

Minutes of the Valles Caldera Trust
Public Meeting

Wednesday, January 23, 2002
1:35 p.m. Fort Marcy Hotel Suites
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Present

William deBuys, Chairman
Gary Ziehe, Executive Director
David Yepa, Member
Palemon Martinez, Member
Stephen Stoddard, Member
Thomas Swetnam, Member
Karen Durkovich, Member
Dennis Vasquez, Member
Bob Armstrong, Member
Leonard Atencio, Member
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager
Steven Romero, Interim Preserve Manager

Proceedings

Chairman deBuys called meeting to order and introduced several attendees

Review and Approval of Agenda

Chairman deBuys: The board has before it the agenda for this meeting, and I would ask you to look over that agenda, it's in your packet, and if there are any changes you would like to make, so indicate. Otherwise the Chair asks for a motion to approve the agenda.
(Moved, seconded and approved.)

Review of Minutes

Chairman deBuys: The backlog of minutes is progressing but not entirely caught up. Minutes were presented from September 7, a meeting in Los Alamos, and minutes from October 11 at Jemez Pueblo for consideration for review.

Chairman deBuys: Are there any changes to either of these sets of minutes?

Mr. Martinez: Mr. Chairman, the October 11 minutes, page 4, there are a couple of typos that I think would give a different feel there. Second paragraph, "Local legal counsel," and then the first sentence reads "To assist the VCNP with resolving the," it probably should be "any."

Chairman deBuys: Yes, we need to delete "the."

Mr. Martinez: And then two lines down from that, "Albuquerque and Santa Fe area" instead of "are."

Chairman deBuys: Noted.

Mr. Martinez: I move the minutes be approved with the changes made.

Chairman deBuys: Okay, motion to approve with changes. Is there a second?
(Moved, seconded and approved.)

The approval of November and December minutes was dispensed with

Board/Administrative Issues

Chairman deBuys: The first item is the announcement of the election of officers for the next 12 months until our first meeting in 2003.

Mr. Yepa: In accordance with our bylaws of the Valles Caldera Trust under Article 6, Section 1, 2 and 3, which covers the Chairperson, Vice Chair and the Secretary, the bylaws require us to elect our officers annually.

The election of officers was held this morning, and I want to announce that William deBuys was again unanimously elected Chair for the Trust, Steve Stoddard, Vice Chair, and myself as Secretary. We will be serving one-year terms, and the board will again reconsider the officers next January 2003.

Chairman deBuys: The next item is the ethics advisory for the board and employees. The ethics folks at the Department of Agriculture had provided us with a set of guidelines which this board has reviewed. This item is still somewhat in flux, and we will get further directive as soon as they can provide it.

Assumption of Management

DR. ZIEHE:

a. Personnel

We received an overwhelming response for our advertisement for Business Manager and we are still in the review process. We hope to have a consensus on narrowing that field down considerably by sometime next week and look to interview for that position sometime in February with the goal of having a Business Manager on board by March 15.

b. Financial Management System

We're also finding that there are a lot of questions that service providers are having of us, what kind of financial management requirements we will expect them to fulfill, and details on how many transactions and how many personnel and various things like that. So we're rapidly trying to get those questions answered so that we can make that selection.

Probably the biggest item remaining for the Trust to assume management of the Preserve is to get that financial management system in place and operating, and it looks like it will be sometime in February.

c. MOU/Los Alamos County

The final item there deals with office space and the Memorandum of Understanding that I believe the board needs to take action on with Los Alamos County.

The County of Los Alamos through its Lodger's Tax Board has offered a grant to the Trust to assist us in providing for visitor opportunities on the Preserve. This was a \$100,000 grant from the Lodger's Tax Board of Los Alamos County. They have given us a lot of flexibility on what we can do including helping us to establish office space, furniture, computer systems and other equipment necessary for the administrative functions, and then also to use that in ways that we could further accommodate visitors on the Preserve. A number of other options are available to the board and are under discussion at this point.

In order to secure that grant, the Trust needs to have an understanding with the county as to how that money will be expended and to assure the county that we will report back at the end of the year what we have spent those dollars on, and if there is any funding remaining that would then be reverted back to the county.

Mr. Stoddard: I think we should propose a motion that would authorize you to sign that MOU with the approval of the board.

Mr. Armstrong: I second it.

Chairman deBuys: The motion has been made and seconded. Is there discussion?

