

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – April 20, 2006
Fuller Lodge
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Board Members Present

Tracy Hephner, Chairperson
Barbara Johnson, Vice-Chairperson
Larry Icerman, Secretary
John Caid, Member
Bill Keleher, Member
Raymond Loretto, Member
Gilbert Zepeda, Member

Staff Present

Jeff Cross, Executive Director
William Barfuss, Archaeology Technician
Jamie Civitello, Archaeology Crew Chief
Xuan Liu, Accounting Technician
Randy McKee, Ranch Foreman
Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist
Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator
Ana Steffen, Acting Cultural Resources Coordinator
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager

I. Welcome

Chairperson Tracy Hephner opened the meeting at 6:07 pm and welcomed guests. Ms. Hephner announced that the Trust had hired a new Executive Director, Dr. Jeffrey Cross.

II. Review and Approve the Agenda

Ray Loretto moved to approve the agenda and Larry Icerman seconded the motion. Vice-Chairperson Barbara Johnson suggested adding the 2006 grazing program as a discussion topic, and the agenda was approved as amended.

III. Approval of the Minutes of the December 16, 2005, and February 21, 2006, Public Meetings

Larry Icerman moved to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2005, and February 21, 2006 public meetings, and Barbara Johnson seconded the motion. The December 16, 2005, minutes were amended to correct the spelling of John Horning. **The motion passed unanimously as amended, with Bill Keleher abstaining on the approval of the December 16, 2005, minutes because he was not a Trustee at that time.**

IV. Introduction of the Executive Director

Chairperson Hephner introduced the Trust's new Executive Director, Jeff Cross. Dr. Cross described his educational background as including a Master's degree in zoology and a Ph.D. in fisheries. He was a fish biologist for 10 years and was in science management for another 10 years. Previously, he was Chief of Resource Management at Grand Canyon National Park and the Director of the Grand Canyon Science Center. He and his wife will live on the Preserve initially and then will look for a home in the Jemez Springs area.

V. Relocation of the Trust's Offices

Chairperson Hephner said the Board learned last year that the Trust's offices in Los Alamos were scheduled for renovation and began looking for new offices in Los Alamos, White Rock, Santa Fe, Espanola, and Bernalillo. The Board finally found suitable and affordable space in Jemez Springs, property owned by the Servants of the Paraclete. An advantage of this property is that the Trust can house seasonal staff members there, which will allow for renovation of buildings on the Preserve. Ms. Hephner thanked Los Alamos County and the Los Alamos National Laboratory for their support to date and said she looked forward to a continuing positive relationship. The Trust is enthusiastic about becoming part of the Jemez Springs community.

VI. Preserve Manager's Report

Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager, reported progress on preparations for the 2006 field season. The staff has formulated the public access program for recreation, written contracts and agreements, and prepared for engineering work to take place. Mr. Trujillo credited staff members for their hard work.

The relocation to Jemez Springs will take place through May, with the last day in Los Alamos offices being May 31, 2006. Work is underway on modifying the new offices, including installation of a high-speed communications infrastructure (i.e., a T-1 line). The main telephone number will stay the same, but the office will also have a local Jemez Springs number. The staff has let contracts for work to make public access compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Trust will also add signage to make the offices more visible.

A one-half-acre fire, the Santa Rosa fire, occurred on the Preserve on April 11, 2006. Lightning was the cause. The response by the U.S. Forest Service was immediate, which suppressed the fire within 36 hours.

Mr. Trujillo summarized the work on reconciling the possible deficits incurred in prior fiscal years attributable to the charging of invoices to incorrect accounts. Larry Icerman asked if there had been a parallel effort to eliminate unliquidated financial obligations on completed contracts. Mr. Trujillo said there was and still pending were some agreements with other agencies that had not been taken into consideration. Tracy Hephner thanked Mr. Trujillo and Xuan Liu, Accounting Technician, for their efforts in this area.

The elk lottery deadline was April 8, 2006, which to date has generated \$317,000. Lottery revenues increased by about \$31,000 compared to last year.

The Trust has contracted with a surveyor to determine accurate boundaries for the Preserve. This work will ensure proper placement of boundary fences and determine any existing encroachments on the Preserve by other landowners.

VII. Revised Fiscal Year 2006 Budget

Chairperson Hephner said the Board approved a Fiscal Year 2006 budget in September, with the understanding that anticipated Congressional recisions would require a revision. Larry Icerman explained budget numbers in three different handouts that included the approved budget, the requested revised budget, and a comparison of the two budgets.

The Board is now close for the first time to being able to track revenues and expenditures by program and activity and also to produce reliable revenue projections and cost analyses. For 2007, the Trust should be able to develop a budget prior to the start of the fiscal year. Mr. Icerman noted that the restructuring of, and revisions to, the budget had been done largely by Mr. Trujillo, Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist, and Ms. Liu, at a time when the Trust was without an Executive Director or Chief Financial Officer.

