

**Valles Caldera Trust**  
**Minutes of the Public Meeting – December 7, 2006**  
Marriott Courtyard  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Board members present:

Tracy Hephner, chair  
Bill Keleher, vice chair  
Barbara Johnson  
John Caid  
Raymond Loretto

Staff present:

Jeffrey Cross, Executive Director  
Debbie Boggess, Administrative Officer  
Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist  
Rob Dixon, Recreation Coordinator  
Marie Rodriguez, Resource Coordinator  
Anna Steffen, Acting Cultural Resources Coordinator  
Pam Dale, Personnel Management  
Xuan Liu, Accounting Technician

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Tracy Hephner called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and welcomed attendees. She explained that the Board had revised the published agenda and that the new items were in italics. She announced two sign-in sheets – one for the meeting and one for anyone who wanted to receive information from the Trust. She also pointed out that background information was available for subjects under discussion. Hephner announced that the Board would have a new member, Dan Jiron, Santa Fe National Forest Supervisor.

**Asked to approve the agenda, Board member Bill Keleher made the motion to approve and John Caid seconded. The motion was approved. The Board also approved the minutes of the September 29, 2006 meeting, after John Caid made the motion and Raymond Loretto seconded. The Board approved an executive session, should it be needed. Vice chairperson Barbara Johnson moved, and John Caid seconded.**

II. Board Business

Hephner said three trustees' terms will end in January 2007 – Barbara Johnson, Larry Icerman and John Caid. She had received no word on new appointments.

Barbara Johnson provided an update on Los Amigos de Valles Caldera. The organizers submitted paperwork to the IRS and held their third Board meeting. They will be sending letters inviting people to become members. The base membership is \$35; or \$50 for families. The purpose of the friends group is to support the Preserve and work with the Trust to fund projects that improve the Preserve.

III. Operations

Debbie Boggess, administrative officer, reported the Trust closed fiscal 2006 with about \$600,000 remaining (primarily from special appropriations), which will be carried over into 2007. She notified the Board that the Trust was on a continuing resolution going into fiscal 2007 because Congress had not passed several appropriation bills. She anticipated being in a continuing resolution until mid-February or even the end of the fiscal year. In response to a question, Executive Director Jeff Cross explained that the Trust uses the National Business Center for its accounting functions and that appropriations come through the US Forest Service. The continuing resolution means the Trust receives appropriations for limited periods of time, which affects planning.

#### IV. Existing Programs

##### **State of the Preserve**

Hephner explained that the Board is working on the State of the Preserve, a report required by the Trust's NEPA procedures. The report is a review of where the Trust has been and where it might be going, she said.

Cross said that NEPA procedures require the Trust to produce the report at least every five years; the first report is due in August 2007. It looks at actions, activities and impacts; it looks into the future to project reasonably foreseeable actions. The report will look out 10 to 15 years. It's not a management plan, he said; it doesn't prescribe actions on the ground. The Trust is not required to go through a NEPA process with this report. It's more of a strategic plan for the Trust. The Board will use it to provide guidance to staff.

The document is presently in draft form. It provides three proposed alternatives – high, medium and low levels of investment. It's structured in a way that will be familiar to people who participate in planning with federal agencies. After January 1, the staff will distribute the draft and seek public input through meetings and workshops. We will do whatever it takes to engage the public, Cross said.

##### **Preserve Manager's Report on 2006 Recreation Programs**

Rob Dixon, recreation coordinator, reported recreation accomplishments in 2006. In addition to the core activities (elk hunting, fishing, wagon and sleigh rides, hiking, tours, equestrian trail riding, skiing and snowshoeing) there were several special events.

The challenges in 2006 included lack of snow for the winter season and vacant staff positions. Several positions were filled by acting personnel and some positions went unfilled. In May and June, the Trust moved its office from Los Alamos to Jemez Springs. As a result, summer activities were not well publicized. Two continuing issues are lack of overnight camping and limited parking. The Preserve can handle 150 cars; with parking attendants, it can handle 300.

Dixon reported that the number of participants and revenue were greatest for elk hunting, followed by fishing. He also reported the elk harvest and noted that there had been no accidents for either staff or hunters. It's a safe program, he said. Total visitation in 2006 was 9,938; total revenue from recreation was \$502,932.

