve land survey completed and corners marked. This is the first time it has been surveyed in many years. More recently, it was decided to call a work day this fall at Knox to clear a walking trail around the Preserve for maintenance purposes. Details to follow.

The Board accepted the donation of Spider Cave from the Carl family, subject to approval of a management plan.

A similar motion passed for Straddle Canyon karst Area. However, the owners have, subsequently, withdrawn from negotiations.

Engel moved that each new preserve will have a professional survey done within one year of acquisition, unless it was done prior to acquiring it.

The President appointed the following ad hoc committees:

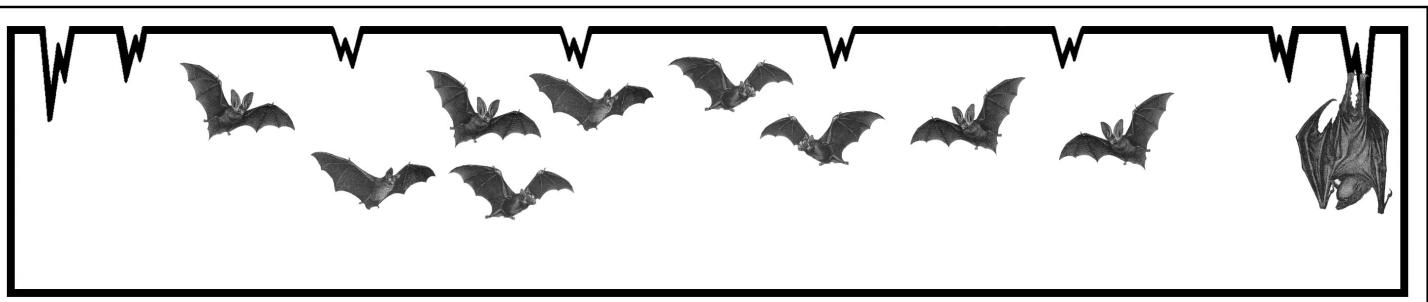
Ad hoc Bat Hibernation – Emily Davis and Mike Warner, co-chairs.

Ad hoc Thacher Park Visitor Center – Thom Engel, chair.

Ad hoc WNS Treatment Study – Peter Youngbaer, chair. Studies of possible cures for WNS and pilot studies in caves is the mission here.

Next NCC Board Meeting will be Sunday, September 13, 2015, 10:00 am at the Gallupville House.

Date and time for the December BOD meeting: Sunday, December 6, 2015 at 10:00 am. Speleobooks, Schoharie.



NOMINATING COMMITTEE SEEKS BOARD CANDIDATES

The Nominating Committee is continuously soliciting nominations for candidates for the NCC Board of Directors. Each spring, three of the nine board seats come up for election to be seated at the June meeting. If you would like to be considered for candidacy, know of someone who would make a good candidate, or are simply curious about the process, please contact Bob Simmons, Nominating Committee Chair, at rwsimmons1@gmail.com or call 860-620-2055. You can also speak to any NCC board member or officer with no obligations.

CHAIRPERSON - RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Risk Management Committee (RMC) will monitor NCC publications and policies for compliance with NCC approved risk-management standards, attorney recommendations, or insurance-carrier policies, and will research any other risk issues that come before the NCC. The RMC Chairperson will appoint a liaison who will be the primary NCC spokesperson and contact with our insurance broker(s). If interested in this position, please contact Vince Kappler at vicepresident@necaveconservancy.org.

CO-CHAIRPERSON - MERLINS PRESERVE

The Co-Chair will help to manage property of the Merlins Preserve. This includes keeping the management plan updated, reporting on visitations, visiting the site and reporting to the Board, and being a physical caretaker during the summer and early fall. The Merlins Preserve Co-Chairs will report to the NCC President. If interested in this position, please contact Vince Kappler at vicepresident@necaveconservancy.org.

CHAIRPERSON - BENTLEYS CAVE PRESERVE

The Chairperson will help to manage property of the Bentleys Cave Preserve (Rensselaer County, NY). This includes keeping the management plan updated, reporting on visitations, visiting the site and reporting to the Board, and being a physical caretaker during the summer and early fall. The Bentleys Cave Preserve Chair will report to the NCC President. If interested in this position, please contact Vince Kappler at vicepresident@necaveconservancy.org.