Mr. Ziehe: The lease has been signed, and the commitment is with Artist Road, Ltd., who are the providers of Los Alamos Inn. They are in the process now of renovating some space in the front part. We are developing proposals to go out for bid for furnishing that office. Those proposals were presented to the board for their review this morning and should be going out here pretty quickly for bid. It is anticipated that we should be in that office space probably late February.

Mr. Yepa: I'm suggesting that we have a signature line here for one board member to attest, or the vice chair or the secretary.

Chairman deBuys: Let's put a line in there for you to sign then as secretary. That's within the role of secretary.

Anything else on the motion? Then those in favor signify by saying aye. (No opposition.)

The motion is carried.

Logo Contest

Chairman deBuys: I believe we talked about deferring that to a time when we can meet with Bill Field tomorrow afternoon.

Mr. Vasquez: That's correct.

Planning/Meeting Schedule

Chairman deBuys: We have decided we will have our next board meeting February 28, and that meeting will be either in Los Alamos or, responding to the generous invitation from Governor Gutierrez of Santa Clara, it will be at Santa Clara.

We will not have a public meeting in March. Our next public board meeting will be April 16, and again that location will probably either be in Los Alamos or Santa Clara.

DR. ZIEHE: Part of the inclusion of the planning and meeting schedule on this agenda item dealt with the comprehensive planning that the board must go through upon assumption of management. The Trust will have two years to come up with a comprehensive management program under the legislation, and that timetable starts as soon as the Trust assumes management. So as soon as we take over the Preserve, we will begin that process.

Chairman deBuys: We do anticipate that after June we're going to move to a different kind of schedule. Instead of having a public meeting every month, we'll probably have a public meeting every other month using reserved board time in the intervening months for planning retreats and planning activities.

2002 WORK PLAN

Roads and Bridges:

Mr. Trujillo: I have invited Pat Leyba and Henry Gallegos with Santa Fe National Forest Engineering Department to give a brief overview of the road system as it is today. They have done

some inventory of the road system that we would like to have from the highway up to headquarters for now. It's a proposal that's in our budget for this year

Mr. Gallegos: First of all, I would just like to state that we're proposing to do a reconstruction of two-and-a-half miles of road from the state highway toward the main gate onto the first intersection right before the headquarters.

Also included in this proposal is to remove existing log stream bridges that don't meet any kind of standards for the National Highway Safety Act. We would also install five stream crossings, two to replace the three existing log bridges, and then the other two to replace unbridged crossings.

Discussion occurred regarding details of proposed construction/renovation.

Total cost for the roadwork including removal of the two bridges and installation of the five stream crossings would be approximately \$550,000. The appropriations are higher than that, so we're anticipating a savings for the Trust.

We recommend that all these crossings be done at this time, and any additional funds that are left over from the appropriation we feel can be used for further maintenance, any kind of heavy maintenance that doesn't require some kind of impact statement. This would require just planning with no significant impact probably.

Mr. Trujillo: We hope to have a letter out to the public on this particular proposal sometime ?? right around March 1 is when we intend to go out to the public with this particular proposal, and hopefully we can implement by sometime mid July.

Mr. Leyba: What we'll do is present some options with associated costs, and then you can look at what the drawbacks and benefits are of the different options.

Mr. Gallegos: There is at least one more that I'm concerned with, and I didn't include it in this report because we hadn't discussed it previously, but going up on the Sulphur Springs Road, there is a large 48-inch culvert that has currently been corroded, and we would need to replace that. We could include that in this contract for basically a minimal cost, or we could do it with a force account, with our own forces as well, our own equipment.

Mr. Leyba: And there is need for culverts for general road drainage for smaller ones. As far as large structures, this would probably be it unless some decisions are made later on managing other roads that might change that, but as far we know right now, that's it.

Mr. Gallegos: There are a couple of other sources I haven't mentioned on the north flank of the Valle Grande. I figured that was just something for future consideration.

Mr. Leyba: What we would like to do is plan the structures ahead of time so they can accommodate widening in the future.

Chairman deBuys: What we understand is that (a) that entrance road needs to be upgraded just for existing traffic and to keep the dust down and make it safer; (b) that lane-and-a-half width is just not an option but a requirement in terms of highway safety; and (c) that therefore a single lane with pullouts is our only real option at this time because going to a double lane if and when this board or its successor ever decides to do that would involve enormous additional cost of archeological work of the additional roadway necessary. Archeological clearance is necessary for maintenance but not for new construction, and that would be an enormous undertaking, far beyond anything within our power in the next few years.

Mr. Gallegos: It would also involve a different category of NEPA, National Environmental Protection Act. You'd have to go with a full-blown NEPA as opposed to right now we can do it with the existing.