The core events will be unchanged in 2007. Staff will add some new special events. He said that the core events will be posted online by the end of January; all special events will be online by the end of February. A calendar of events will be on the web site by the beginning of the year.

Hephner thanked staff members for stretching to cover vacant positions. Asked by an attendee why there were unfilled positions, she responded that when the previous executive director resigned, the people he brought in also resigned. The recreation coordinator left for another position. The Board decided to conduct its own nationwide search for a new executive director. And the Board was not fully staffed because appointments had not been made. The Board was reluctant to hire key staff members without having input from an executive director. For that reason, the Board had an acting finance administrator and an acting executive director.

### **Preserve Scientist's Report on 2006 Monitoring Program**

Preserve scientist Bob Parmenter reported on the Preserve's programs.

Climate. The Preserve's weather stations, located in the major valleys, recorded the year's unusual weather – the second driest winter in recorded history followed by a record monsoon season. In 2005, the Preserve had a good snowpack. Parmenter said that Valle San Antonio seems to be drier than Valle Grande. Soil moisture on the Preserve reflects changes in the weather.

Water Quality. Remote sensors have been measuring temperature, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, pH and turbidity. San Antonio Creek has shown a typical pattern. The East Fork of the Jemez River exceeded 23°C on many days during the summer. After the federal government acquired the property, water temperature have dropped by 20% in five years. Scientists monitoring trout numbers have found that brown trout and rainbow trout populations are stable, which indicates the fishing program has had no impact. Numbers of fathead minnows are stable; the longnose dace and Rio Grande chub numbers are improving.

Elk Herd Monitoring. Cow-calf ratios are at 26%. About one-third of the cows are too old to reproduce. According to the state Department of Game and Fish, 40% is a normal ratio.

Coyote Study. Twenty-two coyotes have radio collars. Trust scientists track them to determine pack territory, location of dens and foraging habits. Blood tests indicate they are all positive for plague and parvo.

Forage Utilization. This was a banner year for forage because of the rainfall. On average, 19% of forage in sample plots was used by elk, insects and rodents. There were only 200 cattle on the Preserve this year.

Hiking Trails. Staff has used photo-monitoring of hiking trails since 2002 and will go back next year and photograph in the same locations to assess use and trail damage. They will also look for non-native plants.

### **NMSU Report on 2006 Steer Research**

Dr. Manny Encinias, New Mexico State University, conducted grazing research during the 2006 growing season with a group of scientists. They were interested in animal and plant responses to the controlled burn in the Valle Toledo. Burns are very much a part of traditional ranching at

Valles Caldera. According to some old timers, the Baca Ranch used fire to clear out vegetation not used by animals. Researchers wanted to know if prescribed burning improved the production and nutritional quality of cool season grasses on high elevation meadows, if it improved the diet quality of wild and domestic animals, and if it improved the performance of cattle.

They began studying 900 acres in the Valle Grande and 900 acres in the Toledo and ended up looking at 2,000 acres in each. To determine quality of forage, they clipped in 243 locations before cattle were turned out to graze (June 2006) and after the cattle were removed (October 4). They sampled in burned and unburned areas. Each week they took 10-15 fresh fecal samples from elk and cattle to estimate the quality of their diet. They obtained body weight of steers before and after grazing.

Even during the height of drought there was adequate forage to sustain 100 head in either valle. The Preserve could have had 472 steers in unburned areas and 301 in burned areas without affecting forage health. There was plenty of grass, Encinias said, even though there was not a lot of growth. Between July and September, there was a 2.5% increase in forage quality, measured by the crude protein. Cattle and elk had a higher quality diet until September. Cattle gained more weight – an average of 13 pounds – in burned areas compared to unburned areas. The additional 13 pounds for 100 steers was worth \$1,277 on the market.

