

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – December 11, 2008
Marriott Courtyard
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Board Members Present

William Keleher, Chair
Ed Tinsley, Vice Chair
Stephen Henry, Secretary
Tracy Hephner
Daniel Jiron
Brad Traver

Staff Present

Lucia Turner, Acting Executive Director
Pam Dale, Human Resources
Kimberly Duval, Public Education and Interpretation
Tim Haarmann, Ranch Foreman
Berta Pantoja, Administrative Assistant
Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist
Dennis Rino, Administrative Officer
Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator
Ana Steffen, Cultural Resource Coordinator
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager
Mick Trujillo, Hunt Coordinator

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair William Keleher opened the meeting at 1:10PM and welcomed and introduced the Board, staff, and public attendees. He introduced Lucia Turner, the Acting Executive Director for the Trust and the new Administrative Officer, Dennis Rino.

Approval of Agenda

Member Tracy Hephner requested the addition of one item under “Board Business” - Recognition of Past Board Members. **Member Dan Jiron moved and member Brad Traver seconded the motion. The agenda was approved as amended.**

Approval of Minutes

Chair Keleher asked the Board to approve the minutes from the September 11, 2008 public meeting. **Member Jiron moved and member Hephner seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the September 11, 2008 meeting. The minutes were approved.**

II. Board Business

Authorize Future Executive Session

Chair Keleher asked the Board for permission to conduct an executive session should one be required. **Member Jiron moved and member Hephner seconded the motion. The motion was passed.**

Announce Schedule of Public Meetings – 2009

Chair Keleher presented a tentative schedule for the public meetings in 2009: March 12, June 11, September 10, and December 10. Non-public board working meetings will be scheduled the day before each of these meetings.

Recognition of Past Board Members

Member Hephner reported that the Board received a foundation grant to recognize the work of the volunteer Board members. All past members received a belt buckle, and one was presented to Senator Pete Domenici in recognition of his efforts supporting the Trust. Larry Icerman, former VCT Board member was presented with the buckle at this meeting.

Board in Transition

Chair Keleher reminded the group that he and three other members will be retiring after four years of service at the end of 2008 - Tracey Hephner, Jim Gosz, and Dr. Ray Loretto. Four new members will be appointed by January 10, 2009.

III. Business Operations

Executive Director Named

Mr. **Gary Bratcher** will begin work on Jan 5, 2009. He brings business experience from both the private and public sectors.

GAO Report

Mr. David Bixler from the Government Accounting Office, the audit arm of the Congress, reported on their work conducting the second audit required by the Trust's enabling legislation. They are assessing the accomplishments and challenges to date. They will be back in the spring to continue interviews and research and will finalize the report in 2009.

Attendee Dan Blossom asked if there will be an opportunity for the public to review the report. (Bixler responded that the report is presented to the staff only for comment prior to being submitted to Congress.)

Blossom asked how audits are initiated. (Bixler responded that there are three ways: legislative mandates, sub-committee chair request, and individual member request.)

Gary Morton asked which groups they are interviewing. (Bixler responded that at this point they have only spoken to the outside groups that they interviewed for the

first audit. They will be back in the spring to for additional research and interviews with other groups.)

*Attendee **Chip Cunningham** asked about the evaluation criteria used by the GAO. (Bixler said they use the goals named in the enabling legislation and other government reports such as the Government Performance and Results Act.)*

FY2008/FY2009 Budgets

Dennis Rino, Administrative Officer, presented an update on the FY2008 and FY2009 budgets. He has been with Trust only one month and has many years with the United States Forest Service (USFS) in positions such as accounting, auditing, and contracting. The Trust received a \$3.75 million appropriation for the 2008 fiscal year-coupled with a carry over from the previous year to total \$4.3 million. The Trust's planned expenditures for FY2008 were \$4,278,502. Actual expenditures totaled \$3,631,391. He noted that the revenue account totaled \$703,528 and the Trust rolled over \$2.9 million to FY2009. After Congressional review, the 2009 budget will be available to the public.

Attendee Tom Ribe, Caldera Action, Dave Craig and other unidentified attendees asked for a more detailed breakdown of the costs in order to understand net profits etc.(Chair Keleher confirmed that the Board has asked the staff in the future for such breakdown of expenditures.)

Attendee Tom Jervis asked for an explanation of where, for example, maintenance of fences might be placed in the current budget. (Rino offered that fence maintenance might be included under personnel and supplies or perhaps under outside contractors.)

Attendee Betsy Barnett asked where the forage studies not covered by grants would be found in the current budget. (Rino responded that the studies again might be found in personnel/supplies or outside contractors. Lucia Turner clarified that the numbers as presented are based on detailed project work plans developed by staff.)

Attendee Jervis asked about the inclusion of volunteer time in the budget. (Rino noted that the Trust keeps track of the hours but they are not reflected in the budget.)

Member Tinsley added that the Trust is also conducting a financial audit that should be available in early 2009.

