

Colorado Cave Survey  
Cave Information System Committee  
March 20, 2008 (2<sup>nd</sup> meeting)

Summary of meeting

Two main topics were covered at this meeting. First was the idea of having local coordinators as part of the Cave Information System (CIS). The second was a refinement of ideas about classifying the sensitivity of cave data.

District Coordinators – Benefits

The idea of local coordinators came up at the January CCS meeting and Dan Sullivan suggested reading a thread on the NSS discussion board that he participated in:

<http://forums.caves.org/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=5991&st=0&sk=t&sd=a>

We discussed the idea and thought it had merit. In some eastern cave surveys they have 'county coordinators'. The county coordinator maintains all the data for caves in his or her county, serves as a contact for inquiries in that county, and almost always is actively participating in exploration efforts in that county. Data for caves in the county is shared between the county coordinator and the person maintaining the database for the entire state.

There are many advantages to having local (perhaps district?) coordinators. First, it broadens participation in the CIS by adding several additional people. It also increases the understanding of data in the database because the district coordinators are the 'boots on the ground'. They are the ones out ridgewalking or surveying in particular parts of the state, and in contact with other cavers doing the same. They are more likely to have first-hand knowledge of caves in their area, and an interest in improving that knowledge.

Second, having district coordinators shares the labor of building, maintaining, and managing the CIS by potentially dividing up some of those responsibilities. Particularly in the early years, building up the CIS is going to be labor-intensive. Having many hands involved will make for lighter work. As time goes on, refining the database will become a priority and the local coordinators can mesh that work with their own exploration efforts. In terms of managing the data, the district coordinators will have the best understanding of local issues and may be better able to handle data requests than a centralized, state-wide coordinator.

Finally, having district coordinators provides for some redundancy in the system. District coordinators will maintain comprehensive databases for their area that will be used to periodically update the state-wide database. In the event that one database is lost or corrupted, copies automatically exist elsewhere.

District Coordinators – Responsibilities

Providing reasonable and appropriate access to data is one of the largest challenges of creating the CIS. By adding district coordinators, several additional people are potentially available to respond to data requests. The question is: how to create a system where responses to requests are not arbitrary (e.g. the district coordinator says "no" and the state-wide person says "yes"). This is a major focus of the next topic.

Having district coordinators also changes the electronic data management situation. The databases of the district coordinators should be just as secure as the state-wide database, and moving data between them needs to be easy. This

is a technical issue that can be addressed in any one of several ways to be determined in the future.

As with the cavers occupying the jobs for management of the state-wide database, getting cavers to commit to at least several years in a local coordinator job will be important. Frequent turnover of district coordinators would not be desirable. A means for selecting and replacing district coordinators will need to be created. Dividing the state into appropriate districts will also be necessary. County boundaries are convenient dividers, but a district may comprise several counties where appropriate.

### Classifying the sensitivity of cave data

At the previous meeting we came up with a two part classification system for the sensitivity of data (see previous report). The system split the sensitivity by risk to the cave, and risk to human beings, and ranked each on a 1 to 5 scale. The idea was to take some of the subjectivity out of deciding what data is sensitive. Whenever a cave is entered into the database it will be given a data sensitivity ranking. Then, when data requests come in, a decision can be made to release (for instance) all the data for caves with less than a 3 ranking on both scales. That saves the person releasing data from having to spend a lot of time picking and choosing data for each request. If the classification system is robust, much of the subjectivity is removed.

At the previous meeting we thought it would be best if the person submitting the data (reporting the cave) was permitted to set the sensitivity rankings. There would have to be some check and balance system, otherwise people could attempt to skew the sensitivity of their reported caves.

At this meeting we tried to refine the classification system, because the devil is always in the details. To give a better idea of how the system would work, we tried to think of example caves for each category. Then we tried to consider some rules for how decisions for data release would be made. The system as it stands now is not perfect. However, by putting some ideas on paper we hope that interested cavers will point out potential improvements. Please see the classification matrix on page 3

### Conclusion

As stated before, the creation of a Cave Information System to serve as a centralized, comprehensive repository of cave location and other data for the state of Colorado is not something we are rushing towards. The purpose of the committee meetings is to brainstorm and outline the structure of the system. The purpose of these reports is to let the caving community see how plans are developing, and have an opportunity to provide feedback. The overall goal is to create a system that satisfies as many cavers as possible and is built to stand the tests of time. If you have the interest, we would like to hear your feedback.

Respectfully submitted,

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