

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – September 6, 2007
Rio Arriba County Complex
Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico

Board members present

Tracy Hephner, chair
Bill Keleher, vice chair
Steve Henry
Dan Jiron
Darlene Koontz
Jim Range
Ed Tinsley

Staff present

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

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Tracy Hephner called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. She asked Board members to introduce themselves. Board member Jim Range departed after introducing himself because of schedule conflicts. Member Raymond Loretto came to the meeting but had to leave because of an emergency. Member Darlene Koontz, superintendent of Bandelier National Monument, said this would be her last Board meeting because she's taking a new position in northern California. Hephner told attendees that the meeting would be primarily a listening session for the Board to gain a better understanding of issues in northern New Mexico.

Approval of Agenda

Hephner asked the Board for approval of the agenda. **Member Steve Henry moved and Dan Jiron seconded, and the agenda was approved.**

Approval of Minutes

Hephner asked that minutes of the June 20 public meeting be approved. **Member Darlene Koontz moved and member Steve Henry 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 said the Board has had requests from the public to share notes or minutes from working meetings of the Board. The Board discussed the request and voted unanimously to release notes from its work sessions. The first set of minutes will be posted on the Web site on September 10.

June 21, 2007 Executive Session

Hephner said the Board discussed a personnel matter but took no action.

Approval of Executive Session

Hephner asked the Board to approve a future executive session, should one be needed. **Member Dan Jiron moved and Bill Keleher seconded. The motion passed.**

Bill Keleher administered the oath of office to Ed Tinsley as a new member of the Board. Tinsley, a rancher from Lincoln County and owner of K-Bob Steakhouses, was, until recently, chairman of the National Restaurant Association.

Secretary's Report: Board Election

Secretary Raymond Loretto would normally report Board elections. In his absence, Darlene Koontz, who coordinated the election, reported that Bill Keleher is the new chairman, Ed Tinsley is vice chairman, and Steve Henry is secretary. They will serve through September 2008. Chairperson Hephner offered a fond farewell and big thank you to Darlene Koontz, saying she had been an extraordinary Board member and had given generously of her skills and experience.

In a parting statement, Koontz thanked past and current staff for their hard work and dedication during uncertain times. She said the Trust has done an outstanding job over the last four years. The challenge is to remember that this is an experiment and not to be afraid to try new things. She also thanked the public for support and patience, saying this is truly a unique type of public land management. She thanked past and present members of the Board. She said she believed the experiment could succeed but would take a lot of time and energy, new ideas and close cooperation. She also believes it's possible for the Preserve to be self sufficient, if everyone will think outside the box in how the Trust raises revenue. Participant Betsy Barnett thanked Koontz for her service.

III. Operations

Preserve Manager's Report

Dennis Trujillo reported on changes at the Valle Grande entrance. Construction in two phases will be based on the Department of Transportation approval of the Trust's traffic control plan. Stage 1 construction started August 27 and includes highway signing, fence removal, earthwork on the north side of NM Highway 4, placement of base coarse material, culvert installation. It won't really hamper traffic. Stage 2 will include work on south side of the highway and include cutting slopes, widening the highway for a left turn lane, preparing a sub-grade for asphalt, and seeding of disturbed areas. Staff eliminated architectural and landscape elements from Stage 2 because of costs. If weather allows, he hopes to be finished by November. Because asphalt must be done all at once, the asphalt may be applied in 2008 if the weather doesn't cooperate.

Trujillo reported on the 2007 Elk Hunt. There are 13 hunts. Archery hunts were held September 5-11 and 15-19; muzzle loaders are Oct. 6-10; rifles are Oct. 13-17 and 20-24; youth rifles are Oct. 27-29 and Nov 3-5. There is an additional youth hunt Nov. 10-23 and two hunts for any

legal rifle Nov. 17-19 and 24-26. The New Mexico Department Game and Fish could offer 75 antlerless permits for Dec. 1-15 on its Web site if the Preserve harvest falls below the target. This hunt will charge an access fee of \$300 per hunter. There are 237 hunt authorizations and a \$25 fee for lottery. The elk hunt generated \$327,000 in revenue.

Trujillo also reported on the condition of elk in the Preserve; pregnancy rates among cows have been good. The average age of bulls and cows is 6.7 years. The average bull score is 302. The cow:calf ratio is 43 calves per 100 cows, which is up from 28 over the last three years.

