

Valles Caldera Trust
Minutes of the Public Meeting – 6/11/2009
Hilltop Inn
Los Alamos, New Mexico
6:00PM-9:35PM

Board Members Present

Stephen Henry, Chairman
Ed Tinsley, Vice Chair
Daniel Jiron
Dr. Raymond Loretto, Secretary
Jason Lott
Virgil Trujillo

Staff Present

Gary Bratcher, Executive Director
Rob Dixon, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Kimberly DeVall, Public Education and Interpretation
Sage Dunn, Wildlife Biologist
Tim Haarmann, Ranch Foreman
Terry McDermott, Communications and Marketing Manager
Berta Pantoja, Executive Assistant
Bob Parmenter, Director of Science and Education
Dennis Rino, Administrative Officer
Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator
Ana Steffen, Cultural Resource Coordinator
Dennis Trujillo, Preserve Manager

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Steve Henry opened the meeting at 6:05PM, welcomed and introduced the Board, staff, and public attendees. Chair Henry specifically welcomed new Board member Jason Lott, the new superintendent of Bandelier National Monument. Chair Henry also introduced Michael Lopez, Field Representative from Senator Udall's office and Pablo Sedillo, Field Representative for Senator Bingaman. He also introduced Maria Vargas, on the phone, from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in Denver.

II. Board Business

Approval of Agenda

Chair Henry asked the Board for agenda approval. **Member Ed Tinsley moved and member Jason Lott seconded the motion. The agenda was approved.**

Approval of Minutes

Chair Henry asked the Board to approve the March 12, 2009 Public Meeting minutes. **Member Raymond Loretto moved and member Tinsley seconded the motion to approve the March 12, 2009 meeting minutes. The minutes were approved.**

Authorize Future Executive Session

Chair Henry asked the Board for permission to conduct an executive session should one be required. **Member Virgil Trujillo moved and member Tinsley seconded the motion. The motion was passed.**

September 29, 2009 Public Meeting

Chair Henry announced that the next public meeting will be in Las Cruces on September 29, 2009 from 9:00AM – 12:00 Noon. The specific location will be announced and posted on the web site.

III. Management Comments

Preserve Activities – General Manager, Preserve

Dennis Trujillo, Preserve General Manager, provided an overview of topics on which his staff will present: 2009 Recreation Activities, Stewardship Action Planning Overview, 2009 Infrastructure Activities, and the 2009 Grazing Program.

a) 2009 Summer Recreational Activities

Rob Dixon, Outdoor Recreation Planner, presented an overview of the activities available at the Preserve during the upcoming summer season. He noted that the season spans from May 21st – October 18th. He also remarked that the Preserve is open seven days a week from 8:30AM -5:00PM at the Valles Caldera Valle Grande Staging Area. He reviewed the “Core Events” and “Special Events” for the season. Core events include tours, fishing, hiking, elk hunting, biking, horseback riding, astronomy, and turkey hunting. He reviewed the potential visitor slots and revenue for each activity which totaled 21,707 potential visits at \$674,200. The Preserve will also conduct special events such as the Mountain Bike Fun Ride, Marathon, Equestrian Endurance Race, Pasture Rides, Fly Fishing Workshops, Photo Adventures, and Outdoor Skills Workshops. The potential visits for the above activities total 1508 with \$86,700 in income. Casa de Baca Lodge and the Bunk House will be available for rentals from May 21st to November 30th. He noted that the average cost for general activities is under \$7 per person and is less than \$24 for activities which require special equipment (e.g. horses, mountain bikes).

Reservations are required for many of the above activities and Dixon noted that reservations are low this year to date. Detailed information about the season is on the website.

Attendee Betsy Barnett asked that more free hikes be made available for the general public.

Tom Ribe asked about the extent of access to the Preserve available to lodge renters. (Dixon responded that they need to stay within a 300 meter radius.) He also asked for details about cost for renting the Lodge. (Dixon responded the Casa Blanca Lodge has a two night minimum and can be rented for \$2500 per night.)

b) Stewardship Action Planning Overview

• *Recent Decisions*

Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator, reported on Director Bratcher signing on April 7, 2009 the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield of Forage Environmental Assessment (EA) which determined a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for the grazing program. On April 28, 2009 he also signed the San Antonio Watershed Wetlands and Riparian Restoration EA which also determined no significant impact of the proposed activities. Also, on June 8, 2009, Bratcher signed the Facilities Management Repairs Categorical Exclusion to upgrade the lodging and staging area.