IV. Preserve Programs

Stewardship Action Planning Updates

A. Public Access and Use

Martin Chavez, Enterprise Technical Services, reported on their two phase planning process that is charged with identifying revenue generating uses to support the Trust's goal of long term financial sustainability. They are currently in the "planning and testing phase" that includes assessing previous interviews,

ENTRIX's work, and past public input as well as conducting additional public input and research. Phase II, the traditional NEPA process, will follow in for a total planning time of 18 months. Their work will look at a broad range of alternatives using maximal public input.

Attendee Dave Craig asked for detailed cost estimates for the uses being considered. (Member Tinsley responded that this will be a component of the planning activities.)

Member Hephner asked if considerations of human carrying capacity will be included in the analysis. (Chavez responded the considerations as such will be included, particularly in the NEPA process in phase II.)

Member Tinsley clarified that the Trust currently has an annual operation budget of \$3.6 million and by 2015 the Trust needs a variety of income streams to meet the budget. The Trust needs to wrestle with options without tipping the scale to exclusivity.

An unidentified attendee noted the slow pace of all the planning activities – lots of planning and little action and results.

B. Forage Use and Sustained Yield

Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator, reported on the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield of Forage planning activity. A detailed summary of the all the stewardship planning activities is available on the web page – www.vallescaldera.gov - under “Get Involved” then scroll to “Stewardship.” Rodriguez presented the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to the Board this week, received their approval, and is preparing it for release pending various logistical considerations. The Forest Service Enterprise Team that developed the EA spent only \$200,000 of the budgeted \$300,000. The EA will be released in hard copy and posted on the web. The EA is a draft document and once it is released will have a 45 day comment period. Rodriguez will mail a hard copy upon request.

C. Redondo Canyon Stewardship Project Action Item

Rodriguez presented the request for Board authorization to continue planning for the Redondo Canyon Stewardship Project. The activities will focus on 600 acres within a 1600 acre project area. The purpose of the project is to reduce fire risk through thinning, slashing and prescribed fires. In addition, information derived from assessing the changes in ecosystem services as a result of forest thinning will support long term forest management on the Preserve. This project will also support local capacity and collaborate with neighboring land managers, especially the Santa Fe National Forest. Planning and analysis should be completed in the first quarter of 2009.

Member Henry motioned to authorize staff to continue planning activities in Redondo Canyon. Member Hephner seconded the motioned. The motioned was passed after the following public comments.

An attendee asked if the Trust has submitted proposals for foundation funding. (Rodriquez responded that she has submitted one to the National Forest Foundation.)

Member Tinsley asked if the revenue opportunities have been quantified. (Rodriquez responded that quantifying the revenue opportunities will be a component of the project itself.)

Chair Keleher asked if the community will be able to harvest fire wood. (Rodriquez: Yes)

Recreation and Resource Management Updates

a. 2008 Grazing Program

Grazing Impacts

Bob Parmenter, Preserve Scientist, reported on the 2008 grazing program. He noted that 2008 predicted average precipitation but with warmer temperatures. This summer, the Preserve grazed 1960 steers and approximately 3000 elk. Parmenter's team evaluated four area types to assess grazing impacts: grazed woodland, mountain/valley, mountain meadow, and riparian. The goal is to maintain equal to or less than 40% of new growth to be grazed. The 2008 monitoring revealed that forage consumption was within the parameters set by the Trust in all four area types.

This year his team also assessed stubble heights, which will allow them to compare with similar data from sister agencies. Utilizing stubble height, his research showed excessive grazing by cattle, elk and insects in the riparian areas. They conducted measurements in mid-September several days after the removal of the cattle.

Member Hephner asked Dr.Parmenter if he agreed that the stubble height data would not be of any relevance until several years of data on the Preserve had been collected and analyzed. (Dr. Parmenter agreed).

An unidentified attendee asked about the water quality implications of excessive grazing. (Parmenter responded that they have collected some data and need to study it; however, the data is hard to evaluate due to the turbidity also caused by thunderstorms.)

Member Tinsley asked if permanent water access points would reduce problems in the riparian areas. (Parmenter responded that they would, as would strategically placed fences.)

Ranch Manager Report

Tim Haarmann, Ranch Manager, reported on the Trust's adaptive management activities related to grazing. The volume of cattle this summer was the largest since the Trust was established. This past summer, the Preserve used an intensive grazing

then moving the cattle approach. The cattle were grazed for a total of 120 days and at the end of the season gained an average of 300 pounds. The income from the operation was \$7 per head per month plus a bonus of \$1.68 due to weight gains over 275 pounds. The total revenue was \$58,172. Haarmann provided an overview of visitor comments which captured a number of negative comments from anglers.

Attendee Dick Ford commented that horses seemed to be the main problem on Section 7. He commented that the angler experience was not satisfactory this past summer because of the grazing operation. (Haarmann noted that the operator's horses were pastured in that area.)

Ron Lowman, New Mexico Trout Unlimited, added that his Board strongly opposes the Trust's grazing program. (Haarmann agreed that they learned a lot this summer and that the intensive grazing strategy resulted in excessive negative impacts in the riparian areas.)

Attendee Monique Schoustra, Caldera Action, offered that her understanding of the contract was that it would not allow grazing in the riparian area. (Haarmann responded that the cattle needed to get their water from the streams but then the cattlemen herded them from that area as soon as possible.)

