

Minutes of the Valles Caldera Trust
Public Meeting
Wednesday, April 17, 2002
9:00 a.m. Fort Marcy Hotel Suites
Santa Fe, New Mexico

PRESENT

William deBuys, Chairman
Steve Stoddard, Vice Chairman
David Yepa, Member
Palemon Martinez, Member
Thomas Swetnam, Member
Karen Durkovich, Member
Bob Armstrong, Member
Leonard Atencio, Member
Dennis Vasquez, Member
Gary Ziehe, Executive Director
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager
Rich Engstrom, Business Manager

PROCEEDINGS

Chairman deBuys welcomed everyone and introduced several attendees.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Chairman presented the agenda and it was moved and seconded to approve the agenda as written. The motion was approved unanimously.

PLANNING UPDATES

The Chairman asked Mr. Trujillo to give an update on several of the projects being planned for the summer. Mr. Trujillo announced that he has detailed a NEPA Planner, Marsha Winkle to assist in the planning for numerous projects that are proposed for this season.

1. Roads and Bridges: Mr. Trujillo gave a report on the project to resurface Road A from the highway to the headquarters area and replace five bridges throughout the Preserve. A public scoping letter will be released next week on the project. The road system is currently being surveyed and engineered and, with the resurfacing, some drainage components and culvert installation will be included. The contract will be released for 30 days and the engineers are estimating 30-45 days for completion, weather permitting. There should not be any problems from the Heritage standpoint. There are a couple of different areas being considered as a borrow source for the project. The initial cost estimate for the project is \$550,000.
2. Headquarters Water System: Mr. Trujillo explained that the water at the headquarters does not meet state standards and is not potable. Santa Fe National Forest engineers are helping design an upgrade to the infiltration and treatment system. The design should be complete this week and, pending completion of the environmental assessment, this Phase I effort should be complete this summer. Next year the distribution system will be analyzed for upgrade as Phase II.
3. Walatowa Initiative: This grant proposal has been accepted under the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program as proposed by the Pueblo of Jemez in conjunction with the Valles Caldera as a partner. The proposal is to thin and reduce hazardous fuels both on tribal lands and on the Preserve. The general treatment areas on the Preserve have been identified. The types of

prescriptions have not been developed yet, but the headquarters area and an area along Highway 4 just east of Redondo Campground are identified as the highest priorities.

4. Noxious Weed Control: Mr. Trujillo explained that Brett O'Haver with BLM has identified small pockets of noxious weeds on the Preserve. A proposal has been developed to do an herbicide treatment to take care of the isolated pockets while they are small. An environmental analysis is being conducted because of the herbicide-type treatment. The pockets being described are less than half an acre each.

5. Elk Hunt: A brochure was finalized in March, and has been printed for the 2002 bull elk hunt. The application form is also included with information about the purpose of the hunts, history of the Preserve, and insight into the lottery. The lottery will be for access permits for 85 of the 90 bulls to be hunted on the Preserve. Several types of hunts will be offered including one archery, three rifle, and one muzzleload hunt. Applications have been mailed to all the vendors that handle the New Mexico Game and Fish licenses. The applications will be processed by the Public Lands Interpretative Association out of Albuquerque. The lottery draw will be handled by an independent lottery agent in July. In addition, access permits for five bull hunts will be allocated by auction. The legislation that established the Preserve gave the Board of Trustees and the Trust the authority to control access to the Preserve. The winners of both the auctions and the lottery will have to purchase a license from the Department of Game and Fish. To date, four access authorizations have been purchased at auctions, two through the Safari Club International and two through the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. One each, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Safari Club, sold for \$15,000 at the national shows for each of the organizations ?? these are fully outfitted hunts ?? and one each sold for \$12,000, one in Dallas and one in Albuquerque. The Trust will receive 60 percent of the proceeds from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation auctions and 75 percent of the proceeds from the Safari Club auction. There is still one left to auction on e?Bay.

The Chairman recognized Steve Padilla, Commissioner of the New Mexico Game and Fish Commission who commented on the steps that his Department is taking to contend with the issue of Chronic Wasting Disease. He made the following points:

1. Two weeks ago the Commission passed regulations strengthening the requirements of testing for Chronic Wasting. Any import into the state now has to be certified disease-free for five years, 60 months. That is up from two years.
2. There is no live testing available for CWD.
3. On the Class A parks that exist right now, if the owners submit for testing every single animal that dies or is killed and the test results show that there is no disease, then that park will be certified as disease-free, and then can export to other states.
4. NMGFD recommends right now, but probably will not make it mandatory, that any deer or elk killed be taken to the Game Department so that they can test and certify that that animal is disease-free.

The Chair recognized comments from the audience on Mr. Trujillo's report: Comments were made by Ms. Crawford, Mr. Sanchez, an unidentified guest, a Game and Fish Representative, Ms. Arnold and Ms. Day concerning the bridge designs, using local guides and outfitters for the hunts, using goats to handle the noxious weeds without herbicides, utilizing local newspapers to advertise the hunts, analyzing the elk as they leave the ranch for chronic wasting disease, whether potential cost cuts will affect the ability of the Trust to allow the public access, and that the intent of the legislation was that the Preserve be operated under the National Forest system and that includes a provision that monies received should trickle back to local school kids.

