

Valles Caldera National Preserve
Listening Session # 3

College of Santa Fe

Santa Fe

March 8, 2001 6:30 - 9:30 pm

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator: Lucy Moore
Recorder: Toby Herzlich

Welcome and Introductions: Bill deBuys, board member of the Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP), welcomed the group to the listening session and expressed appreciation on behalf of the board to all those who took time to come and offer their thoughts on the future of the VCNP. He emphasized that the Board is in a learning mode, and that the listening sessions will be very important for gathering and understanding the concerns of the public. Bill asked the other Board members present to introduce themselves and indicate the interest that they represent on the board. Those present, in addition to deBuys, included: Bob Armstrong, Leonard Atencio, Palemon Martinez, Stephen Stoddard, and David Yepa. The following board members were unable to participate in this listening session, due to travel obligations, Karen Durkovich, Thomas W. Swetnam, and Dennis Vasquez.

Lucy Moore thanked participants for coming and described the process for the evening. Bill introduced a brief video, which gave background on the creation of the VCNP, and set the stage for discussion about its future.

DISCUSSION: Following the video, Lucy asked participants to share their ideas, concerns, hopes and dreams about the VCNP. She asked for comments in four areas: 1) questions people had about the formation of the Board or the context in which it will operate; 2) visions for how people want to see the VCNP in the future; 3) fears or concerns about the future of the VCNP; and 4) issues or suggestions regarding the management of the preserve. She emphasized that the intention of the Listening Session was not to develop consensus, but to hear the broad diversity of opinions and ideas.

Most of the comments offered were suggestions for management of the VCNP. The comments summarized below do not represent any consensus among participants at the Listening Session. Some of the comments are grouped, to allow for comparison among a range of viewpoints around a similar topic.

VISIONS

Access for fishing, hunting, camping, cross-country skiing. These were all also suggested as means for revenue generation.

Educational interpretive center. There is an opportunity to develop on-site educational programs and conferences that highlight the VCNP as a center for ecological diversity, sustainable ranching, and conservation. This center could generate income for the preserve while being an educational model for the west.

Showcase fisheries management. Though the VCNP needs work to restore steambanks, the suggestion was made to optimize the resource and showcase it as an example of prime fisheries management. Revenues could be generated through a rod fee. Encourage catch and release fishing.

Bike paths for seniors. Trails or roads should be flat, paved, go to interesting areas, and be designated for cycling.

CONCERNS AND FEARS

Impacts from off-highway vehicles and motorized recreation. Several people expressed concerns about motorized recreational vehicle use. Concerns included the impacts of roads on the ecosystem, noise impacts, and pollution impacts. One person spoke about the Airreconcilable conflict between motorized sports and everything else.

Impacts from human access. High levels of recreational activities can damage the resource, through impacts on streambanks, roads, camping areas, and wilderness areas. A suggestion was made to have backpacking groups involved to maintain the trails, and to consider the establishment of backcountry shelters and composting toilets.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS

Start with a careful inventory of the resource. The suggestion was made to remove domestic livestock for two years to study the rangeland, including the competition for forage with elk. Some also suggested limiting recreation usage of the VCNP until inventories are complete and other concerns have been addressed. Establish a good baseline while planning.

Eagerness to get onto the VCNP B also caution about moving too fast. Several people expressed the wish to get onto the ranch as soon as possible, with one person requesting that it be opened within a year. Others advised the Board to withstand public pressure and take time to do a thorough inventory. Identify the areas to be preserved as pristine, silent valleys; designate some areas as wilderness and others as ranching; identify roadless areas and areas for restricted OHV access. One person emphasized the need for limited access B especially at the start. He said to the group, Athere are lots of other places in the Jemez besides the Valle Grande.

Management approach issues:

Learn lessons from other management agencies . The National Park Service, USFS, and BLM all have years of experience dealing with the public, the resource, and multiple use considerations.