NCC VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE

Cavers can get involved with many volunteer opportunities offered by the NCC. These include work on various committees or assisting with one of the cave-preserve management teams. Volunteers contribute to the maintenance and preservation of unique underground environments and help to support various NCC educational and outreach activities. To learn more about volunteer opportunities, please contact Vince Kappler at vicepresident@necaveconservancy.org. You can also speak to any NCC board member or officer. Don't pass up the chance to give something back to the caves that are so important to us all.

THE NORTHERN LONG-EARED BAT - A CONSERVATION UPDATE

— Mike Warner —

On April 2 this year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published an interim rule regarding the new listing of the northern long-eared bat as threatened. This rule went into effect on May 4. This rule affects all listed hibernation sites for the bat, including all of the Northeastern Cave Conservancy (NCC) properties except Sellecks. The rule requires that the sites to be closed to visitation between October 1 and May 1.

The NCC will be seeking to have the status of at least two of our caves, previously available year round, revised to allow visitation between October and May. We believe Onesquethaw Cave is unsuitable habitat for the affected bat. Existing studies made at the cave may be able to be used to confirm that the cave floods completely during the hibernation season and would, therefore, be unsuitable for any hibernation use by bats. The recorded listing of the bat at Clarksville Cave is several decades old. While this was sufficient to place the cave on the list of hibernation sites, we are pursuing ongoing studies of the site to determine if the cave is, in fact, a hibernation site. Were this to be demonstrated, it should be possible to have the cave removed from the list of affected sites.

In making its determination the USFWS was not permitted by rule from considering the wider impact of their site determination. The USFWS comments that “In making a determination as to whether a species meets the Act’s definition of an endangered or threatened species, under section 4(b)(1)(A) of the Act the Secretary is to make that determination based solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available. The Act does not allow us to consider the impacts of listing on economics or humans activities (sic) whether over the short term, long term, or cumulatively.

....Known, occupied hibernacula are defined as locations where one or more northern long-eared bats have been detected during hibernation or at the entrance during fall swarming or spring emergence. Given the documented challenges of surveying for northern long-eared bats in the winter (use of cracks, crevices), any hibernacula with northern long-eared bats observed at least once, will continue to be considered “known hibernacula” as long as the hibernacula and its surrounding habitat remain suitable for northern long-eared bat. However, a hibernaculum may be considered to be unoccupied if there is evidence (e.g., survey data) that it is no longer in use by northern long-eared bats.”

The NCC is working to develop such studies as well as petitions, as needed, to pursue relief from these newly implemented rules as we deem appropriate to the specific circumstance of each cave. We are consulting with the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) regarding the most effective options to pursue.



Northern long-eared bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*) are captured in a mist net, banded, and fitted with a small radio transmitter to help track them to their roost. Photos by Mike Warner.

THE SPIDER CAVE DONATION — Bob Addis —

The Acquisitions Committee (Chuck Porter and Bob Addis) went to the Town of Wright Planning Board meeting Wednesday, August 20. All seemed to proceed smoothly. There was one other applicant after us.