One attendee asked what a typical weight gain was in the Jemez Mountains. Encinias said he didn't have good information on that. Another attendee asked if the expense of prescribed burns offset the weight gains in cattle. Hephner said it was expensive to do controlled burns on federal land. For private land, the difference in weight gain could pay for the cost of a burn. An attendee asked if the Board consults old timers when making decisions. Hephner said the Board tries to mine them for information. Gilbert Sandoval, of Jemez Springs, pointed out that grazing enhancement was not the only value of prescribed burns. Forest and forage health is an important consideration, and so is fuel reduction as a preventive measure for forest fires.

Hephner thanked Encinias and the NMSU students who worked very hard. She also thanked Randy McKee who oversaw program.

### **TEAMS Forage Assessment Report**

TEAMS is an enterprise group from the Forest Service that has been conducting a study. Cross said the last peer review of the report has been completed, and staff asked for some additional statistical analysis. The report will be completed in January 2007 and it will be posted on the Web site.

### V. New Programs

#### **Action item: Proposed stewardship action for public access and use management plan**

Cross asked for authorization to collect data and information (Phase 1) to support planning (Phase 2) to develop programs, facilities and infrastructure for public access and use of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. During the public meeting on April 20, 2006, the Board directed staff to prepare a stewardship proposal for recreation programs. Cross explained that infrastructure development on the Preserve had been limited to roads. The Trust use temporary facilities for public visitation, which has grown from about 200 visitors a year before government acquisition to nearly 10,000 a year presently.

The first phase will collect data and information; the second phase will develop the plan. In Phase 1, which will take four or five months, staff will hold series of workshops. During Phase 2, the Trust will follow a formal NEPA planning process and consider alternative levels of investment to support various levels of visitor capacity and programs. The Preserve has been operating under interim programs since acquisition and needs to develop long-term programs.

**Barbara Johnson moved to authorize the collection of data and information to support planning to develop programs, facilities and infrastructure for public access and use of the Preserve for recreation, education and other public purposes. John Caid seconded.**

Board member Bill Keleher asked if dates were set for the workshops. Cross responded that the sessions will be professionally facilitated, and he hoped to put out an RFP in the next few weeks and hoped to get authorization to use carryover funds. As soon as the meetings are scheduled, they'll be publicized. John Caid asked if the workshops would be held in different towns, and Cross said they would be.

Staff member Marie Rodriguez explained that workshops would take place in four different locations, including the possibility of a final meeting at the Preserve. The use of an outside facilitator will enable the Board and staff to work with the public. Typically, under NEPA an agency will describe what it's planning to do, offer some alternatives, get feedback from the public and then make a decision. This approach will develop proposed alternatives, which can be analyzed for impacts, as it seeks suggestions from the public.

Caid asked if four meetings were enough. Cross responded that they would do four and see if that was enough because the cost of meetings will not be trivial. Rodriguez added that meetings would likely be held in Albuquerque, an undetermined location in northern New Mexico, Jemez Springs, and the Preserve. Board member Raymond Loretto suggested that the staff make a presentation before the 19 Pueblo Council during an upcoming meeting and ask for their input.

Susan Linnell, of the Valles Caldera Coalition, said if the meetings weighed only predetermined activities, it would curb the creative process. Cross responded that nothing is predetermined. Betsy Barnett said hiking is a small part of the recreation picture and it's very controlled. Preserve visitors want more access and less controlled access. Rodriguez said that's the kind of information they expected to hear in the meetings. Faith Garfield said if the process is collaborative, if the facilitators are neutral, and the Board is committed to getting feedback, she was glad to see it happen. She hoped the process would not drag on without decisions. A Preserve volunteer said the equestrian program has been successful and should be expanded. She would like to see cow clinics, cattle drives, and horse clinics, as well as increased riding accessibility. Hephner responded that those were exactly the kinds of things they wanted to hear in the workshops.

Marty Peale, of the Valles Caldera Coalition, asked how to distinguish between these public access programs and the cattle and timber thinning programs. Cross said that in his experience, those were classical differences between access and administrative use. Access for forest thinning, search and rescue, and fire fighting are treated as administrative access and use.

**The motion passed.**

**Action item: Proposed stewardship action for allocation and use of forage and management of associated structures**

Hephner explained that the TEAMS study assessed forage and its use. It was a bigger undertaking than just looking at grasses because it also included browse and timbered areas. The Preserve has been operating under an Environmental Assessment (EA) for grazing, which has been supplemented several times. It is time to develop a new EA for forage management.