• *Public Use and Access Planning Activities*

Rodriguez provided an overview of the Phase I activities completed to date. They include the 2006 Public Workshops, Revenue and Enhancement Study (ENTRIX), Visitor Surveys, and Site Assessments. Phase II, "Planning and Decision making," is the NEPA process and has incorporated the work of Phase I into its draft alternatives. The Trust released an RFP for a contractor to support Phase II's activities such as public workshops, open houses and an interactive website. These venues will provide opportunity for public education and input regarding the proposed alternatives. The Trust will announce the winning proposal when all others who submitted are notified. Phase II should take 12 to 18 months to complete.

• *Landscaping Restoration Management and Planning*

Rodriguez reported on the interdisciplinary team studying the Preserve's existing conditions. The teams will focus on considerations such as fire/fuel, silviculture, soils, water, roads, and wildlife. This work will inform a future EIS that should be initiated in 12 to 18 months.

• *Proposed Stewardship Activities*

The Preserve is working with Bandelier to conduct prescribed fires on Scooter Mountain and Rabbit Mountain. Each fire will impact about 300 acres on the Preserve. Bandelier is the lead agency and the activities should occur in the next fiscal year.

Attendee Tom Jervis asked how the Trust intends to use the transportation grant it has received and for clarification on how these decisions are coordinated with the overall comprehensive planning activities. (Rodriguez responded that grant will be used to study alternative transportation planning activities as a component of the Public Use and Access Planning EIS. Phase I activities have been used to develop five programmatic alternatives which capture a general range of development. Public open houses and workshops are scheduled for July 15, 21, and 23 in Jemez, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque respectively. The interactive web base will be launched

on July 6. The web based component will include instructional videos, maps, and other information related to the alternatives.)

Member Dan Jiron asked how the comments will be folded into the NEPA process. (Rodriquez responded that the contractor will use these comments as a part of the NEPA scoping activities to ultimately refine, narrow, and develop more detailed alternatives.)

Member Tinsley clarified that the key criteria for developing and assessing alternatives include: increasing inclusiveness, supporting g access to allow more people to experience the preserve, protecting the unique resource, and meeting the mandate for self sufficiency and sustainability by 2015.

Attendee Ken Salazar asked if the Trust is planning to conduct special outreach to tribal and Hispanic people. (Rodriquez answered yes.)

Attendee Evan Delametar asked how long the interactive website will be available for comment and how will citizens know that they have been heard. (Rodriquez and Rob Dixon responded that the site will be up for 60 days and will involve registration, review for spam, then the posting of comments.)

Trujillo reminded the group that the information derived in Phase I was used to develop the alternatives.

c. Infrastructure Activities

- *Facilities Assessment Report*

Trujillo reported that they are assessing the condition of 38 structures. This information will be coupled with information derived from the Documentation and Preservation of Historic Building Study. This study assessed the buildings to determine the requisite tools to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Both studies will support developing design elements and the prioritization of investments in the buildings.

- *Upper San Antonio Watershed Collaboration*

Los Amigos, the Trust, and other partners are planning to restore the riparian habitat on the San Antonio Creek under a State River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative grant. The work will improve water quality, restore and improve drainage, and provide education opportunities for the volunteers regarding restoration techniques. Also 319 Funds and a grant from the New Mexico Gas will support improving 6.5 miles of road (VC02 – VC09) to level 3 standards.

Attendee Pablo Sedillo asked about the conditions of the historic structures and if any are currently producing money. (Trujillo responded that 11-12 structures are historic, primarily in the headquarters area. The buildings are generally in poor to fair conditions. The Casa de Baca Lodge and Bunk House are currently generating revenue.)

Attendee Tom Jervis asked who determines future uses for the building and how are these decisions coordinated with the Public Use and Access Plan. (Trujillo responded that EIS is conducted at a programmatic level and will define how the structures will be used. Administrative decisions will eventually determine certain priorities and allocation of funds. The two studies provide baseline information about the buildings' deficiencies and compliance requirements. Member Tinsley added that the management plan will dovetail with refurbishment decisions. Trujillo responded that these are interim upgrades. Tinsley added that these improvements would need to be made regardless of the alternative that is ultimately chosen. The upgrades are necessary to support safe use.)