We would do all the design, and it would be put out to bid, but we would do the survey, design and contract administration, just like we do for our own projects.

Mr. Leyba: From the time that we have approval to go ahead and start the project and get a package to contracting would be within about a four-month period.

Mr. Trujillo: Basically this was for informational purposes, and once the survey and design work is completed and we have some numbers to play with based on their recommendations, then we would like some decisions from the board at that time on which way to go.

Chairman deBuys: To sum up, there will be an environmental analysis done for this project under NEPA.

Mr. Trujillo: Again, we plan to start and put out the public initiation letter for the scoping of this particular project in March and hopefully look at having a decision by the first of July.

Inventory and Monitoring

Mr. Swetnam: We continue to receive reports from the collaborators, contractors from last year, and Craig Allen, our coordinator, is working with them back and forth on the reports to get them in final form. We're working toward getting these documents as we can on line

Mr. Swetnam: The Los Alamos National Labs has approved some time of their geologists to prepare a new geological map, a new high resolution geological map for the Preserve, and as I understand, the State Geologist Office is also going to be collaborating and putting some time and resources in this mapping effort.

Mr. Swetnam: We're now in a critical phase of planning the next field season's work of inventory and monitoring, and we're in the stage of discussing potential projects. We have a tentative list of about 11 new projects that would be funded in the '02 budget, and these run the gamut from additional range monitoring, we want to expand the network that was begun with Will Barnes, some riparian assessment, a variety of other work on elk, small mammals and amphibians. No details at this time until further future discussion at the Jemez Mountains Biological Symposium.

In addition to the new projects that we hope to fund this year, we are going to be continuing about 11 other projects that were funded from last year with funds from the Preserve and also in-kind contributions or basically contributed work from other agencies.

We'll need to try to begin organizing logistics for this summer in accommodating the field crews as soon as possible.

By April we hope that we will have our financial system in place to be able to be working on the contracts for these new projects. That's kind of a deadline also. In order to get the work on the grounds, started on the ground in May, we are going to need to be able to do the contracting work for these new projects.

There are some projects that we're still waiting for the final reports or interim reports where maybe the staged payments haven't been made yet, but in the accounts we're okay as far as having the funds to pay for last year's projects.

Water System

Mr. Trujillo: The current situation is the water at headquarters is not potable. An on-site survey has determined that the whole system needs to be reconstructed. What this would entail, would be developing a new collection system at the spring. It is classified as surface water, so it would need a new collection system right at the spring.

It would include the installation of a new storage tank, a treatment system with a new building, and approximately about 6,000 feet of distribution line to all the facilities that currently have water at this time.

Right now on that particular project, we plan again to do some scoping to meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act. We're hoping that we can get a letter out to the public on this particular project around April 1. That's our target date.

We hope, right now in discussions with some of the specialists that have been up there, that we might be able to implement a decision on this by late summer or early fall, and the reason being is there are heritage resource sites in and around the headquarters. We anticipate consultation with the tribes and also close consultation with SHPO to be able to undertake this project.

DR. ZIEHE: It may be next field season before we can actually get in and implement this project.

Chairman deBuys: There are functioning septic systems in place. They are old. They're going to need to be addressed down the line. We're looking at getting potable water in first and hoping we can just keep limping along with the existing wastewater systems, but they will be a big challenge.

Noxious Weed Program

Mr. Trujillo: We are aware that there are isolated pockets of noxious weeds out there, and at this time myself and Gary have been working with BLM to initiate a planning process to do some type of treatment on noxious weeds for this coming field season. We feel it is important to try to get something in place as far as planning so we can start doing the implementation and doing the treatments as early as possible.

Treatment for this type of noxious weed that we have on the Valles Caldera National Preserve, is treatment by herbicides, and with that we're looking at planning taking place and following the proper NEPA requirements.

Mr. Ziehe: BLM has offered us staffing to get us through the environmental assessment that is necessary. The implementation phase, I think, is still one that is under discussion, and obviously until we get the environmental work done, we're not exactly sure what that will be.

Our goal is to get the environmental work done so we can move into implementation as quickly as possible.

It is apparent at this point that there is a noxious weed problem on the Preserve, but it is a manageable problem now. This is a very important project for us to get going this year because if we let it go, it becomes much less manageable and much more expensive to deal with. So that is why this is as high a priority as it is.

Chairman deBuys: What we have that we know of so far are nine sites of Canada thistle basically on the road edges, nine discrete sites, and we want to be able to hit those sites and treat them and stop them from expanding. That's top priority.