Chairperson Hephner explained that the Board was not budgeting anticipated revenues but only the annual appropriation, a one-time special appropriation, and the transportation contract authority. Mr. Icerman added that all revenues now go into the Trust's treasury account and will not be spent on ordinary operating activities. The Board is moving toward operating from non-appropriated dollars and planning for decreasing appropriations. This approach should allow the Trust to have a substantial balance in the treasury account at the end of the fiscal year.

Bob McPherson, Santa Fe, asked what would prevent Congress from looking at the treasury account balance and saying, "You really do not need the requested appropriation." Chairperson Hephner responded that this issue has come up before. The Trust has different founding legislation than a standard federal agency, which gives the Trust the authority to accrue balances in such a fund.

A member of the public asked about the special projects listed in the revised budget. Mr. Trujillo explained that the special appropriation of \$1.5 million had been broken out as special projects, including items such as infrastructure, trails, facilities, and fencing. Marty Peale, Valles Caldera Coalition Coordinator, asked about recreation spending. Mr. Trujillo said recreation expenditures are included in a number of the line items.

Asked how much was carried over from the Fiscal Year 2005 appropriations, Mr. Icerman said the staff is still trying to reconcile that figure. He expected the carryover to be near zero when the reconciliation work is completed.

Karen Kendall asked if the Trust plans to continue using two sets of books. Chairperson Hephner responded that the Board was still deciding what the ideal system would be and looking at all

possibilities. Mr. Icerman said that in the future reconciliation of the books should be able to be accomplished regularly. Ms. Hephner explained that the Trust's appropriation comes through the U.S. Forest Service, so the Trust's books have to be reconciled with the Forest Service's books.

Jim Rickman, Los Alamos, noted the office rent and utilities of \$95,000 and asked what the savings will be by moving to Jemez Springs. Mr. Trujillo said the Trust has been paying about \$17 per square foot. In Jemez Springs, the cost is \$4 per square foot, and the site offers more flexibility, plus housing for staff. He said the present facilities in Los Alamos might have been available after the remodeling is completed but at a much higher cost than the present rent.

Larry Icerman made a motion to approve the revised budget for Fiscal Year 2006, which was seconded by Raymond Loretto, and passed unanimously.

VIII. Stewardship Action for Interim Opportunities for Overnight Camping

Dennis Trujillo asked for authorization from the Board to continue planning an interim program for overnight camping on the Preserve. Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator, explained that presently there are no camping facilities on the Preserve, and an interim program is needed that allows some camping for researchers, contractors working on the Preserve, educational activities, fire management, and other work. An interim program would also contribute information to a long-term plan.

The Stewardship Action proposes an interim camping program on the Preserve that might be limited to trailers and recreational vehicles in existing parking areas, camping in some of the Preserve's previously disturbed areas or near developed facilities, or some back-country camping. The staff will do an Environmental Assessment with the responsible official being Mr. Trujillo. The planning costs are estimated to be \$5,000 or less.

Larry Icerman made a motion to authorize further planning under the proposed Stewardship Action, which was seconded by John Caid.

Chairperson Hephner asked if under the interim program camping proposals would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Trujillo responded that part of the process is to come up with alternatives and determine how to evaluate requests. Jody Benson asked if this action was part of a comprehensive, long-term plan. Marie Rodriguez pointed out that this is a short-term, interim action. Ms. Benson asked the Board to keep in mind stars and viewsapes and to provide details of the proposed action to the public.

Following this discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

IX. Stewardship Action for Borrow Pit Expansion

Marie Rodriguez asked for authorization from the board to continue planning for the expansion of Borrow Pit #2, located in the northwest part of Preserve. The pit would be expanded from 2.6 to 4.3 acres to supply materials necessary to complete the planned road work. Organic material and topsoil would be retained for remediation after the gravel is used for road maintenance. The

estimated planning costs are \$5,000 or less and Mr. Trujillo would serve as the responsible official.

Ray Loretto made a motion to authorize further planning under the proposed Stewardship Action, which was seconded by Larry Icerman.

John Caid asked if the staff had looked at alternative sites or other pits. Mr. Trujillo pointed out that the estimated costs to haul material from off site range from \$600,000 to \$750,000.

Following this discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

X. Recreation Opportunities for 2006

Dennis Trujillo explained that many of the recreation activities were on the Trust's Web page. The fishing program starts on May 11. Hiking starts on May 19 and ends September 23. Some hikes will be guided. The staff is working on a contract for providing wagon rides, which could start in May. The equestrian program runs from May 26 to September 24. Wildlife viewing tours, which have been very popular, begin on May 23. Other special activities and events include night sky viewing, fly-fishing clinics, mountain biking, and archery. Seminars and workshops include survival, hunting, ranching, fly tying, birding, art, and photography. Reservations for all activities can be made through the Web site, which now averages 500 inquiries a day, double last year's activity level.