Attendee Gellaher asked if the Trust is planning to pave any of the roads. (Trujillo responded that this question will be considered within the Public Use and Access Planning activities.)

d. 2009 Livestock Program

Tim Haarman, Ranch Foreman, presented on the 2009 livestock program. He informed the group that the lease was granted to New Mexico State University in cooperation with the New Mexico Beef Cattle Association and Jemez Pueblo. The Preserve anticipates making \$52 per head. He reviewed that they set grazing capacity at 40% of yield and therefore can allow 540 animal units for the 120 day season. This year the program will separate the cows from the elk and keep them out of riparian areas - although the cow/calf pairs were initially corralled for 10 days near the riparian area. This year the program focuses on studying high altitude bulls, reproducing heifers and cow/calf pairs. The university will be studying pulmonary altitude pressure – a cause of brisket disease. The cow/calf pairs will come from Jemez Pueblo.

Attendee Tom Taylor asked for the key criteria on which they evaluated the proposals. (Bratcher responded that in addition to economic implications they considered other benefits such as educational opportunities, community support, and spin-off enterprises.)

Attendee Elsa Brett asked how much of the \$25,000 income will be net profit for the Trust. (Haarman responded that this summer the Trust staff is providing only minimal oversight so the income is incremental.)

Attendee Tom Ribe asked if the specific administrative costs that were requested at a previous meeting will be provided in the future accounting information. (Member Tinsley responded that the revised accounting system will be available in July 2010.)

Attendee Tom Ribe commented that he did not believe the public bought the preserve to support the livestock industry. (Tinsley responded that the Congressional mandate includes establishing a working ranch.)

Attendee Kent Salazar requested that the Trust track and report benefits of the program to the Preserve and neighboring communities.

Communications – Manager, Marketing and Communications

Terry McDermott, Manager of Marketing and Communications, reviewed his actions to date. He noted that an RFP could be issued next quarter to address website concerns to make it more user friendly. He noted that he is available as a point of contact for the Trust and will connect the public with the appropriate staff or information. He placed advertisements for the Preserve in the Los Alamos Summer Guide, Jemez Thunder, and the Los Amigos Newsletter. A fishing piece was published in several local papers and he has been on several radio programs to discuss the Preserve. He will be meeting with NMDOT regarding additional road signage. He is working to revise dated informational materials and has requested funds from the Board to support enhanced advertising and marketing activities.

An unidentified attendee asked if he was going to develop a marketing plan. (McDermott responded that once his budget request is fulfilled he will develop a plan.)

An unidentified attendee asked for the criteria for determining the May 21 opening date. (Rob Dixon noted that it is based on conditions of the roads.)

Science/Education – Director, Science and Education

Bob Parmenter, Director of Science and Education, listed his division's topics for this meeting: Climate Change Workshop, 2009 Spring Range Report, Fisheries Monitoring, Bio Bug Blitz, High School Teachers Continuing Education Program, Elk Mortality Study, and Cultural Resources update.

a. Climate Change Workshop

Parmenter presented on several findings from the Nature Conservancy's sponsored workshop which focused on the impact of climate change in the Jemez Springs area. He reported the temperatures have increased 4 degrees in the last 100 years and precipitation has decrease by .003 inches per year. The Jemez River discharge has decreased from 100cfs in 1972 to 60cfs currently. He reported that climate changes will impact species at risk such as the pika, and Jemez mountain salamander, as well as impact the fisheries health and elk foraging opportunities.

b. Forage Monitoring

In May 2009, the Trust's science staff and volunteers primarily from the Sierra Club and the Forest Service studied the entire Jemez Mountain Region (not just the Preserve) to assess forage availability. They evaluated conditions of pastures and available forage as well as assessed the potential for seasonal growth. Findings revealed record forage availability for the 2009 grazing season.

c. Fisheries Monitoring

Parmenter presented several slides which illustrated his staff's fisheries monitoring efforts for the 2009 season.

d. Bio Bug Blitz

This summer the Trust teamed with the Systematic Entomology Lab and outside volunteers to conduct four intensive collection sessions targeting different biotic regions in the Preserve. Additional samples will be collected in June, July and August. The first sampling filled three museum drawers of insect species.

e. High School Science Teachers Continuing Education

A consortium of partners (with the lead office at UNM) received a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to support research on water resources in the mountains from northern New Mexico; as part of this grant and collaborative funding from the State of New Mexico, science teachers from the northern New Mexico network of public school districts will be supported in an on-site summer continuing education program. This June, the teachers will participate in a training program for one week learning a range of field techniques that can transfer back to the classrooms.