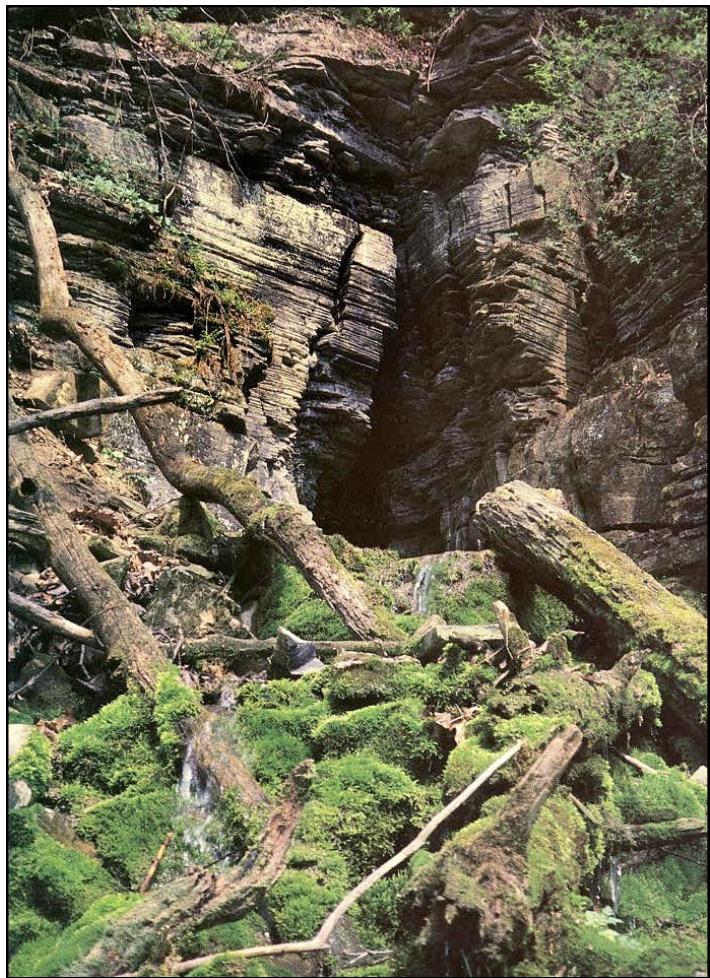
Chuck had thought this meeting was to discuss a zoning variance, since our subdivision meets neither the building- nor agricultural-use categories—the only categories of the zoning code. But that didn't seem to happen.

The Chair reminded us that a fee (she will have to see how much) will soon be due, that they would like one more printed copy of the June sketch plan, and that they will be scheduling a site visit. Chuck volunteered to lead that.

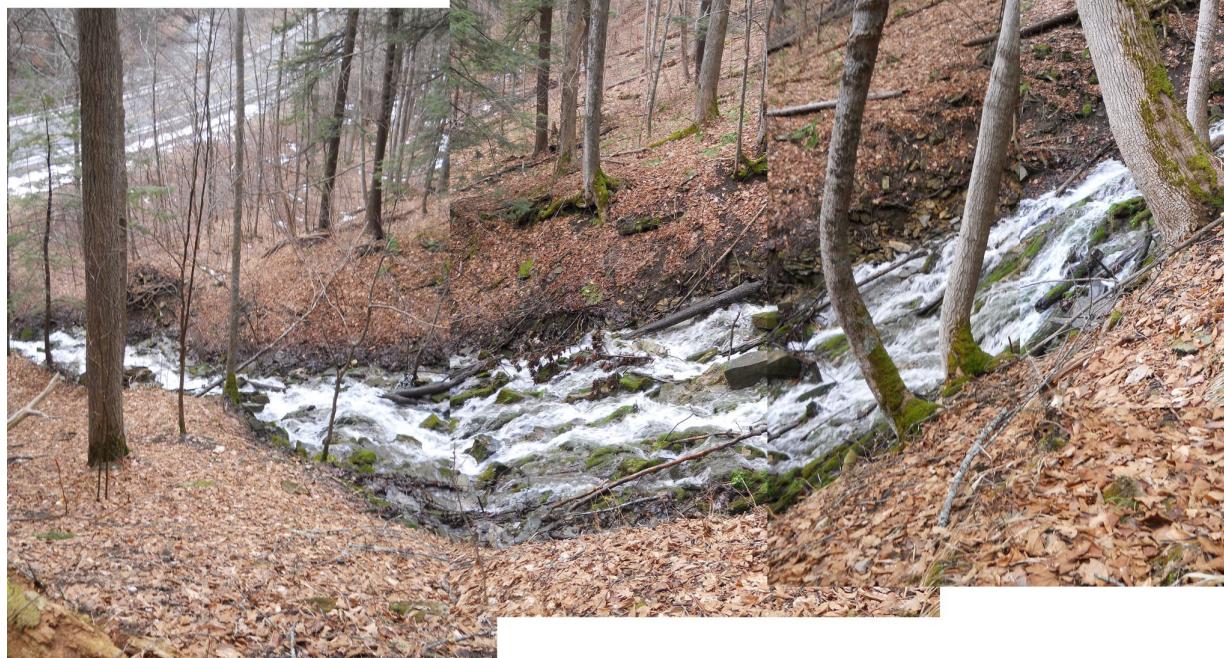
The Chair had discussed parking with the DOT representative, and we are not to erect any parking signs since they would be on DOT property. A temporary sandwich-board type of sign could be used for special events, such as our opening ceremony (or an NRO). It seemed to please the Board that Chuck had been able to get DOT's written permission to use their gravel storage lot—about 1,000 feet down Route 146—as a safer parking space.