The domestic livestock contract operator is running 500 yearlings. Range conditions are good to excellent, but a ranger rider was injured and the BLM's range specialist was out for surgery. The cattle will remain until end of September. Decisions have not been made about the 2008 livestock grazing program and the Trust invites comments. Since 2002, the Trust has had five different livestock programs.

Natural resource coordinator Marie Rodriguez reported on public workshops held to discuss public access and use of the Preserve. Four workshops were held in Jemez Springs, Pojoaque, Los Alamos, and Rio Rancho. The 120 attendees included representatives from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and business. The facilitated sessions included an open house and discussions of resources, facilities, education, science, and recreation. Participants were asked to put on the Preserve manager's hat and balance all of the public's wishes and needs. Staff has not yet received summaries from the sessions, but among the core values was the appreciation of solitude and nature. There were requests for more spontaneous access and free activities.

Forest thinning is continuing on 90 acres of Banco Bonito to improve forest health and reduce wildfire hazards.

Staff is planning for multiple use and sustained yield of forage. The Trust is proposing to allocate forage for domestic livestock and elk, as well as ecological services, such as soil stabilization, habitat, and protection of streams and riparian areas. A public meeting was held in June in Jemez Springs. Another meeting will be held with a time to be announced in the near future.

FY07 Budget Report

Administrative Officer Debbie Boggess reported that the Trust received \$3.5 million for the fiscal year and more than 90 percent is expended; carryover to FY08 is estimated at \$250,000.

Action Item: FY08 Budget

The proposed FY08 is based on the \$3.5 million 2007 budget plus \$250,000 carryover, plus \$20,000 in quarters revenues. The \$3.8 million budget is divided among program areas: 29 percent, general administration; 14 percent, research; 8 percent, Preserve operations; 13 percent, planning; 12 percent, infrastructure; and 4 percent, special uses and events. Member Ed Tinsley congratulated the staff for their analysis, saying he was impressed with the level of detail by Jeff and Debbie. **Tinsley moved for approval. Bill Keleher seconded. Hephner noted that the Board must approve the budget before knowing the actual allocation. She amended the motion to approval of the FY08 budget subject to revisions or changes by Congress. The Board approved.**

IV. Issues Affecting Northern New Mexico

Alfredo Montoya, Rio Arriba County Commissioner and Chairman, New Mexico Game and Fish Commission:

It's important to understand that whatever decisions you make on the Valles Caldera have an impact on the surrounding areas. We understand that you have a huge responsibility in managing the Valles Caldera. I understand you're about halfway through the time allowed to make the Preserve self-sustaining. Grazing is important to people here. Done right, grazing can enhance wildlife conditions. Deer and elk don't like that overgrown, thatched grass. They're known to go to neighboring allotments in search of new grass. It would be helpful if local cattlemen could use the Valles Caldera to rest their lands and the allotments.

The previous owner ran over 6,000 cows and still had enough for wildlife, and it wasn't overgrazed. Regarding elk, you visited Jicarilla Lodge. You manage 90,000 acres; the Lodge has less than 30,000. They harvest at least 100 bull elk with less acreage, and it's become a lucrative business for them. I'm told by some of our game officers that the Preserve is in need of better management to reach optimum benefits. As chairman of the State Game Commission, I offer you the expertise of the Game and Fish Department.

In the last five or six years, hunting opportunities in the choice units have deteriorated. Sportsmen are asking that the quality of hunts be improved. There's not enough hunting pressure on the Preserve. The moment an elk hears a shot, they go into the Preserve where there's no hunting pressure at all. Hunts in the Preserve should be coordinated with hunts outside the Preserve. You need to increase the number of antlerless opportunities. The current rate is minuscule. It impacts the entire region because you're not hunting enough. More pressure would improve the age of females, and it would improve productivity. If you underhunt, your herd gets older. It would help to pressure the herd to move to the southwest. You need to develop roads for access to the east side of the ranch, which would create more disturbances to move elk.

The Preserve staff should work more closely with the department. The department should be much more involved in the design of hunts on the Valles Caldera. Staff may convince management that until all the wildlife is studied into the ground, management decisions can't be made. There is also a perception that they have decision-making authority. The department and Preserve staffs need to work together. The public likes beauty, solitude, open space, but that's not going to pay the bills.

