

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – June 20, 2007
Best Western Hilltop House
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Board members present:

Tracy Hephner, chair
Stephen Henry
Dan Jiron
Bill Keleher
Darlene Koontz
Raymond Loretto
James Range

Staff present:

Jeffrey Cross, Executive Director
Debbie Boggess, Administrative Officer
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager
Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist
Rob Dixon, IT and Recreation Manager
Marie Rodriguez, Resource Coordinator
Berta Pantoja, Administrative Assistant

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Tracy Hephner called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and welcomed attendees.

Approval of Agenda

Hephner asked the Board for approval of the agenda. **It was moved and seconded, and the agenda was approved.**

Approval of Minutes

Hephner asked that minutes of the March 1, 2007 meeting be approved. **Member Raymond Loretto moved and member Bill Keleher seconded the motion to approve the minutes; the motion passed.**

Approval of Executive Session

Hephner asked the Board to approve an executive session, should one be needed. **Darlene Koontz moved and Bill Keleher seconded. The motion passed.**

II. Board Business

Hephner introduced two new Board members present, Jim Range and Steve Henry, and passed along comments from the third new member, Ed Tinsley, who couldn't be present but said he was delighted to be on the Board.

Range, of Washington D.C., worked a number years in the U.S. Senate and in recent years has been involved in conservation organizations, often on boards. He said he understands the issues

the Trust is facing and looks forward to working with everyone. Henry is retired from the New Mexico Game and Fish Department. He began his career as a district wildlife officer and ended as area chief of the southwestern quadrant of the state.

Board member Bill Keleher administered the oath of office to Range and Henry.

III. Operations

Debbie Boggess, Trust Administrative Officer, discussed the FY07 budget. The Trust did not get a budget until the fiscal year was more than half over, but it did receive the planned appropriation of \$3.5 million and had a \$600,000 carryover from FY06, although it doesn't yet have authorization to spend the carryover. The Trust has spent about 60 percent of its budget, including 91 percent allocated to partnerships, 67 percent of planning, 57 percent of Trust management, 47 percent of research inventory, and 53 percent of administration. Boggess anticipates receiving additional monies for roads.

IV. Existing Programs

2007 Spring Turkey Hunt

Preserve Manager Dennis Trujillo reported that the Trust's first turkey hunt was completed. It went very well and generated a lot of interest in future hunts. This year a committee of Board representatives and staff designed the 16 available hunts issued by the state Game and Fish Department and came up with two programs. One, for eight hunters, was a deluxe package for \$1,800 that included four nights at the lodge, three days of hunting, catered meals, and one guest. There was a one-turkey bag limit. The Trust didn't provide transportation or a guide but did hold an orientation, discussed safety, and briefed hunters on likely locations. The hunts were very successful and very safe.

The second program was offered through a lottery process, which cost \$20 per chance to hunt. They sold six chances and donated two to the Wild Turkey Federation, which provided good publicity about the hunt. This included one day of scouting, three days of hunting, one guest, and off-site lodging. They also had a one-turkey bag limit.

During the deluxe hunt, six turkeys were taken; the largest was 18 lbs 7 oz. The average weight was 17 pounds 7 ounces. During the lottery hunt, seven birds were taken. The largest was 19 pounds 12 ounces, and the average weight was 17 pounds 3 ounces. The birds were all in good health and had been feeding on dandelions. Trujillo said the hunters really enjoyed the hunt and liked the way it was structured.

The deluxe hunt returned \$15,600 in revenue, the lottery hunt, \$4,680. The Turkey Federation provided 600 hours of volunteer time. The cost of implementing the program was \$18,270, which included several one-time expenses. Trujillo hopes to increase income next year and reduce costs. For 2008, staff is discussing pricing and the number permits. Trujillo noted that the only window of opportunity for the hunts is in April-May, when only 20 percent of the preserve is accessible. One change might include adding fishing to the package at a higher fee.

Attendee Jim Unruh asked if hunters had an opportunity to provide feedback, and Trujillo said staff took comments from everyone who participated.

An unidentified attendee said 16 appeared to be a small number of permits and asked if that was the number requested. Trujillo responded that this was the number staff felt comfortable with and considered practical, based on the number of acres available. Because of the amount of snow in April, they didn't see many turkeys during their scouting. Asked if they could offer more, he said they could, although it's the Game and Fish Department's decision.

Roger Snodgrass, of the Los Alamos Monitor, asked the average time it took to bag a turkey, and Trujillo responded, two days.

Attendee Warren Young asked where the hunt was held, and Trujillo responded, from Sulphur Canyon and Alamo Canyon; the upper areas were not accessible.

Summer and Fall Recreation Programs

Rob Dixon, recreation coordinator, reported that the Winter Recreation Program, which was December 29 to April 1, brought 2,100 visitors (20 percent of total visitation for the Preserve) and \$24,700 in revenues. It was the first year for overnight skiing. Costs totaled over \$100,000, which included operations from fall through spring. About 80 percent of the cost was labor needed to groom trails, operate the store and provide safety.

The Summer Recreation Program included fishing, hiking, tours, astronomy, and equestrian trails. Special events included guided hikes, group tours, mountain biking, running, weddings, and clinics. Fishing season was from May 25 to September 30, Thursday through Monday, and accessible by lottery. It included adult and youth fly-fishing clinics with one instructor for every two students. Hiking season, from May 25 to September 30, Thursday through Monday, was accessible by reservation. About 200 people took the free hikes at Coyote Call Trail. Tours covered archeology, botany, ecology, geology, history, and wildlife and were available by reservation. Equestrian trails were available May 25 to September 30, Friday through Sunday, by reservation. Mountain biking was available on June 9-10, August 11 and September 2 by reservation. Riders chose their own routes from designated roads.