Betsy Barnett, Sierra Club, asked about the status of spontaneous hiking. Mr. Trujillo said access is a problem on the interior of the Preserve; however, two free trails are available to hikers without reservations.

Chairperson Hephner asked the staff to present a proposal to begin comprehensive recreation planning at the next Board meeting.

Brooks White asked about the impact of the drought on recreation and what would happen if the adjacent national forest becomes closed to public access. Mr. Trujillo said that even with fire restrictions, the Preserve could still provide limited access; however, if Santa Fe National Forest were closed, the Preserve would mostly likely take a similar action.

Hillard Howard described complaints that the Board is only interested in cows and the public does not have comparable access to the Preserve. He proposed more volunteer interface in towns like Santa Fe and Los Alamos. Chairperson Hephner said that grazing on the Preserve is only the focus of the press. For example, last year there were 700 head of cattle on the Preserve and 10,000 visitors.

Jody Benson pointed out that a number of people in Los Alamos were instrumental in the acquisition of the Valles Caldera and envisioned something new in land management, namely, science-based adaptive management. They also envisioned greater public access. She was critical of the few opportunities for volunteers and the limited activities for recreation. Chairperson

Hephner responded that Trustees take their charge, as spelled out in the legislation, very seriously. The Board is trying to do exactly what is called for by the legislation.

Ken Kutac asked if the Trust could offer an annual pass of some type. Ms. Hephner responded that this concept is being explored.

Marty Peale noted that the Trust is working on its fourth National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) level document but none yet for recreation. She said that was a source of frustration for many people.

XI. Grazing Program for 2006

Chairperson Hephner explained that after much discussion, the Board decided in December 2005 to adopt an interim grazing program for steers in 2006. The Trust prepared a request for operators to provide steers up to 1,500 approximately 450-pound steers. Because there has been little rain or snow, the range conditions have continued to deteriorate. A range readiness report will be completed by May 1, on which a decision regarding implementation of the 2006 grazing program will be based.

Anthony Armijo, Jemez Pueblo, asked what the response was to the announcement. Hephner said she had gotten about seven calls from interested parties in Clovis, Cuba, elsewhere in northern New Mexico, and out of state. Mr. Armijo asked about the selection process. Ms. Hephner responded that the Trust would invite operators to submit applications, which would be evaluated in terms of specific criteria.

Marty Peale asked what the budget was for managing the 2006 grazing program. Ms. Hephner said that was difficult to answer at present because of uncertain contract obligations.

David Ortiz, Nambe, noted that he had participated in the cow-calf and heifer programs for the last three years, which were very beneficial. Because extreme drought poses a hardship for farmers and ranchers in northern New Mexico, he urged the Board to consider any program that was feasible involving area ranchers. He noted that local ranchers also did their part to support the purchase of the Preserve.

Joseph Toya, Jemez Pueblo Lt. Governor, said he has participated in the previous grazing programs, which were good programs. He thanked the Board for giving local cattle growers this opportunity. If a grazing program suitable for local ranchers became possible, Jemez Pueblo would be willing to help sponsor the program and could possibly provide volunteer staff support.

A member of the public pointed out that Sandoval County, which previously had 22,000 head of cattle and now has only 10,000. The Trust's grazing program is an opportunity to help some of these northern New Mexico ranches. Mr. Parmenter responded that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) addressing forage management, which is in progress, has an economic analysis component, and ranchers are encouraged to submit their comments during this process.

Larry Armijo, Jemez Pueblo Livestock Association, said the association members appreciated being participants in the Trust's grazing programs in the past and asked to be considered for any future programs. Consequently, the Association had made substantial gains in improving its rangeland and herds that would not have been possible otherwise.

Marty Peale asked the Board if anyone had considered distributing cattle differently so that a cow-calf program might be profitable. Ms. Hephner responded that the EIS would investigate alternatives. The Board had discussed running steers to reduce previous financial losses experienced by the grazing program and to learn about managing different kinds of livestock.

XII. Public Comments

Jim Rickman, Los Alamos, expressed his disappointment in moving the Trust's offices to Jemez Springs. In spite of the cost differences, the Los Alamos community had supported the Trust from its inception and Los Alamos County provided some initial operational funding. The Los Alamos community was a good source of volunteers and support. He was concerned about the remote location of Jemez Springs and the potential impact on the Trust's programs and volunteers.

XIII. Adjournment

Larry Icerman moved to adjourn, and Raymond Loretto seconded the motion.

Chairperson Hephner adjourned the meeting at 8:35 pm.

Approved on September 29, 2006.

Respectively submitted by Larry Icerman, Secretary.