ASSUMPTION OF MANAGEMENT

The Chairman asked Mr. Engstrom to update the Board on the assumption of management from the

Forest Service. He said that there are two issues involved: one is getting the Trust into its own financial system, and the other is getting the Trust into a set of offices.

The Trust has decided to become a client of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's financial system because federal requirements would not easily allow the Trust to set up a stand-alone system. The transition out of the Forest Service, where all of the Trust's financial data currently resides, and into the USDA system should be complete by June 1. The Trust will still have to work for some period of time with the Forest Service to ensure a smooth transition.

The Trust now has office space in the Los Alamos Inn and should move in by May 6. Los Alamos has been very nice to donate money for furniture and equipment to get the Trust set up there.

Among issues affecting assumption of management authority, one is the completion of a fire agreement with the National Forest. The Forest Service is calling this a work-in-progress, and release of management to the Trustees on June 1 while those negotiations are being finalized should be fine. The Trust clearly has to have control of the accounting in order for the Trustees to take control.

Dr. Ziehe said the law enforcement agreement has been negotiated, and it is complete and signed. As to the fire agreement, the source of funds that would be used in the event of a catastrophic fire are still being explored. The final issue is emergency response. The staff is still exploring the options structural fire and/or medical emergencies.

COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Ziehe stated that the legislation mandates that the Trust should develop a comprehensive management program within two years of assuming management. The board has scheduled a one-week retreat in June to focus on long-term planning and program development that will begin as soon as the assumption of management is complete. The goal for the week-long retreat will be to develop a schedule of activities that will be included in the development of a comprehensive program.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Dr. Ziehe stated that the environmental analysis has not been completed, and so this is strictly a status report at this stage. As soon as that analysis is completed, the document will go out for public comment as a final environmental assessment.

The Valles Caldera Preservation Act directs the Trust to operate the Preserve as a working ranch. The Preserve was set up as a working ranch for over a hundred years, and so the facilities are there for those kinds of operations. There are not a lot of facilities there for public access, and those are the facilities that we need to develop or improve to make the Preserve more accessible.

The ranching facilities and the ability to get hunters out into the field for the hunts are adequate for the current planned activities.

The ID team is currently developing alternatives. So far they have developed three action alternatives along with a no action alternative. The first action alternative is the most extensive. That would be to allow 35 percent utilization on all three major Valles including the Rincon pasture.

· Under this alternative, it is likely that at 35 percent utilization level about 1,900 head could be accommodated in an unfavorable year. The scoping of this project was from zero to 2,000, so that

would probably be the limit that we would be able to utilize.

- Alternative 2 is slightly more conservative. In Alternative 2, one of the pastures, the Rincon pasture, is taken out of the capacity determination, and the utilization rates are 35 percent utilization by livestock in the uplands and 15 percent in the riparian areas. The way the ID team has defined the riparian areas is an eighth-mile strip along both sides of all streams. So that within an eighth mile of the stream, would be considered riparian on each side.

This alternative might accommodate about 1,400 head in an unfavorable year, and about 2,700 head, although again the limit is 2,000, based on scoping, in a favorable year.

- The third alternative is the most conservative. But under this alternative, again, we would go with 35 percent utilization in the uplands and 15 percent utilization in the riparian zones. The difference between this one and Alternative 2 is that one of the major valleys would not be grazed, so that either the Valle Grande or Valle Toledo or the Valle San Antonio would not be grazed under this alternative in a given season. So under this alternative, the numbers here are 775 to 1,700.

- A fourth alternative calls for no action.

After a description of the cattle and elk exclosures that will be set up on the Preserve in association with the grazing program, Chairman deBuys stated that the Trust wants to run this program in a way that will generate data that can be used to devise longer-term programs that will be kind to the land and effective and that will balance the cattle-elk interaction in an appropriate way.

The Chairman opened the floor for public comment:

Dave Sanchez a rancher from Rio Arriba County, and also Board of Directors, New Mexico Cattle Growers. Mr. Sanchez reiterated his desire to involve New Mexico State in the monitoring and analysis for the grazing program. He also voiced a concern that the Trust has not included a social and economic evaluation of the grazing proposal to know what the impacts are going to be on Northern New Mexico. He stated that his group's recommendation will be that assumption of management not happen and that the Forest Service continue managing the Valles Caldera, and that they be allowed to manage it as they do other grazing allotments in Northern New Mexico

Arturo Martinez, a landowner from the Coyote area. Mr. Martinez expressed concern regarding how he would get his stray animals off the Preserve under the new control.

