

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – April 14, 2005
National Park Service Old Santa Fe Trail Building
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Board Members Present

Tracy Hephner, Chairperson
Barbara Johnson, Vice-Chairperson
Larry Icerman, Secretary
Darlene Koontz, Member
Gilbert Zepeda, Member

Staff Present

Ray Powell, Executive Director
Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager
Dennis Hazlett, Controller
Randy McKee, Ranch Foreman
Julie Grey, Communications Coordinator
Kimber Barber, Recreation Planner
Maria Lynch, Office Administrator

I. Welcome

Tracy Hephner, Chairperson, welcomed the members of the public in attendance.

II. Review and Approve the Agenda

Larry Icerman made a motion to amend the agenda to include a discussion of the 2006 grazing program. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

III. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

September 17, 2004

Larry Icerman moved to approve the September 17, 2004, minutes. The motion was seconded by Darlene Koontz and passed unanimously.

December 3, 2004

The December 3, 2004, minutes had already been approved at the meeting on January 28, 2005, so no action was taken.

January 28, 2005

Larry Icerman moved to table the January 28, 2005, minutes to allow for corrections to be made prior to reconsideration for approval. The motion was seconded by Barbara Johnson and passed unanimously.

IV. Executive Director's Report

Ray Powell reviewed the Trust's progress emphasizing reorganization of the staff as well as the process of reaching out to neighbors, local- and state-level elected officials, the Congressional delegation, business leaders, community leaders, scientists, teachers, and other persons interested in the Preserve. Powell also gave a brief overview of the efforts to review, revise, and update the policies and procedures of the Trust.

V. Financial Report

Dennis Hazlett, Controller, summarized the 2006 budget request submitted to the U.S. Congress. The request contained standard operating funds, monies for transportation-related improvements, and a special request of \$1.5 million to improve the experiences of visitors to the Preserve.

Larry Icerman made a motion to ratify the 2006 budget request, which was seconded and passed unanimously.

The Board discussed the practice of including funds from the Treasury Account in the budget request addressing appropriations and the confusion that could result. This practice was viewed as not being an optimal strategy.

Dennis Hazlett summarized an income and expense report for the period through March 31, 2005.

VI. Old Business

Julie Grey, Communications Coordinator, reported that the Framework and Strategic Guidance for Comprehensive Management would be available in final printed form in few weeks.

The elk hunt lottery sales have gone well, measurably better than in recent years. Attendance at hunting trade shows was reported as a contributing factor to the higher sales rate.

A member of the public inquired about legislative efforts to change the Trust's hunt lottery status to enhance revenues. The Trust has ongoing efforts to build a productive partnership with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the State Legislature, other agencies, and local communities to allow the Trust to enhance revenues from elk hunts and to improve the management of the elk herd on the Preserve. A member of the public inquired about efforts to prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease on the Preserve. Steve Kohlmann of the Department of Game and Fish responded that there is no occurrence of chronic wasting disease in elk documented anywhere in New Mexico, but that the Department continues to sample elk periodically. A member of the public suggested that the Trust should sample every elk killed on the Preserve. A member of the public expressed concern regarding the hunts on the Preserve not

coinciding with neighboring hunts resulting in elk moving out of the active hunt areas. The Trust is working to better coordinate the timing of hunts.

The final draft of the Master Plan for Interpretation is due from the contractor on May 1, 2005. This document is intended to lay the foundation to guide other planning processes on the Preserve, including transportation and facilities. Marty Peale, Coordinator of the Valles Caldera Coalition, urged inclusion of the public in this process and expressed appreciation for viewing this material as a living document. She also asked how the public contact list was developed and why she was not included. Unfortunately, the repeated changes in the Executive Director of the Trust during the last year resulted in some lack of continuity in directing the work of the contractor. The Valles Caldera Coalition will be added to the list for future public input.

VII. New Business

Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager, summarized the 2005 grazing program, which is a continuation of the 2004 conservation stewardship program and the heifer replacement program. A member of the public noted that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) might be able to provide assistance to the Trust in designing the grazing programs. Timing made this suggestion infeasible for 2005, but perhaps such assistance could be considered for future years. A member of the public expressed dissatisfaction with the Trust's practice of only choosing a limited number of ranchers to participate in the conservation stewardship program. Due to the nature of the program, limits were set on the number of animal units and the participants were selected based on their proposals that addressed the criteria for selection. The same person also expressed displeasure regarding reduced grazing on Forest Service lands, noted the increase in the elk populations as additional stressors, and was disappointed in not being allowed to participate in the grazing programs on the Preserve. The Preserve has limited capacity in this interim program. Furthermore, the Trust acknowledges the elk issue and is committed to studying elk population dynamics in an effort to determine what is best overall for the Preserve and its neighbors.