Another NSF grant is in preparation by these partners (led by NMT, the Northern New Mexico Network for Rural Education, and the Valles Caldera Trust), and will be submitted in August. This five-year, \$12.5 million proposed program will enhance science education in northern New Mexico's high schools, and will use the Valles Caldera National Preserve as a central training site for teachers and students.

f. Elk Mortality Study

The Trust, in cooperation with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, is conducting a study to better understand the low calf/cow ratio on the Preserve. Sage Dunn, Wildlife Biologist, presented slides on study techniques for capturing, evaluating and tagging the calves. To date they have captured 27 calves and have recorded 6 subsequent mortalities.

g. Cultural Resources

Ana Steffen, Cultural Resources Coordinator, provided an overview of summer 2009 activities. She reminded the group that to date her team has studied about 11% of the Preserve- identifying 485 sites on approximately 7400 acres. The University of New Mexico Archeology Field School will continue to survey the areas around the South Mountain to East Fork. Steffen reported on volunteer Coleen Olinger's Aspen Art Survey which is identifying and recording carvings on the Preserve's aspen trees. Olinger has identified 115 trees so far with historical carvings- the earliest is dated 1911. Steffen also noted the availability of the final report entitled "LA26917" which documents historic climate data. Steffen reported that the Preserve is also conducting a Diagnostic Point Study this summer - points have already been found that are 9000 years old.

Financial Review, Chief Administrative Officer

Due to time restraints, Dennis Rino presented an abbreviated overview of the Trust's financials to date and briefed on the results of the financial audit. He reported that revenues are down, reflecting general economic conditions. Actual income to date is \$488,499 which contrasts with projected revenue of \$815,000. The financial audit of the Trust from 2004 – 2007 identified several findings that the Trust has already addressed or is in the process of addressing. Rino noted that a chart of the audit's specific findings coupled with the Trust's response will be posted on the web as will a copy of the detailed financials to date.

General Comments, Executive Director

Gary Bratcher reminded the group that his office is open and welcomes contact with the public. He also commended the staff for all of their good work.

IV. Board Committee Reports

Infrastructure Committee – Vice Chairman

Member Tinsley reported that the Temporary Visitor Center Improvements should be complete in middle July. He noted the Board's support for a Water Availability Study. Tinsley added that the planned ADA upgrades are being worked on and almost complete. The Board has also authorized use of the revenue fund for funding the Phase II Public Use and Access contract(440,000); road upgrades for finishing the main loop through the Preserve (\$1.2 million); web review and improvements (\$160,000); infrastructure repairs, renovation, and maintenance of buildings and structures(\$1.9 million), refurbishment and supply of a science and education center (\$300,000); and renting a facility for a science and education center from available structures next to the VCT administrative office in Jemez Springs.

Corporate Governance Committee, Chairman

Chair Henry reported on four new staff policies related to vehicles, harassment, drug use and compensation. He asked attendees to contact the staff if they desire more details about the policies.

V. Public Comments

Attendee Betsy Barnett expressed concerns about how comments were interpreted by ENTRIX from the earlier scoping process. She noted that approximately 200 comments were recorded that emphasized resource protection and only three reflected an economic emphasis. Barnett thought the ENTRIX report over emphasized the three in its conclusions. Barnett asked for more hiking and biking and does not believe that financial sustainability should be pursued at any cost. (Member Henry agreed that financial sustainability should not be pursued at the expense of the other mandates. Member Tinsley agreed and thanked Barnett for her passion and commitment.)

Attendee Greg Kendall expressed support for the rim trail concept.

Attendee Jake Keller added that the 500 pound gorilla in the room is the ongoing frustration with limited access and asked the Trust to set and announce a date when more access will be allowed.

Marie Rodriguez read a letter from Vaughn Delemeter to the Board.

Attendee Kent Salazar commended that livestock plan and asked the Board to document its positive impacts to the Preserve and adjacent communities.

VI. Adjourn

Chair Henry adjourned the meeting at 9:35 PM.