Schoustra added that her understanding was that if additional personnel were needed they would be added. (Haarmann responded that the intensive grazing was more the problem than lack of personnel.)

Member Tinsley added that a larger percentage of the preserve could be grazed (therefore, less intensive impacts) if water could be made available.

Attendee Tom Ribe noted that the \$58,172 does not reflect the cost of operating the program. (Haarman responded his intuitive guess is that the Trust did not lose money on this operation. Member Hephner added that the Trust made more this year than any other year on grazing.)

Ribe emphasized again the need for accurate and honest accounting. (Member Tinsley clarified that the interim grazing program is an opportunity to learn and understand grazing impacts without any major infrastructure investments.)

An unidentified attendee asked about the benefits of intensive grazing. (Haarmann responded that it allows the resource to recover once the cattle are removed from the area.)

Preserve Manager Dennis Trujillo added that they are in the learning phase, and will apply lessons learned as they go forward.

Member Tinsley responded that in the future they need to look at an on-going partnership with a cattle operator so that they can manage for more than one year at a time.

Attendee Dan Blossom noted that the Trust should not be constrained by the grazing option if it does not demonstrate financial benefits.

Attendee Pam McBride, Native Plant Society, said that her organization spends their resources restoring riparian areas and it is hard to support a program that impacts riparian health.

Gary Morton Painting

Doug Fraser, Los Amigos, presented Gary Morton's lithograph painting of the Bond Cabin. The proceeds from sales of these prints will support the cabin's restoration. The first print of 350 was given to Senator Domenici. The Los Amigos website has detailed information about how to purchase the print.

B. 2008 Elk Hunting Overview

Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager, reported on the 2008 elk season. This year the Trust offered 13 different types of hunts. The Trust issued all the permits by lottery. The program earned \$343,496 in gross revenues while expending \$170,000. Forty-nine mature bulls and 54 antlerless elk were harvested- the lowest percentage to date. This program had a 100% safety record and was supported by 1156 volunteer hours. Trujillo also reported on the Catch A Dream Foundation hunt provided this season. He clarified that the Make a Wish Foundation does not grant wishes for hunting – the niche filled by this organization. This year Ben Carlson and his family spent four days elk hunting on the Preserve.

C. 2008 Recreation Program Overview

Trujillo reported on the 2008 recreation activities. The activities range from hunting, fishing, sleigh riding, to mountain biking and astronomy. The Preserve also sponsored special events such as a marathon and moonlight skiing. The Preserve had 14,000 visitors this season with no safety incidences. The challenges to increasing the activities at this time include: limited funding, staff turn-over, marketing, staff vacancy, limited infrastructure, and the status as interim programs while long term planning is in process. Revenue increased by 14% and visitation by 38%. The program had 71% cost recovery based on expenditures of \$898,269 and revenues of \$633,853. The website supported 70% of the collections, with only 30% collected via walk-ins. The Preserve was open 7 days a week from April to November and offered more mini van tours/hikes this season and was supported by 3032 volunteer hours. Trujillo listed his goals for 2009 as: 15% increase in revenue, 15% increase in visitors, 15% increase in volunteers, and 15% increase in cost recovery.

Member Hephner asked if they are considering offering hunting of other species. (Member Henry responded that there have been early discussions, perhaps bear and cougar.)

Attendee Dorothy Hoard asked about elk poaching this season. (Trujillo reported that there were 4 to 5 elk poached, mostly in the northern portion of the Preserve.)

Attendee Dan Blossom asked how the volunteers were used in the hunting program. (Mick Trujillo responded that the Preserve is blessed by high quality volunteers. They helped with hunter check in, patrols, downed elk retrieval, safety, etc.)

Blossom asked if vehicles can drive anywhere on the preserve (Mick Trujillo noted that they cannot leave the graded roads.)

An unidentified attendee asked if the east fork of the Jemez River will be available again for angling. (Dennis Trujillo: Yes.)

An unidentified attendee asked if mountain sheep will be reintroduced. (Dennis Trujillo responded that they have had some early discussions on this topic.)

Preserve Scientist's Report

Coyote Study Report

Preserve Science Bob Parmenter reported on the Coyote Study. The purpose was to understand the impact of coyotes on the elk population. Valle Grande was the primary study area. Using radio collars and scat collection the study found the coyotes diet is comprised of only 7% elk – not a significant percentage. Parmenter added that they still need to understand how other predators impact the elk population.

Due to time restraints, Chair Keleher asked the attendees to contact Parmenter personally if they have additional questions or comments.

V. General Public Comments

Chair Keleher asked for general public comments and informed the public that the Board would have a working non-public board meeting in January.

Tom Ribe thanked the Board for allowing time for extensive questions and comments during the meeting and thanked Keleher for his service to the Trust. He asked why there needed to be a Board meeting in January. (Keleher: To elect a new Chair and officers).

Monique Schoustra asked for status reports in the future on the development of a comprehensive plan for the Preserve.

Tom Jervis commented that the legislation limits the number of executive sessions and requires the Board to state the purpose prior to the meeting.

VI. Adjourn

Chair Keleher adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:30 PM.