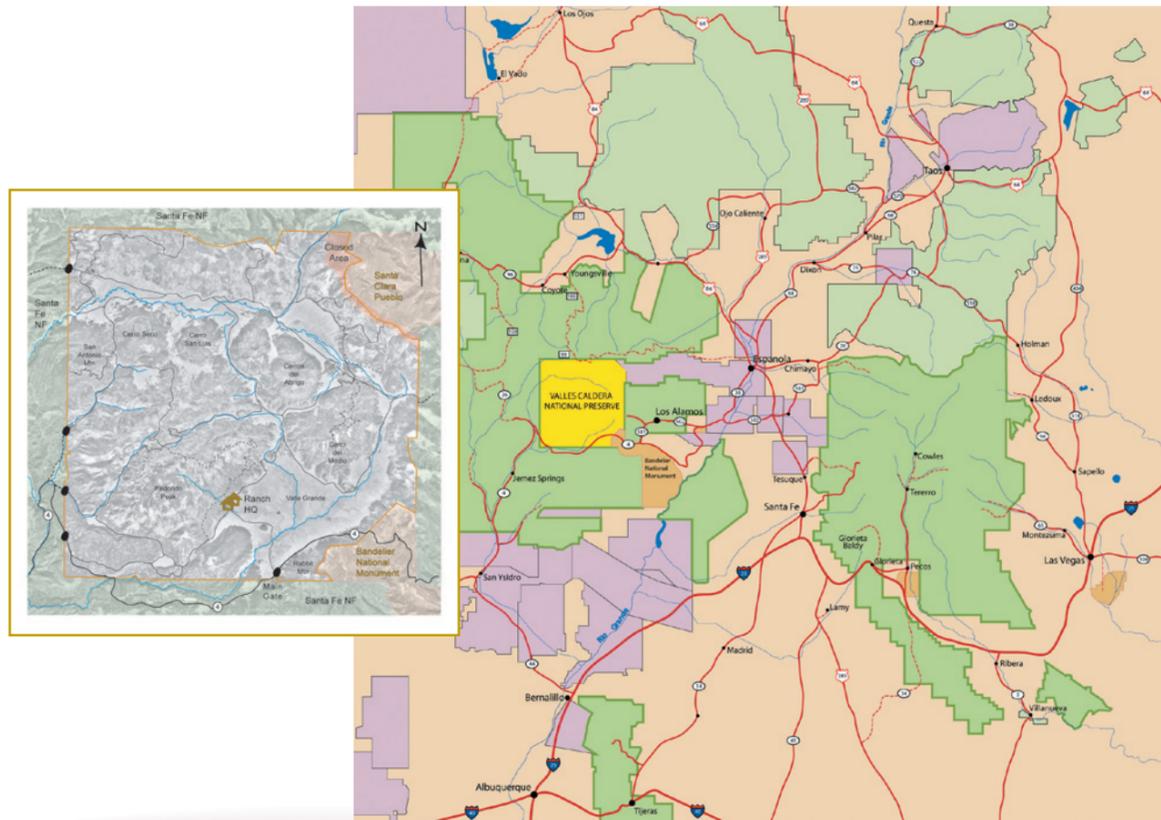


# Valles Caldera National Preserve

MASTER PLAN for INTERPRETATION

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

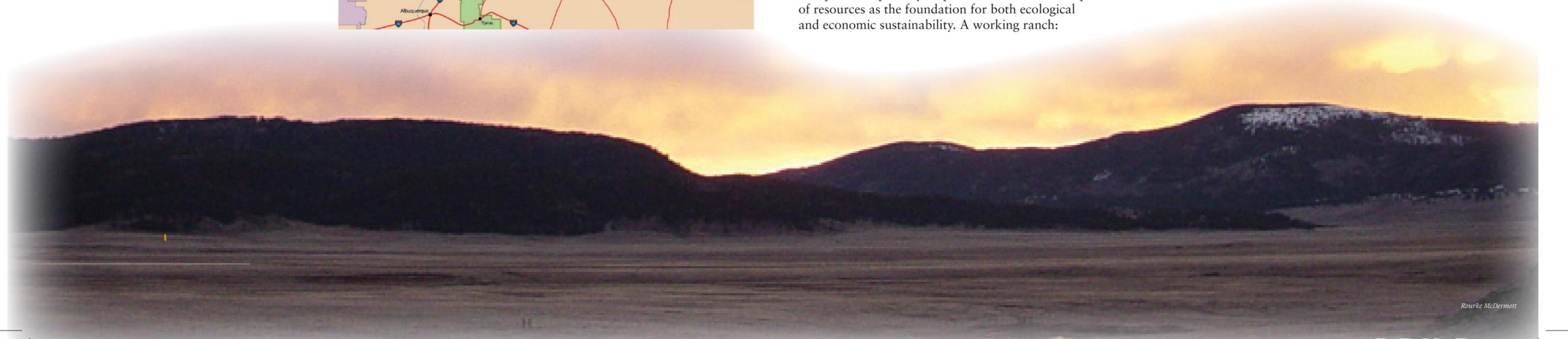


The National Association for Interpretation defines Interpretation as “...a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.” In order to achieve these connections this Master Plan for Interpretation establishes the major themes, messages, and the approximate scope and relative locations of program elements and interpretive components associated with the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Paraphrased, the goals of interpretive planning are to minimize site impact and maximize impact on the hearts, minds and behavior of the Preserve’s users. Balancing these two goals guides the development of strategies that are intended to enhance the Preserve experience. While maximizing the impact on visitors’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors, mechanisms must be avoided that would have a negative effect on the site’s ecological, aesthetic and perceptual integrity.

Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP) is a unique site with a unique mandate. It is an experiment in land management; this master plan is part of this experiment. Two factors distinguish VCNP from virtually all other public lands: it is operated as a working ranch and it has a goal of financial self-sufficiency. This master plan also addresses these factors. A working ranch is defined as an operation that places its primary emphasis on the stewardship of resources as the foundation for both ecological and economic sustainability. A working ranch:

- Runs a sustainable level of livestock, adjusting numbers as necessary;
- Makes resources available for other revenue-generating activities such as bird watching, hunting, fishing and other low-impact recreational activities;
- Applies adaptive management on a day-to-day basis to ensure resource protection; and
- Monitors the impact of ranch activities.

A process was followed in developing this plan, which included: the direct participation of the Board members and staff of the Valles Caldera Trust through interviews, workshops and document reviews; extensive site visits; research into the published and unpublished information available on the Preserve and adjacent areas; tours of regional attractions, parks and national forests; interviews with neighboring land managers and State tourism officials; interviews with recreational users of the Preserve and area residents; and attendance at a public review of the Valles Caldera National Preserve Draft Framework and Strategic Guidance for Comprehensive Management—the key document that guided the planners. Documentation of the workshops, literature reviews and contacts are included in an appendix to this plan.



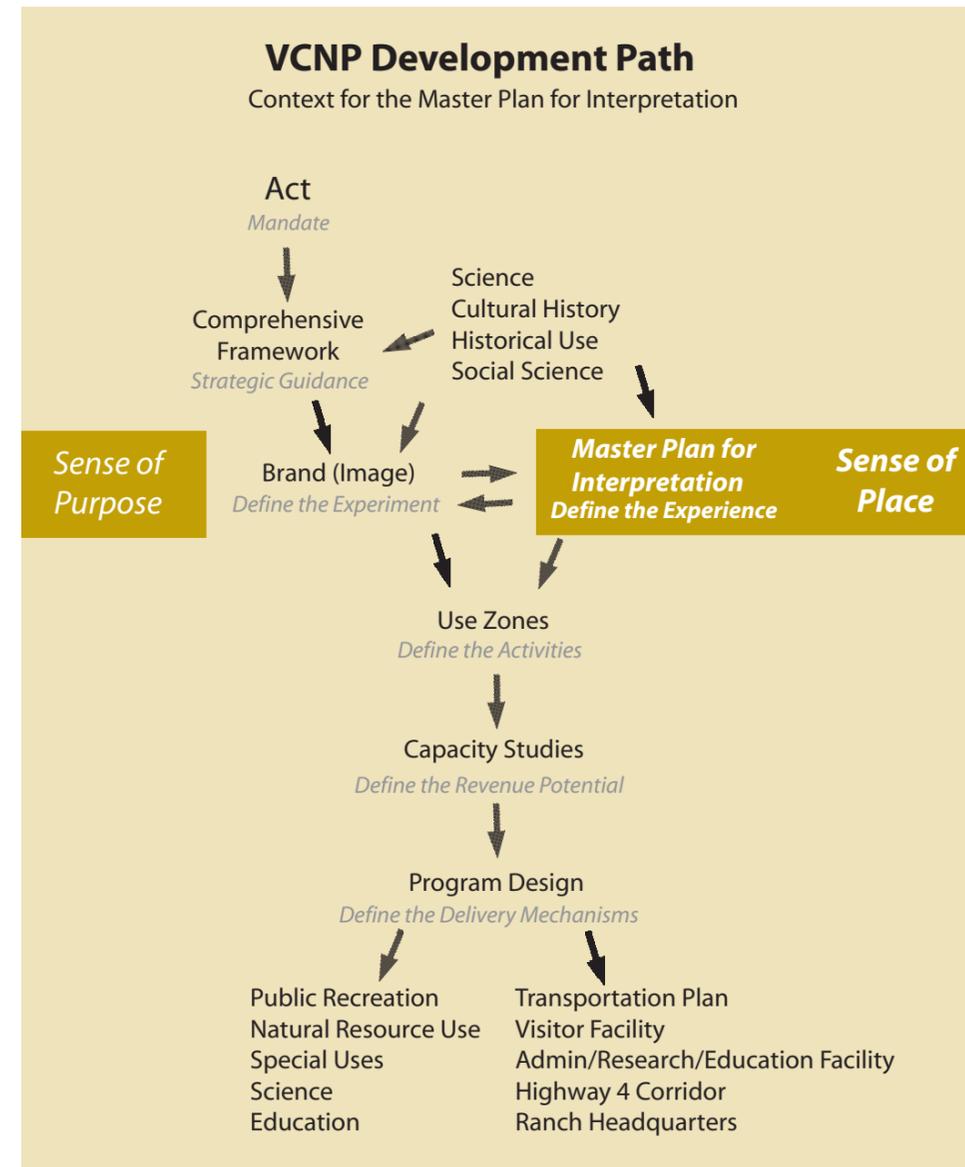


### 1.1 Purpose of this Document

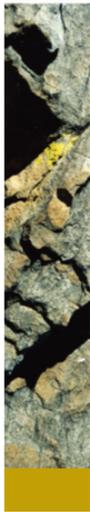
This document is for in-house use. An important focus is on the broad interpretive messages, and how and where they should be told. While this master plan follows the format and content of many interpretive plans, it also has a unique role in the management of VCNP.

This is the first major planning document to be produced for the Preserve. As such, it will guide other planning processes on the Preserve, including management, transportation, facility and service development. This document is the foundation for discussing options and consulting with the public. In addition, the plan:

- Guides interpretive decisions by identifying challenges and providing a filter for determining the appropriateness of management actions based on interpretive resources and sustainability, e.g., location of a weather station based on optimizing interpretive opportunities;
- Broadens and deepens our understanding of the audience—a critically important component of interpretive planning;
- Evaluates interpretive media and techniques, identifies those that are the best fit for the Preserve, and guides the implementation of specific programs and media;
- Addresses the working ranch management model and goal of financial self-sufficiency—with specific recommendations provided under a separate cover.



(source: VCNP Staff)



# VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE

MASTER PLAN for INTERPRETATION



## 1.2 Purposes and Goals of the Preserve

The purposes of the Preserve, as outlined in the Valles Caldera National Preserve Act, are “to protect and preserve the scientific, scenic, geologic, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values of the Preserve, and to provide for multiple use and sustained yield of renewable resources within the Preserve.” Inherent in these purposes is the need for sustainability of these values, and the desire that the Preserve become a model for sustainable multi-use land management.

The Valles Caldera Trust upholds the Act through management principles that guide the operation of the Preserve as a working ranch, the protection of cultural resources and traditions, the Trust’s commitment to involve the public in decisions affecting the Preserve, and the pursuit of financial self-sufficiency.