**Board member Bill Keleher moved to authorize continued planning for the allocation and use of forage for commercial and public purposes and the management of associated infrastructure. Raymond Loretto seconded.**

Peale asked how the Board could do this before the State of the Preserve was completed. Cross responded that the TEAMS report provides reliable estimates of available forage. Moving ahead would actually help inform the State of the Preserve, he said. The two processes will inform each other.

A Sierra Club representative asked if there was a timeline. Cross said staff had been authorized to begin a recreation plan and were now talking about the public process on the State of the Preserve report. There would be another public process on forage. The Preserve has a grazing program for 2007 based on an interim EA, but now has great deal more information. He expects to have the new EA completed for the 2008 season.

A representative for the Western Environmental Law Center observed that the Trust is proceeding with three plans at the same time. For the sake of holistic management, he wondered if it would be possible to do it in one process. Cross responded that under NEPA, they have to look at relationships among the plans. The WELC representative also asked if the State of the Preserve would be integrated with the environmental analyses. Cross responded that the Trust is an experiment in public land management. The State of the Preserve will allow Trust management to look programs and make course corrections along the way. A conventional management plan would delay action by several years.

**The motion passed.**

**Spring Turkey Hunt**

Cross reported that in October the state Department of Game and Fish authorized a turkey hunt for 2007 and that staff was working on a proposal to be posted on the Web site for comment. There will be a public meeting in the Trust offices in January. He hopes to have a hunt in April-May 2007 and needs to look at compliance and logistics issues.

Ilse Bleck asked what the estimated turkey population was. Cross said the Game and Fish estimate is 300-500, which fluctuates because turkeys only spend part of the year on the Preserve. Susan Linnell asked what percentage of hunting permits were granted to bow hunters and rifle hunters. Mick Trujillo responded that there were 12 archery permits and 60 rifle permits for elk hunting. Cow elk permits were all rifle.

VI. Public Comment

Elva Busch, of the Santa Fe Garden Club, asked how the Trust communicates with the public besides through the Web site. Hephner responded that there is an email list. The Trust also sends press releases and a quarterly newsletter. Betsy Barnett said she was disappointed in the strategic planning document. Greg Kendall said he hoped workshops would be held in Los Alamos, where many Preserve volunteers live.

A member of the public observed that not everyone will be happy with what's going on at Preserve. Some people want to see more cattle or more hikes. He said that the Trust needs to emphasize limited access in its marketing.

Tom Ribe said that in the two Board meetings he had attended, two Board members were absent at both. He wondered if they were participating in the work of the Board. Hephner responded that the two missing members, who are experienced federal land managers, had been a tremendous asset to the Board as ex-officio members. They made an outstanding effort to be at every meeting, she said.

A member of the public asked if the federal Wildlife Services could come to the Preserve and slaughter wildlife, such as coyotes or mountain lions, considered a burden to a sector of the economy. Board member Barbara Johnson responded that the original Board made a decision to have no predator control. Wildlife Services had never approached the Trust. Hephner stated that the Preserve is officially predator friendly and is studying the effects of predators on wildlife.

A member of the public asked what was happening with timber. Bob Parmenter said the timber program is not developed, but staff will explore work with small companies to use the wood. There have been no discussions about sawmill timber. Board member Bill Keleher said only a few small stands were of commercial interest, but they were separate, isolated and transportation costs are high. So they are of limited economic value. He said 80% of the Preserve has been logged. The Preserve has worked with Jemez Pueblo to do thinning. Staff member Marie Rodriguez said staff is in the process of collecting field data and using the information to look at growth and yield, as well as management. Like much of west, the Preserve's forests are at risk for catastrophic fire and insect infestations.

A member of the public said the way the stewardship action proposals are worded appear that one use of the Preserve is preferred over another. He said the Board risks alienating the public by claiming administrative use rather than a holistic approach. He said he appreciated John Caid's question about whether four meetings were enough.

## VI. Adjournment

Board member Raymond Loretto made a motion for adjournment, and John Caid seconded. Chairperson Hephner adjourned the meeting at 4 p.m.