Dixon said the Trust is renting out the bunkhouse, which sleeps 13, and the lodge, which sleeps 16. They're available by reservation.

Greg Kendall asked why many hikes are guided and few are unguided. Dixon responded that because of a late start, the result of a delayed budget, there was less time for planning and approvals. He expects to have more unguided hikes.

Warren Young asked if Preserve staff had begun contacting volunteers, and Dixon said they had. He added that they're always looking for volunteers.

Board member Steve Henry asked if bunkhouse rentals were related to activities. Dixon responded that it's permissible for guests to go on group tours or bring horses.

FY07 Grazing Program

Dennis Trujillo said the preserve has a lot of forage, which is the result of a wet year. The board selected Jack and Pat Hagelstein, of Dexter, N.M., to provide cattle and manage a small grazing program this summer. The Hagelsteins submitted a comprehensive plan to manage

an ecologically sound program that would produce a modest return. On June 13, 300 yearlings were delivered, and 200 more arrived on June 20. The average weight was 434 pounds per head. One herd will run for a 120-day season from June 1 to September 30. The contractor is staying on site and has leased two buildings. They'll conduct a herding workshop August 16-17. They're moving cattle on a rapid rotation operating plan. Trujillo said he believes 500 head is a conservative number, and the Hagelsteins have a good rotational plan.

Kendra Sullivan asked if the cattle came from the Hagelsteins' ranch and Trujillo responded that they were from that ranch and another.

Tom Reedy asked if they would run cows through all the valleys. Trujillo said there were many areas where the cattle won't graze. As part of the rapid-rotation system, cows would pass through Valles Toledo.

Range Readiness Assessment

Preserve Scientist Bob Parmenter said he had a very optimistic report, compared to this time last year. From a wet year in 2005 to a dry year until June 2006, the Preserve has enjoyed one of the wettest Mays since the study began in 2003. Similarly, moisture content was at an all-time high this May, although conditions vary somewhat throughout the Preserve. There is good stream flow in the Jemez River. Last year two Preserve streams ran dry. Spring snowmelt was also high at 50 to 60 CFS compared with 15 CFS a year earlier. He said it's difficult to predict monsoons, but predictions so far are for a normal monsoon season. Long term, the chances for La Niña are greater than for El Niño. He said the Preserve has enjoyed a good collaboration with range scientist Chris Havstadt, of NMSU, and his volunteers.

Parmenter said forage availability has nearly doubled since last year, and it's green vegetation, which is more nutritional than the dry vegetation available last year. Presently, there is plenty of forage for cattle.

Fire Program

Board member Dan Jiron explained the government's fire management program. Agencies work well across bureaucratic divisions and jurisdictions, but it still takes constant vigilance by the public, he said. With early warning, firefighters can make an initial attack. Considerations in firefighting include approach, tactics, danger and cost.

Board member Bill Keleher asked if the policy of letting a fire burn might be applied to the Preserve. Jiron said the Forest Service uses a combination of tools, including prescribed burning and mechanical thinning. The agency would work with Trust staff to put a fire out. Executive Director Jeff Cross said his staff is in its final year of collecting data on the forest, after which they can start forest and fire management planning. They're now operating under an agreement with the Forest Service. He said that if the Trust manages a wildfire for beneficial use, it will have to pay, but the Forest Service picks up the cost for fire suppression. The prescribed fire in Toledo in 2005 was expensive.

V. New Programs

Public Access and Use Workshops

Cross announced public access and use workshops, scheduled for later this summer. There will be four professionally facilitated workshops in four locations, and the public is invited. There will be a variety of ways for people to participate, such as open house and breakout discussions. Access and use planning will be conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, staff will gather information from the public and inform the public what they've learned in operating programs on the Preserve. The overriding questions will be the level of visitation, programs and infrastructure needed to reach financial self-sufficiency.

Jim Unruh asked about carrying capacity and the social science studies. Cross responded that a great deal of long-term monitoring and research has been done on the natural and cultural resources on the preserve; staff will add the social component during planning.

Roger Snodgrass asked how this process differs with the process for the framework report. Cross responded that in the meetings, participants will talk about programs and infrastructure; the framework is the strategic guidance for long-term planning for the Preserve.

Forage Use Planning

Marie Rodriguez said the staff is working on a plan for multiple use and sustained yield of forage. There was an open house on June 15 during which they described existing conditions, the history as a working ranch, proposed action, and planning. The 20 attendees included representatives of Jemez Pueblo, the state Agricultural Extension Service, and the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Association, as well as Barbara Johnson and Member Ed Tinsley. Some attendees wondered if there would be opportunities for small producers. A second open house will be held, probably in the Española area.

Marty Peale asked how to submit comments on creating an education program related to livestock management. Cross responded that this would be addressed in the access and use planning as well as forage planning. Several universities are interested in creating a high-altitude field station on the Preserve.

Action item: Proposed Stewardship Action for Overnight Camping

Hephner said that because they could expect to have firefighters, researchers, volunteers, and contractors on the preserve, they needed a policy on camping. **Member Dennis Jiron moved to direct the staff to revise a proposal to have public camping on the preserve consistent with programs, scientific studies, emergency uses, and other uses. Raymond Loretto seconded.** Warren Young, of the equestrian program, said he spent two nights there last year, and it was a good experience for participants. **Bill Keleher called for the question. The motion was approved.**

VI. Public Comment

Hephner invited public comment, and there was none.

VII. Adjournment

Hephner asked for a motion to adjourn. Henry moved, and Loretto seconded. The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.