Anything more on this? (Nothing more.)

Livestock Grazing

Mr. Trujillo: We're in the process of formulating a NEPA planning team to meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act. We have the team members identified. We're hoping to get a scoping letter out to the public by the 15th of February.

We're looking at reviewing the purpose and need for livestock grazing, and we hope that we might have a decision for recommendation by probably mid-May to around the 20th of May. Somewhere around there is when we plan to have a decision for the board.

Chairman deBuys: This is a document that will be used extensively in that planning process, and the public needs to be able to view that to be able to review the adequacy of that process. By the time an environmental assessment goes public, this should be a part of that record and available. The other issue that is involved deals with the potential individuals who might be interested in actually grazing on the Preserve, and so we have somewhat of a two-track system going on. We won't know for sure whether we will have grazing until we complete the analysis and if that analysis gets completed in time. But at the same time, we need to determine what kind of criteria we will need for the selection of individuals and potential grazers to be on the Preserve.

The grazing committee is putting together sort of a working group trying to work with some of the state and federal agencies that might be involved and know of interest and know of how to coordinate that kind of a program. We will be developing that selection process, simultaneously with the environmental work that's going on.

Mr. Trujillo: I did want to state also that there has been an extensive amount of work that has been gathered as far as data collection and monitoring plots that have been established, and basically the information to be utilized to create our planning process from is based on Will Barnes' report, on Steve Leonard from BLM, and also from Kris Havstad who also has produced some reports for us. They have a lot of information, and basically that's what we're using right now as our guidance.

DR. Ziehe: Any grazing program that we provide at this point in time or that we initiate at this point in time will be designed to gather additional data to guide us in future management decisions as we put together a comprehensive plan, and that goes to impacts of various levels of grazing, perhaps on cultural, natural resources, elk, livestock kinds of interaction.

All of this information will be most useful to the Trust and to the board as the Trust and board make decisions in the future on any kind of more comprehensive and long-term programs.

Chairman deBuys: What we have done is we have initiated the NEPA process. Those of you on our mailing list will be getting a letter from us describing this process in greater detail. There will be opportunities for public comment and interaction as this process goes forward.

It's going to be modest in size. We're going to use it to learn more about the character of the kinds of grazing that the Preserve can sustain over the longer haul, and we will do our level best to get all this work done in time to have a grazing season this summer, but we are not going to sacrifice thoroughness of evaluation for the sake of speed. We're going to do the NEPA and do it right, and we'll see if we get done in time.

DR. Ziehe: The idea is to make use of expertise from state and federal agencies. It is not really an advisory committee. It is more of we want to gather more expertise than we have here on the board. A couple of state and federal agencies that would have that kind of expertise, Bureau of Indian Affairs, perhaps, the Extension Service, perhaps the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, we would like to be involved in that process.

But that's to help us identify strategies to determine how best to serve not only the local grazers but also what we can expect from economic returns and all those kinds of issues that we want to discuss.

2002 Elk Hunt

DR. Ziehe: Elk hunt planning is continuing. We are trying to put together a program that will accommodate large numbers of hunters, hunters largely from across the economic spectrum. One of

the primary purposes of implementing the elk hunt as we did and going to the Game Commission to get this opportunity to conduct a lottery was to make it available to a large spectrum of the public.

In order to cover our costs and go through the normal process, we would have had to charge an access fee that would have been prohibitive to a large number of people.

We are in the process of developing strategies on how to conduct the lottery, and that information will be available to the public. It is our hope that it will be available to the public by the end of February.

Some basic information on the hunt structure, the dates, some of the restrictions the board has considered on what kinds of activities will go on during the hunt will be out in the proclamation that the Department of Game and Fish will put out. It should be coming out here fairly shortly. And then further information on how to apply for the lottery, at least our portion of the lottery on the bull hunt will be out sometime toward the end of February, first of March. So that's the time frame we're looking at this point.

It is not on the web. It will come out with the proclamation.

We need to explore state regulatory provisions for conducting lotteries.

We have made preliminary contacts with the Elk Foundation and have asked them through Gary Wolf, the former executive director, to put together some proposals and maybe even a range of proposals. We hope to have that accomplished sometime fairly soon, within the next couple of weeks.

There are other organizations that we could use. We have even begun to discuss handling it internally. It will be a big chore, but that may be an option that we've really got to take seriously at this point.

Here again, this is an experiment, this is a one-year program, and no matter what we do, we will learn a lot. We're going to make every effort to make this as successful as possible for both the Trust and for the public, for the hunting public.