Learn from their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

Also, don't fix what's not broken & learn from the history of the Dunnigan's management practices.

Be innovative! Consider out-of-the-box thinking in your management planning B this is a unique opportunity to manage the whole cloth.@ It is also an opportunity to get beyond the political fray that NPS and other federal agencies have to deal with. Try out some new thinking that may not be politically viable in other places. This is a fertile ground for research. Document the process as a model. Send out a gadfly to study on-the-ground innovations happening elsewhere.

Preserve the VCNP's uniqueness. Maintain the naturalness and don=t overdevelop to meet all of the

special interests .

Ensure ecological viability . The Baca should be seen as the central and largest piece of the Jemez puzzle, and managed in an integrated way that considers all of the surrounding lands within an interconnected whole.

Zoning for different uses. Compatible uses can be gathered into specific regions, with the backcountry use restricted to low-impact uses and uses that retain the silence and pristine wilderness conditions.

Fairness and balance . Emphasize multiple use. All uses should be allowed B hiking, biking, motorcycling, 4WD, motorized and non-motorized. Explore the water-cooled engines for snowmobiles. Look at the Valle Vidal as a model for grazing and income generation for local people.

Use tools to address the cultural landscape . Hire an ethnographer. Hire an oral historian to work with the local communities. Establish grassbanking. Employ progressive ranch management practices to work with both cattle and livestock

Issues around Fishing:

Repair and heal streambanks. Currently, the streambanks are overgrazed and eroded. They should be deeper. The suggestion was made to exclude elk and livestock for a while to facilitate streambank regeneration. Consider a range rider to chase the elk from streambanks.

Cutthroat trout restoration. The cutthroat trout population is declining due to poor habitat conditions and could face being listed as a Threatened and Endangered species. This designation would very strict management requirements in the Jemez and other areas. The VCNP should focus on restoring the population to prevent it from being listed.

Issues around roads and vehicles:

Consider road closures. Many people wanted to limit access for motorized vehicles. One person pointed out that roads for 4WD=s in this country comprise more mileage than all of the interstate highways. Several people suggested that some roads on the VCNP could be closed. It was stated that there are more roads per square mile of the VCNP than on the Santa Fe National Forest. People requested that restricted areas be established to prohibit vehicles. Do not allow 4WD wherever whenever policies.

Manage vehicle access conservatively. This includes OHVs as well as cars and other vehicles using paved roads. The VCNP should consider instituting a shuttle service (as has been established in Zion) for most of the access. It is easier and better to first limit access and then expand it, than to open it widely and then try to pull back.

Rotate road usage areas. An OHV enthusiast reported that setting aside smaller areas for motorized recreation can create overuse and abuse. He suggested rotating the areas for OHV access and building bridges over stream crossings.

Motorized recreation is growing sport. It was reported that motorized recreation activities are growing quickly, and that it can be a positive sport when properly managed. Involve user-groups in inventorying motorized recreation opportunities on the VCNP.

Snowmobile prohibition. A participant spoke about the need for silent contemplative sports, especially in the winter, and requested that snowmobiles be prohibited. He cited Yellowstone Park, where a layer of air pollution hangs in the valleys due to unregulated snowmobile engine pollutants, and where other winter sports are being squeezed out by snowmobiling advances. At the rate we're going, the single winter recreation will be snowmobiling.

Entry points. The ranch has several existing access points around its perimeter. Use these as entries to disperse congregation of vehicles at the main entry point.

Grazing and livestock issues:

Grazing. One person pointed out that grazing is not bad but overgrazing is. A grassbank was suggested to relieve pressure on rangeland in the neighborhood communities. At some point the USFS lands may be returned to original land grant owners and these lands should be returned in good condition.

Consider recreational livestock use as separate from grazing. This includes horsepacking and goat packing (which is limited in the Pecos because of concerns about diseases that could endanger the Bighorn Sheep).

