

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – September 29, 2006
Valles Caldera Trust Offices
Jemez Springs, New Mexico

Board Members Present

Tracy Hephner, Chairperson
Barbara Johnson, Vice-Chairperson
Larry Icerman, Secretary
Jim Gosz
Bill Keleher
Darlene Koontz
Raymond Loretto
Gilbert Zepeda

Staff Present

Jeff Cross, Executive Director
Jamie Civitello, Archaeology Crew Chief
Chris Cope, Geographic Information System Technician
Xuan Liu, Accounting Technician
Karen Montgomery, Biological Field technician
Martin Pacheco, Outdoor Recreation Specialist
Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator
Ricci Soto, Archaeological Technician
Ana Steffen, Acting Cultural Resources Coordinator
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Tracy Hephner called the meeting to order at 10:15 am and welcomed the Board members and guests.

II. Review and Approve the Agenda

Larry Icerman moved to approve the agenda and Raymond Loretto seconded the motion. Barbara Johnson suggested adding Los Amigos de Valles Caldera under as a discussion item under New Business. **The agenda was approved as amended.**

III. Approval of the Minutes of the April 20, 2006, Public Meeting

Larry Icerman made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 20, 2006, public meeting, which was seconded by Darlene Koontz, and was passed unanimously.

IV. Board Business

Chairperson Hephner explained that the Trust occasionally needs to make decisions between public meetings. For this reason, the Board authorizes future Executive Sessions, as needed. **Jim**

Gosz made a motion to authorize a to be called if necessary Executive Session and Raymond Loretto seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairperson Hephner reported that last year the timing of the election of officers was changed to September from January in order to align the election with the Trust's fiscal year, which begins in October. The Board elected officers during its work session. Larry Icerman reported the results: Tracy Hephner was elected Chairperson; Bill Keleher, Vice-Chairperson; and Raymond Loretto, Secretary.

V. Trust Operations

Executive Director Jeff Cross announced that the Trust had hired four new employees: Debbie Bogus, Chief Administrative Officer; Roberta Pantoha, Administrative Assistant; Bob Wilson, Assistant Accountant; Mick Trujillo, Volunteer Coordinator.

Jeff Cross also presented a preliminary budget report for FY06. Approximately 35% of the appropriation of \$3.6 million was spent on administration, 36% on Preserve operations, and 19% on science operations. The Trust received \$1.4 million for special projects, and will probably have some carryover. Final figures will be available in mid-October. The Preserve programs had revenues of about \$577,000 in FY06.

Regarding the FY07 budget, Congress has not yet passed the appropriations bill, so the Trust will likely be required to operate under a continuing resolution based on the FY06 appropriation. As a result, the proposed budget for FY07 is based on FY06 and includes \$889,826 for general administration; \$90,000 for Trustee activities; \$285,920 for rent, utilities, information technology, the website, and communications; \$1,394,436 for Preserve operations; and \$959,818 for science operations. Chairperson Hephner said the Board recognizes there could be some Congressional recisions.

Larry Icerman made a motion to approve the proposed budget for FY07 subject to possible changes resulting from final Congressional action, which was seconded by Jim Gosz, and was passed unanimously.

VI. Existing Programs

Preserve Manager Dennis Trujillo reported on several projects. The Preserve entrance upgrade will include left-turn and right-turn lanes off Highway 4, as well as improved signs, a kiosk, and removal of a berm. The Trust staff is working with an engineering firm to design the upgrade, and a contract has been signed to begin construction in May 2007. The project will not only ease access to the Preserve but will bring the entrance into compliance with highway safety standards.

Barbara Johnson asked about the anticipated completion date. Mr. Trujillo responded that the work should be completed within a year. Gilbert Zepeda asked how visitors would enter and exit the Preserve during the construction. Mr. Trujillo responded that access would be maintained throughout the construction period.

The Trust received a special appropriation in FY06 to upgrade facilities on the Preserve. As a precursor to any upgrading of facilities, a Facilities Assessment Report was completed. The current replacement value of the buildings is \$5.5 million, and about \$1.2 million is needed for deferred maintenance. The current annual maintenance allocation is \$20,000 to \$30,000. Major issues include site drainage, structural stability, access, and safety. Safety concerns include wiring, plumbing, asbestos, environmental hazards, and rodents. The Trust will use this assessment to guide renovation, repair, alteration, or demolition of buildings in the future.

Four earthen stock tanks on the Preserve are creating resource issues because the spillways were not properly designed. The Trust staff is working with an engineer to assess current conditions and make recommendations for repairs. The tanks could be used watershed restoration, recreation, fire control, range management, and even fishing.

This summer, heavy rains impeded progress on upgrading the VC02 road. Work was done on four miles of the road, including new culverts and new drainage, but additional work is still needed. Staff members plan to develop a Stewardship Action Proposal addressing road system improvement. The road inventory should be finished during 2007. Jim Gosz asked if many of the roads were former logging roads, and Mr. Trujillo responded that they were. Some roads are being reclaimed successfully and will not be included in the inventory.