Chuck will see how things go with the site visit. After that we'll send out certified letters to the adjacent landowners, run a legal notice, and have a public hearing at another Town of Wright Planning Board meeting.

Then the land survey, closing, and Bob gets his tux out!



Spider Cave. Top Photo - Entrance image by Kevin Dumont.
Bottom photo - composite image by Chuck Porter.



THE OLD MAN ON THE HILL?

— Alan Traino —

Much has been written about Ella Armstrong Cave, which was purchased by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy in 2004. Ella is a highly varied cave, offering an array of tight crawls, walking passages, a vertical rappel and climb, as well as digging opportunities. As such, it is a great “teaching ground.”

Ella was first described in an article in the September 1815 issue of *The American Magazine*. It is probably the oldest cave on the plateau, higher in elevation than any of the other six well-known caves in the area. Most of the cave is in the major cave-forming Manlius limestone, with 30 feet of it being exposed within the cave.

A few months ago, a group of diggers organized and gathered on a rainy day and decided to clean out the Ella Armstrong entrance/sinkhole. The large, steel plate that was in the entrance was removed, affording a much easier approach. A new rock wall was also constructed, and the entire entrance has been cleaned of large boulders and assorted debris.

The Old Man on the Hill?

In a message I received from Arthur Palmer, I learned that the name “Ella Armstrong” comes from a strange inscription that was scratched into the rock floor inside the cave, with the letters being reversed and so forth. Mrs. Robinson (former Knox Cave owner), whom I chatted with years later, suggested that it really may have said “Ell Armstrong,” a masculine name. Taking into consideration the fact that literature about the cave with the name of Ella Armstrong had already been distributed, Art (who originally mapped the cave in 1960) thought it best to leave the name as Ella Armstrong.

Although we refer to her as Ella today, no one can be certain whether the name should reflect “The Old Man (or Woman) on the Hill.”



Cavers clean up the Ella Armstrong sinkhole and entrance. Photos by Alan Traino.



STRADDLE CANYON NEWS

— Bob Addis —

The owners, Paul Murphy and Al Lehmann, have rejected all offers to sell the NCC the karst areas, citing their realtor's concerns about devaluating the property's total value. Originally, we looked at 5 acres, and later amended it to 3.2 acres.



Emily Davis (left), Bill Folsom (seated), and Mitch Berger (right) at the NCC table during the recent NRO. Photo by Mike Warner.



Our new display made its debut at the recent NSS convention in Missouri. We are currently working on updating all our marketing and membership documents and our website as well. Thanks go out to all the members that sent in their wonderful photographs. Don't see your photo? Watch for the brochure and website as we continue updating. Please send any photos you would like to share with the NCC to publications@necaveconservancy.org.

SUMMER NRO AUCTION NETS NCC \$767

— Bill Folsom —

At the successful yet relatively lightly attended NRO hosted by CCG (125 attendees), 40 auction items were converted to the green to the tune of \$767. Spirited bidding and perfect weather! Thanks to those who helped out at the auction: Alan Traino, Jose Martinez, Charlene Sandonato, Maylis Verpunk, Leah Hill, and Chuck Porter, with Speleobooks supplying the clipboards.



An animated Bill Folsom displays his finely honed auctioneering skills before an attentive audience of northeastern cavers. An enthusiastic bidding crowd and a variety of intriguing and useful items sparked everyone's interest. Photo by Norm Berg.

OLD TIME BARN DANCE

AT

KNOX CAVE

7th
Annual

Knox, N.Y. - Octagon Barn, Middle Rd.
(Follow the Bat signs)

Sat. September 19

Dancing 7 to 10PM, Doors open @ 6:30

Featuring Paul Rosenberg & Tamarack

Live fiddle band playing traditional early American, Celtic,
French-Canadian, Old-time and original fiddle tunes

Easy to learn step-by-step contras, squares and folk dances.

No experience necessary, all dances are taught.

Fundraiser for Northeastern Cave Conservancy
Silent Auction, Raffle, and Door Prizes!

\$15 per person (\$10 for students), \$30 per family, children under 12 free

Refreshments and light snacks will be served