Ensure that grazing has compensation attached to cover reparation costs. A suggestion was made for a habitat stamp, with funds going toward grazing reparation.

Opportunity for revenues from timber harvesting. One participant said that timber harvests could generate \$2 million/year from cutting only the sustainable annual growth. Another suggested small logging operations using local labor.

Provide easily accessible beauty. Some places of great beauty should be accessible without having to pack in. Seniors and kids can't walk for miles

Allow spontaneous access. A participant stated, I've always wanted to lose myself in that place, and asked that easy and spontaneous access be permitted for individuals, picnickers. And people just wanting to take a quiet walk alone.

Interest in geothermal resources. While some think there is not enough heat, participants expressed

interest in exploring the possibility of developing these resources. It can be clean, simple, small and good revenue generation.

Camping sites. People requested a diversity of camping opportunities, dispersed and multi-tiered with different areas for different types of usage.

- One person requested that there be 200 yards between the sites, so he could party without bothering people.
- Provide camping sites in the trees, so they are not obvious
- Horse trailer parking facilities available near camp sites
- Keep campsites away from streams
- Have them be localized and controlled B not everywhere on the VCNP

Growing elk herd needs management. The concern was raised that without expedited management, the herd could cross-breed and may overgraze the VCNP. One person suggested the consideration of natural predation, such as wolves, as a management tool for elk. Another said that the elk problem may be one of distribution, and that management may come through looking at recruitment issues.

Rules and rangers. There will be many rules to enforce. Rangers must be experienced and trained adequately. It is better to have a few rules, well-understood and strictly enforced, than many rules that are not adequately understood or enforced.

Use volunteer organizations to help in assessing and monitoring the resource conditions and as labor for repairs and development of trails. The Board should hire someone to coordinate volunteer efforts. Offers to provide assistance:

Southwest 4WD Association offered to do a road building inventory
 Trout Unlimited offered education, PR campaigns, resource analysis, funding ideas, technical assistance regarding fishery activities, and volunteer labor
 Backcountry horsemen offered leave no trace educational programs
 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation offered volunteer labor as well as partnering toward habitat restoration and conservation education; also experience with on-the-ground projects.
 NM4WD offers volunteers to map the roads and analyze possible closures
 National Park Service National Natural Landmarks program offers planning assistance. The VCNP is one of 587 NNL's in the country (designated in 1975)

Summary written by Toby Herzlich. Please contact her with any comments or corrections. 505-984-1284; fax 505-988-4727; or email <Toby@nets.com>

Potential partners and sources of help:

Gateway Coalition:

- Los Alamos Chamber of Commerce
- Los Alamos County Council
- Bandelier National Monument
- Friends of Bandelier
- Los Alamos National Lab
- University of California
- University of New Mexico at Los Alamos

- UNM Small Business Development Center
- Lodgers Tax Board
- Los Alamos Public Schools
- Los Alamos Historical Society
- Pajarito Environmental Education Center
- Multi-agency Volunteer Task Force B John Hogan 662-5052, or Craig Martin 672-1962
- Los Alamos Vision 20/20
- Los Alamos Ski Patrol Search and Rescue
- Wildlife Center B POBox 246, Espanola, NM, Dr. K. Ramsey, 753-9505
- Back Country Horsemen B Chris Atkinson 689-2402
- Los Alamos Nordic Club
- Velo del Norte Cycling
- Valles Caldera Rim Trail B 662-2662
- Trout Unlimited, Truchas Chapter
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- New Mexican Stockmen's Association
- Northern New Mexican Stockmen's Association B M.R.Pacheco 758-3168
- Chicama Livestock Association B 753-1783
- Ghost Ranch
- Quivira Coalition
- Museum of Natural History in Albuquerque
- Los Alamos Pathways Association
- Southwest 4WD Association
- New Mexico Trout (Albuquerque)
- National Park Service, National Natural Landmarks Program
- New Mexico Wildlife Federation

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