Lorenzo Valdez, Rio Arriba County Manager:

(Valdez began by providing a history of the area and some observations on local culture.) We're your neighbors on the northern fence, and we believe that neighbors can talk to each other. We used to talk to the Dunigan's all the time. Across the fence from you are three allotments on what was once the Juan Bautista Valdez grant – Youngsville, En Medio, Coyote. Each allotment is tied to a community. You should have a quarterly dialogue with all the presidents of the surrounding allotments. You need a way to communicate with your neighbors who are using the land near you.

Four years ago we were run off our Forest Service pastures (allotments) in June (because of the drought). Some sold off their cattle and haven't put them back because can't afford to. Environmentalism is politics. There is nothing more conflictive nowadays than the word environment. The Valles Caldera is not pristine nature. Elk have killed off the raw materials that

slow down the streams. We want to work together to make the Jemez Mountains more productive for everybody.

Felipe Martinez, Chairman, Rio Arriba County Commission:

We recently visited with Sen. Pete Domenici, and he expressed hope that this Board will take a new direction. I believe the Hispanics and Native Americans have not been equally represented on this Board, so I'm happy to see Dan Jiron on the Board.

When this concept of the Valles Caldera was being proposed, I was very excited, as a lot of residents were. I own a grazing permit. Ranchers thought this would offer the opportunity for access. That idea has fallen short. I participated in the heifer program. I paid over \$300 for three heifers – not a good proposition. It's difficult just getting them there and back. We need to open a dialogue and have quarterly discussions.

Some people would have you think that elk have always been part of this landscape, but the first report of elk was from the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition in 1776, which noted the early northern New Mexico communities but didn't report elk until the expedition reached the San Juan Mountains near present-day Pagosa Springs. The Board needs to review its policy on harvesting elk. I challenge this Board to engage in educational opportunities for area youth.

V. Public Discussion of Issues Affecting Northern New Mexico

Moises Morales, former commissioner: We ask you to support area ranchers. The Forest Service has put pressure on ranchers because of the drought.

Suellen Strale, Chimayo Youth Conservation Corps: The group started in 2002 and works countywide on public lands in restoration, conservation, historic preservation, environmental sciences, and job training, among other areas. The program has 150 kids a year. We want to work with the Valles Caldera.

Camilla Bustamante, Director, Environmental Science Program, Northern New Mexico College: Environmental management can be political but environmental science isn't. If you factor in science, the politics and emotions die down. Ranchers understand sustainability. We wouldn't have multi-generations of ranchers without it. We want to work with the Valles Caldera and would like to integrate students in Preserve operations. The program will soon be accredited.

David Cockerham, Superintendent, Española Public Schools: We would like to work with the Valles Caldera and ask you to involve our students in educational programs.

Unidentified attendee: We just had a successful county fair and doubled sales from our livestock auction. We'd like to see an opportunity for youth to graze their livestock on the Preserve. Also elderly people.

Gerald Chacon, Cooperative Extension Service, New Mexico State University: From the time the Valles Caldera was proposed to the Northern New Mexico Stockmen's Association, Hispanic stockmen have been supportive. It was presented as a place to graze from surrounding communities. It seems to have gotten away from what they were told, what they supported to get political support. The feeling among members of the association's board is that they were let down. They stuck their necks out pretty far. They lobbied Congress, they wrote letters.

The original Board asked me to present a plan, and I offered some concepts for cow-calf and heifer operations and a grassbank. The local ranchers are almost entirely cow-calf operations. Previously, they ran sheep. These are all land-based communities. There is deep feeling for the land. I think there could be some relationship building. The resources of NMSU, a land grant university, were offered, but the resources weren't used. Politics got in the way. We're very dependent on federal lands in this area. Hephner responded that she would be happy to work with local people to generate information to give the Board a better understanding of issues.

Chris Lovato, permittee, Coyote: When the grass is tender, all the elk are on our allotments. You need more cattle grazing on the Valles Caldera because elk are coming into our allotments. As soon as the hunt starts, they go to the Preserve.