Chairman deBuys: Just for the record, permits to hunt cow elk, antlerless elk on the Preserve, will be distributed through the state draw. The only permits we're talking about through a lottery would be the access authorizations that we issue for hunting bull elk on the Preserve.

Recreational Activities

DR. Ziehe: To date, we've talked about projects that require a great deal or some prior planning, a lot of prior planning. The board and the Trust have received several proposals for recreational activities on the Preserve, interim kinds of activities.

My point in including this on the agenda today was to inform both the board and the public that those are next in line, those are what the board probably needs to take up over the next couple of months, the proposals that we've been looking at and will probably need to modify at some forum, but at least have the board discuss.

It's a matter of taking these things in order of complexity.

It's important that the public know that recreation is not taking a back seat, that it's just a matter of logistics in getting these other programs in that are more complex, and getting those processes in line and not taking up some of these additional ideas.

Chairman deBuys: The only amendment I would make to that is that I think once we start looking into some of those issues, we'll find that they may be equally as complex as the ones we're working on right now.

Mr. Ziehe: The other thing that will be required for us to undertake some of these things is a great

deal of volunteer effort, and we anticipate that and we appreciate that.

Mr. Nordstrom: I think it is another opportunity to make money. Just like you do for elk hunting, you might do lotteries for the first back packers in the area. A lottery for birdwatching, hiking, just access there might be interesting to see.

Chairman deBuys: Your point is well taken, and I hope the public understands that given the enormous demand, access is going to have to be limited and rationed through one means or another, a reservation system, a lottery system, something. We don't want to love that place to death, and we could do it very quickly.

Mr. Ziehe: The other thing I think that is important to note, this was a working ranch for a long time. The facilities for some kinds of overnight activities are not developed nor are trails. There are opportunities for developing a trail system, but that has not been done yet. This is going to be a part, a big part of the long-term comprehensive program. The interim programs are going to have to be, just because the facilities aren't available, quite a bit more limited.

Mr. Horning: I was wondering what sort of activities have been proposed to date. You said you have a list that you were working on.

Mr. Ziehe: There are some hiking opportunities, primarily day hikes. There are tours, cross-country skiing. Unfortunately the snow pack at this point wouldn't accommodate that, but that is certainly a potential for the future. The logistics of getting that organized in time if we get the snow is going to be very difficult. That's for this year. For interim kinds of programs, that's about it at this point.

Chairman deBuys: Any other questions or comments on this? (No questions or comments.)
All right, is there any new business that the board or the staff would like to bring up at this time?
(No new business.)
Are there any members of the audience who would like to make comments to the board? If so, please raise your hand.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Bowersock: Suellen Bowersock. I guess I have one question. If you are to submit a proposal, who would you submit it to?

Chairman deBuys: To the Executive Director, Gary Ziehe.

DR. Ziehe: One of the limiting factors that we have, and it was clear in one of the cross-country ski proposals, is where do you park. We don't have any parking facilities at this point, and the turnouts along Highway 4 are not sufficient to accommodate people for any long term. So transportation to and from, and transportation safety have also got to be considered. Addressing those kinds of issues in a proposal certainly makes it more palatable for us and easier for us to undertake and potentially implement.

Mr. Stoddard: I have been advocating for some time that the cross-country ski group get a hold of the Los Alamos Ski Club and see if they couldn't develop a win-win thing where they could use the ski club's parking lot. One of the proposals in this most recent one is leaving from the Ski Club anyway. Mr. Beard presented this one. That is a possibility, and I think it could be shown to be a win-win for both organizations.

Mr. White: I just wanted to follow up quickly about the grazing working group. You mentioned

government agencies, technical services, I wonder if the board would consider also ranchers and people doing progressive ranching, such as the Quivira Coalition. It's an innovative group. I assume that that will probably be part of the working group, but you didn't mention it. So, I just wanted to throw it out. I didn't want you to forget about those kinds of innovative things.

DR. Ziehe: Courtney, at this stage I'll expand on this a little bit. This initial meeting is more of an organizational kind of strategy meeting, and from that point we would intend to go and do a broader public kind of meeting, invite those kinds of organizations and folks at that point in time, hopefully fairly soon. That means in the next two months. It's on our schedule.

Chairman deBuys: Anything else?

There being silence, the Chair would entertain a motion to adjourn.

(Moved, seconded and approved.)

We are adjourned.

(The hearing concluded at 3:20 p.m.)

Copyright© 2002 Valles Caldera Trust | All Rights Reserved