A member of the public noted that the Trust makes money on the elk program, but that the land actually is being damaged by the elk herd. The Preserve should be used for grazing greater numbers of livestock. The Trust currently uses an evaluation of the standing biomass at the end of a season to determine numbers for the following season. The Trust is currently operating under an Environmental Assessment (EA), which limits the number of livestock. Only a portion of the Preserve is available for grazing under the provisions of the EA and a comprehensive look at the whole Preserve is planned for future years. The member of the public reiterated his feeling that the current system is too restrictive and that there should be more cattle allowed on the Preserve.

A member of the public asked about the typical number of cows per owner. A maximum of 50 cows per participant is allowed unless there is unsubscribed capacity. Some owners have had as few as four cows on the Preserve. A member of the public asked if the Trust should charge for livestock by weight gained when on the Preserve. This approach is not practical because the cows are fully grown animals and, therefore, are not gaining weight. The grazing fees established by the Trust are comparable with grazing fees on private land. Randy McKee, Ranch

Foreman, mentioned that the conception rate last year was 90% and that there was a very low death loss.

Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist, gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing a study of the impact of grazing on the Preserve. The conclusion is that the grazing program to date has had no significant impact on the biomass on the Preserve.

Larry Icerman proposed that the current interim grazing EA be extended, if possible, beyond the current expiration date of the end of the 2005 grazing season to accommodate the possibility that a more comprehensive environmental analysis might not be completed before the 2006 grazing program has to be defined. This approach would ensure that some type of grazing program could be conducted during the 2006 season. Tracy Hephner noted that the Trust's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures most likely will require an Environmental Impact Statement to be prepared for the entire Preserve for potential grazing. The Trust is currently limited to using only low land pastures in the existing interim EA.

A member of the public asked how the EA can be extended. No action is needed at this time. When the current EA expires, the Board will have to consider a new decision and notify the public of the decision. Another member of the public would like the socioeconomic impact on local communities to be addressed in the future analyses conducted under the Trust's NEPA procedures. Other members of the public emphasized the cultural and economic importance of small-scale cattle grazing in northern New Mexico.

Kimber Barber, Recreation Planner, gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the summer recreation activities planned for 2005, including a review of the activities in 2004. A total of about 8,500 people participated in recreation activities during 2004.

Dennis Trujillo made a brief presentation on the planned Toledo Prescribed Burn project. A Stewardship Action Register (StAR) addressing the Toledo Burn was made available to the public at the meeting.

VIII. Questions and Comments from the Public

Carlos Salazar requested that the Board consider holding future meetings in the evening and in more rural areas. The July meeting is planned in Tierra Amarilla.

Work on developing a rim trail should be continued. In addition, there is a need for more strenuous trails. The new Hilton Trail available this year is quite strenuous and 12 miles long. The opening of any new trail has to have cultural clearance first, which is time consuming.

The new web site is disappointing and is not as functional as the previous site. The web site is in transition now but will be fully functional soon, including financial information, information on the staff and Board of Trustees, and an interactive issues forum.

There are a lot of people who do not have computer access. What effort is the Trust making to reach those individuals? Cooperative extension offices and libraries may be able to provide free

Internet access. The Trust is planning printed newsletters that will contain relevant information. An option to consider for rural areas would be a flyer distributed with monthly bills mailed by electric cooperatives.

A Women in Wilderness event would be a good addition to the Trust's recreation programs.

What were the odds for the spring fishing lottery? There were 1,600 entries and 250 winners.

How does the Preserve compare to other National Parks? The programs on the Preserve are not really comparable to those on other federal lands. The Trust is committed to offering a high-quality experience rather than accommodating a large number of participants in recreational activities.

The Trust must address the elk issue, including potentially building an elk proof fence to prevent elk intrusion into the cattle grazing areas near Coyote and Youngsville.

IX. Adjourn

Larry Icerman made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Darlene Koontz and passed unanimously.

Approved as amended on September 6, 2005.

Respectfully submitted by Larry Icerman, Secretary.