Carlos Salazar, cattleman and president of the Northern New Mexico Stockmen's Association: I've spoken to this Board before with no results. I hope this time will be different. We've seen no Hispanics on this Board. We need more Hispanics. We need people from the local area who understand the culture and the issues. We need to have meetings at Coyote and Cañon. Why did we go down south (referring to a trustee from Tennessee) to recruit somebody?

(The Forest Service required complete removal of livestock in 2002 and sharp reductions in 2003 and 2004.) We had a wet spring, but we weren't allowed on our allotments until July. Elk are the problem. If you do nothing else, put up a game fence. We get up to 500 head of elk in the allotments. Cattle are blamed for resource damage, but elk consume a large portion of that pie. You (the Trust) can't manage elk, but you can manage cattle to improve the habitat. The Valles Caldera has 89,000 acres, Bandelier has 33,000 acres, the Department of Energy has 33,000 acres. The elk aren't going to starve. The grazing program has been very limited. There's so much research, they step on each other.

The Valles Caldera has had no grazing in three out of seven years. We need a livestock program that's user friendly. Environmentalists tend to carry a lot of weight sometimes. You need to look at the purpose of the ranch (Preserve). Member Ed Tinsley responded that problems won't be fixed quickly. But we're working on it, and we're committed to it.

Cornelio Salazar, permittee and rancher, Cañones: We've addressed this Board before with the same issues. It seems that everything is for recreation, at least that's how we take it. You're fixing up the Valles Caldera with construction, but the grazing is left on the back burner. The local forest ranger says we have to leave 40 percent on the allotments for elk. That's pretty hard to meet, and yet the elk from Valles Caldera come in 200 to 300 at a time on our allotment. Elk tags have no value at all. Hunters say they haven't seen any elk because they're now moving to the Valles Caldera. We have Game and Fish on the fence line protecting the elk. We've had a rough time with the drought. We've asked to get into the Valles Caldera, but if you don't apply a year before, you're out of luck. If the ranger orders you out of your allotment, it would be nice (to have an alternative). We have to get creative and think of something to help the ranchers. Why burn (preventive burns) when cattle can shear it off just the same? Grazing season should be more feasible for ranchers. Cow-calf operations used to sustain the county.

Jan Crawford, Creede, Colorado: Stated an interest in watersheds.

Lorenzo Salazar, permittee and rancher: As soon as the snow melts, that's where the elk are. We see them out there. If we could graze cattle in the fall, it would clip a lot of that grass off.

Mike Trujillo relayed messages from local legislators. Debbie Rodella asked the Board to keep a progressive and open mind about what you're hearing today about grazing, water and education. Richard Martinez said he hoped it won't be the last time you come to visit.

Virgil Trujillo, permittee, Abiquiu: I'm a pretty close neighbor of the Valles Caldera. I want to run cattle. My father-in-law wants a nice place to sit by creek. My brother-in-law wants a good place to go fishing. Management means a lot of things. In the beginning, we were asked for input, and a lot of constructive input came from northern New Mexico. One of the best things to happen was relief from drought. We still see a need for a grassbank or swing allotment. My family had to move from Vallecito because of tree encroachment (on pasture lands) and not enough water. We don't talk enough about reclaiming what's lost, but instead we fight over the last piece that's left. We need to think about keeping people on the ground, not getting them off. When I took cattle up to the Valles Caldera, I asked when I could go see them and was told I couldn't. That's not the way it's usually done. And we should be allowed to bring kids, too, so they can learn.

Walter Peña, mayordomo, Parkview: Why are you going away from livestock and catering to elk? My family was born and raised here, and we never saw elk until Game and Fish released two trailers of them. Cattle should be a priority. Everybody should have the opportunity to bring in cattle to the Valles Caldera. I have a small ranch, 200 acres, and sometimes I have 100 to 200 elk. How many permits do I get from Game and Fish? One. They're taking our way of life away. The Forest Service made all these people reduce their numbers, but I don't see them reducing the number of elk. Trustee Tinsley responded that the challenge is to come up with a cattle program that's as lucrative as elk. Peña said he thought the Preserve could raise its fees.

Mariano Manzanares: I participated in the heifer program, and the fees were already higher than (the market on private land). Fees for the cow-calf operation were also higher. Tinsley said private landowners are now getting \$20 to \$25.

VII. Adjournment

Chairman Bill Keleher expressed his thanks for electing him chair and said he would do his very best. The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.