A central goal of managing the Preserve is to increase the resilience and integrity of the Preserve’s ecological systems. Restoration efforts include streams and fisheries, grasslands, forests, native wildlife, dirt roads and overall aesthetic integrity. The Trust will operate the working ranch in a manner that sustains range resources, and public recreational needs in balance with use by native wildlife and their habitat needs. The Trust wants to ensure a high level of watershed stability throughout the Preserve—to conserve the soils and attain proper functioning of its streams and watercourses.

## 1.3 Context for Interpretation

Valles Caldera National Preserve is a working ranch, a historic site, a natural treasure and a place for recreation. As a result of the unique nature of its guiding Act, it provides the rare opportunity to explore better ways to manage public lands for multiple purposes. Interpretation of the site must therefore address the past, the present and the future. This opportunity presents challenges as well. To achieve its goals, interpretation must integrate natural and cultural conservation with recreation and economic uses of the land through the filter of the ranching ethic.

The Preserve also sets a challenge for interpretation that is rare in Federal lands, that is, interpretation and education must contribute to the economic viability of the Preserve.



Los Alamos Historical Society



Rourke McDermott

## 1.4 Definition of Terms

Interpretation is not the only communication process occurring on the Preserve. Within this plan, three different terms are used to describe the range of communications activities.

### INFORMATION

Information is often sought out in a free-choice manner—the user actively solicits information. It is generally informal in presentation and is most often linked directly to decision-making, i.e., “What can I do? Where am I? What will it cost?” Information commonly has an audience of individuals or small groups and can be effective both first-hand, e.g., a sign at entrance, or remotely, e.g., website. Information is also linked directly to agency communications and marketing; for this plan’s purposes, information is largely confined to elements that directly complement education and interpretation.

### EDUCATION

Most definitions of education include the word “knowledge.” The goal for educational communications is to promote the acquisition of knowledge through learning and instruction. Education is usually structured and undertaken in formal groups to achieve knowledge-based objectives. The success of education is relatively easy to assess because test results can measure an individual’s ability to memorize facts and figures. While many techniques are applied to education, like interpretation, it is most effective as a first-hand activity.

### INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is informal in practice and may take place with audiences from one to many. It is sometimes defined as free-choice learning, but knowledge is only one of the objectives together with emotional connections and behavioral outcomes. Because of interpretation’s attitudinal and action-based objectives, it can be hard to measure effectiveness. For example, behavioral change may not exhibit itself until long after the interpretative experience. Not only is interpretation most effective when first-hand, it needs to be related directly to the nature of a particular site or object. “Sense of Place” is frequently cited as the ultimate interpretive goal.

In all of these communication processes, the primary focus is on the features of the Preserve and the values they represent to residents and visitors. The first step in developing interpretation is to determine which stories provide interpretive audiences with this sense of place, and establish that Valles Caldera is like no other.



Rourke McDermott



Don J. Usher