Reverend Talitha Arnold a minister of the United Church of Santa Fe asked about using the Preserve as a grass bank. (Ziehe: focus is on grazing right now during this interim period)

Lionel Maestas, Rio Arriba County. If the alternatives come out to be very conservative and there is an opening for more livestock to increase that level, would another EA process be necessary? (deBuys: EA is only meant for interim program)

Virgil Trujillo, Abiquiu, New Mexico. Asked how much moisture has fallen on Valles as a percentage to normal? (Atencio: A little less than 50%)

Virgil Trujillo. Asked if the elk herd can ever be controlled due to the pressure they put on grazing.

(deBuys: Trust has to balance the requirements of the legislation with the needs of the surrounding communities in managing the Preserve)

Marina Day of Santa Fe asked if there will be adequate water for grazing on the Preserve. (deBuys: The Baca is pretty well watered with natural streams as well as stock tanks in various locations. As to how the cattle will actually be managed, a lot of the landscape there is recovering still from past use, and we want to be sure that our program does not inhibit or obstruct that recovery.)

Malcolm Charleton from Santa Fe. In the preparation of the EA, will the rest rotation grazing system be included in your analysis of the grazing program? (Ziehe: For the interim program, herding will be more economical than fencing. The idea is to get the distribution right.)

Mr. Tilkemeier: Said the Trust should factor into consideration that they will be asking somebody to give \$2 million worth of assets to manage in the form of these 2,000 cows. He said the Trust should be able to address the rancher's concern for his assets as he gives them to the Trust to manage, and he has to have some input.

PROPOSALS FOR INTERIM RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Chairman asked Dr. Ziehe to update the Board on recreational activities. He stated that the Board has been very interested in providing public access to the Preserve and to develop interim programs to allow for public access for recreational opportunities. He emphasized the difficulty in determining how to meet the demand with the infrastructure and staff limitations that we currently have.

Immediate prospects are for three potential four? to eight? mile hikes located mostly around the perimeter of the Preserve. Since access to the interior is difficult because of roads and the construction projects that we will have going on, it is necessary to limit access to the perimeter areas utilizing access from Highway 4.

Also, there are no substantial parking facilities up on the Preserve or in the area of the Preserve. Therefore, part of the proposed activity for the summer would involve staging from both Los Alamos and probably Jemez Pueblo where people can be shuttled up for the hikes, and then once the hikes are completed, shuttled back down.

At this stage, an Request for Proposals is being developed that would go out to various tour and outfitting companies. Time lines are very difficult at this point, but hopefully within the next 30 days, a contract for conducting the guided recreation activities can be awarded.

The Board discussed the lack of infrastructure which limits the ability of the Trust to expand access faster and the need to both keep the cost down and to ensure the program pays for itself.

The Chairman stated that there are five draft criteria for the RFP which is being developed for the interim guided activities program:

1. affordability for the public of these opportunities.
2. the remuneration that the Trust receives.
3. the quality of the equipment, the vehicles to be used to carry people from staging areas to the trail heads.
4. the quality of the guide and interpretive services that will be offered as part of this package.
5. the performance record of the proponent, the quality of the reliability and experience of the management of the enterprise.

The Chairman then opened the floor for public comment:

Dorothy Hoard from Los Alamos. She stated that the hikes should not all be strenuous so as to preclude seniors and families. There should be a way to accommodate people who do not want to go the entire distance of the hike.

Martin Litton of Portola Valley, California. Hoped the Trust would remember that a national preserve is a national property equally owned by every citizen in the United States. Whether they ever visit it or use it, use it up, or traffic it, or whatever they might do, they still have every right to cherish it and care about how it is protected. Asked that input be heard not just locally, but from all over the country.

Marina Day from Santa Fe. Asked that the Trust consider having hikes on Saturday and Sunday so as to accommodate people who work during the week.

Dennis Gallegos, a cattleman, hunter and fisherman. Asked if there will be fishing.

Mr. Maestas asked if the Board has considered using volunteers to develop and maintain trails? (deBuys: Yes, as soon as staff is available to set up and manage a volunteer program)

Jim O'Donnell from "The Monitor." Asked if the Board has considered dedicating a part of the Preserve as a wilderness area where it could be used both by the public, in a low impact way, and also be utilized as it was dictated that you could still ranch and log and make money with the Preserve? (deBuys: This will be considered along with other ideas in the development of the comprehensive management program)

Ms. Hoard stated that the legislation says activities have to be of benefit to the Board. She believes the Valles is a very beautiful place that is going to attract artists, and so as part of the management plan, should have a subsection for use of the place by artists. She said that the Los Alamos Art Association was willing to help, and suggested a tour of about 25 artists to go in and give suggestions, and then write a report to advise the Trust as to what should be put in the management plan on the artist section.

Marina Day from Santa Fe. Asked which members of the Board were appointed by President Bush and which one of you were originally confirmed by the United States Senate? (deBuys: None was required to be confirmed by the Senate, and none was appointed by President Bush. There are two ex-officio members, the supervisor of Santa Fe National Forest, Mr. Atencio, and the Superintendent of Bandelier National Monument, Mr. Vasquez. The other seven members of the Board were appointed by President Clinton in the last days of his administration.)

There being no other comments, the Chairman entertained a motion to adjourn, which was made, seconded, and unanimously agreed upon.

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