Ana Stephan, Acting Cultural Resources Coordinator, provided an update on the research, inventory, and monitoring programs. Staff members are currently finishing the geology mapping effort. This year, as part of the cultural resource inventory, the staff surveyed 1,150 acres, including 650 acres in the post-burn area, and 24 miles of roads. The total area surveyed to date is 5,240 acres, or nearly 6% of Preserve. Thirty-four new archeological sites were documented, most of which contain lithic and obsidian artifacts.

Staff members collected data before and immediately after the Valle Toledo prescribed fire and throughout the season and will compare the three sets of data. This study will provide useful baseline information that can be used for several large valleys that are suitable for controlled burns in the future.

A stream study performed by multiple federal agencies rated the condition of streams based on hydrology, soils, and vegetation. Seventy-three percent of 52 miles of streams on the Preserve were functioning properly, up from 61% in 2000. The 4% that were nonfunctioning in 2000 are now classified as functioning properly.

Jeff Cross reported that during the “Drive and Discover” event on August 26, the Preserve hosted 1,444 vehicles with 3,746 passengers. The plan was to be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., but because of traffic buildup on Highway 4, the Preserve opened at 8:15 a.m. Traffic continued through the day, prompting staff to close the gates at 1 p.m. with an estimated 500 vehicles still on Highway 4. Trust staff and volunteers provided 1,500 handouts, including information, a map, and a litter bag. The Preserve also had set up nine education and interpretive stations. Based on zip codes collected from the first 433 cars, 90% of the visitors were from Los Alamos, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Jemez Springs, or Española.

Wet, muddy roads precluded having two, one-way loops as initially planned, so visitors drove only to the San Antonio station and back. There was some impact from vehicles pulling out to pass or turning around. Some of these areas will recover quickly and others will be repaired. There was some compaction from hikers. Overall impacts were slight. There was no evidence of off-road traffic or impact on water quality and virtually no litter. Visitors turned in 35 lithic pieces that were improperly collected. Bill Keleher asked what artifacts were turned in. Ana Stephan responded they consisted of obsidian flakes and debris.

Among 216 responses to a survey, 33% of the visitors rated their experience as “exceptional” or “interesting,” and 19% said “poor.” The leading comment was, “Do it again.”

Chairperson Hephner thanked the Trust staff and volunteers for the huge, united effort to put on the open house.

Chairperson Hephner explained that the Trust’s approach to forage management and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance is to look at all users and all kinds of forage. A Forest Service team engaged by the Trust produced a detailed assessment of the Preserve’s forage resources, but the Board realized there were other issues to be considered before determining a forage management strategy, such as a forest stands assessment and prescribed burns.

Ms. Hephner added that the Preserve had managed a successful interim cattle program with a limited number of animals in the past, although no grazing program was offered during 2006 because of the dry conditions at the beginning of the season. She asked if the Trust could continue the interim program with a supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA). Dennis Trujillo responded that it would be allowable within the constraints of the current EA. Barbara Johnson said the Trust should start planning for a new EA to replace the existing one.

Barbara Johnson made a motion to start work on a new EA for the livestock program, which was seconded by Jim Gosz.

Barbara Johnson said she had never liked the existing EA, which limits the areas on the Preserve for grazing and effectively forces the livestock to graze in riparian areas. Grazing larger areas of the Preserve would lessen the impact on the riparian areas. Jim Gosz suggested proceeding with a new EA, but utilizing the present EA in the event a new one is not completed in time. Ray Loretto asked if a new EA would expand carrying capacity. Mr. Trujillo responded that a new EA would look at a larger area, allow analysis of the Preserve as a whole, and re-examine carrying capacity. Ms. Hephner asked the staff to prepare a scope of work, looking at NEPA compliance and use of forage in grasslands and upland meadows by all forage consumers.

Chairperson Hephner called the question. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. New Programs

Chairperson Hephner explained that the Board had previously asked the staff to prepare a document to move ahead with recreation planning. The staff put in a tremendous effort to

develop a detailed Proposed Stewardship Action, which was completed on September 25; however, some Board members had inadequate time to thoroughly review the material. Chairperson Hephner asked the Board its preference in discussing the Proposed Stewardship Action. Bill Keleher said he was not prepared to discuss the document at this time.

Mr. Keleher made a motion to table further discussion, which was seconded by Larry Icerman, and was passed unanimously.

Ms. Hephner thanked the staff for the completeness of their work and ensured the staff that by this action the Board was not failing to honor its commitment to move forward with recreation planning. But, that the material deserves a thorough review before any decisions are made.

Barbara Johnson explained that the Board had discussed previously the data needed to move forward including, for example, a public survey, a visual-use survey, socioeconomic and market analyses, site suitability, and a sensory resource assessment (i.e., view sheds, soundscapes, and places of impact). Gilbert Zepeda suggested that the Board and staff engage the public in a way that obtains a broad understanding of their interests before initiating any NEPA steps. Finalizing proposed actions before entertaining public input can generate unnecessary friction. Darlene Koontz agreed.

VIII. New Business

Chairperson Hephner announced that a nonprofit corporation, Los Amigos de Valles Caldera, had been established, and she commended Barbara Johnson for her efforts in this regard. Ms. Johnson said Articles of Incorporation had been filed and the Bylaws were approved at the first board meeting. The organization will support the Preserve through outreach and education and by helping the Trust become financially sustainable. The Board of Los Amigos is initiating a fund-raising program. Ms. Johnson encouraged meeting attendees to become members. The initial Board members of Los Amigos are Doug Fraser, Chair, Greg Kendall, Vice-Chair, and Larry Icerman, Secretary/Treasurer, Steve Stoddard, and Barbara Johnson.

Chairperson Hephner thanked Barbara Johnson and Larry Icerman for extraordinary service to this Board and to the Trust in establishing Los Amigos, as well as other contributions during their term.

IX. Public Comments

Betsy Barnett said she agreed with the decision to table the discussion of the recreation plan. Some agency processes do not involve the public early enough. She proposed forming a task force with public members who would help develop a plan, instead of the Board and staff delivering a plan and then asking for comments.

Larry Armijo, Jemez Pueblo Livestock Association, asked the Board to continue to support local livestock producers and to remember the needs of tribal members. Grazing on the Preserve has been a tremendous help in the past and the Association would like opportunities to do so in the future.

Bill Huey, Valles Caldera Coalition member, expressed concern that Los Amigos could represent some sort of conflict between the public interests in the welfare of the Valles Caldera. He suggested making reports available at the Trust office instead of posting them on the website. He also mentioned that he was not receiving the Board's newsletter. Chairperson Hephner promised he would be added to the mailing list.

Marty Peale, Valles Caldera Coalition Coordinator, asked if the Board would clarify the status of any Executive Sessions that were not announced ahead of time. Chairperson Hephner responded that in the past, the Board was in the habit of authorizing future Executive Sessions in case they were needed between scheduled public meetings. There is presently no intention to hold an Executive Session before the next public meeting. If the Board does hold an Executive Session, the results of the meeting would be reported at the subsequent public meeting.

Ms. Peale questioned the wisdom of the Open House. Darlene Koontz expressed her comfort with the decision to go forward with the Open House. It was a one-time event that served as an experiment. This type of program falls within the Board's decision-making purview.

Ms. Peale observed that the road restoration work looks like reconstruction rather than maintenance. The work done on the VC01 and VC02 roads was done under a categorical exclusion as road maintenance. The NEPA procedures view reconstruction and repair differently than maintenance so the work should have required an EA. Darlene Koontz responded by referring to her 26 years of experience in working under NEPA and noting that the rules are different for existing roads. This work was not new construction, but merely improving existing roads.

An attendee asked if a volunteer could come to headquarters and get information to post in public places. She also noted that the Preserve staff used to post maps of trails. However, the website does not work for everybody. Dennis Trujillo responded that copies maps would be available in the future. He advised her that volunteer coordinator Mick Trujillo can be reached at 661-3333. The Trust is planning a volunteer office in Los Alamos and would notify the *Los Alamos Monitor* when the office was open.

Tom Ribe, Valles Caldera Coalition member, said he was concerned about the lack of public involvement in the management of the Valles Caldera and urged the Board to allow more time for public feedback, including listening sessions.

Gilbert Sandoval, resident of Jemez Springs, said there should be more time allotted for public comments or make time separate times from the normal public meetings available, such scoping meetings.

A member of the public who lives near Jemez Springs said the Preserve entrance needed to be addressed a long time ago. He also said it a long-distance call for him to reach the Trust's office and suggested the office have a local line.

John Garcia, Mayor of Jemez Springs, welcomed the Valles Caldera offices to the village and said he would be happy to assist the Trust in any way.

Sarah Cobb, Congressman Tom Udall's office, said public input is the cornerstone for the Valles Caldera legislation and the Preserve.

Marty Peale asked when the results of the Forest Service's forage assessment work would be available. Chairperson Hephner said a presentation would be scheduled for the next public meeting. Barbara Johnson added that the Board just received a draft, which will be peer reviewed. Following revisions, the report would be available to the public.

Marty Peale asked if the Trust planned to engage the public in preparing the State-of-the-Preserve report. Barbara Johnson explained that the procedures called for a report on activities and impacts, as well as a five-year forecast. The State of the Preserve is a planning tool for the Trust, not a NEPA document.

X. Adjournment

Chairperson Hephner asked for a motion to adjourn. Ray Loretto so moved, which was seconded by Jim Gosz. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Approved on December 7, 2006.

Respectfully submitted by Larry Icerman, Secretary.