



**VALLES
CALDERA**
NATIONAL
PRESERVE

Valles Caldera National Preserve



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Proposed Stewardship Action

**Multiple Use and Sustained Yield of
Forage Resources
Stewardship Register
50400 MUSY-Forage**

Valles Caldera National Preserve
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July 11, 2007

Introduction

Since 2002, the Valles Caldera Trust has administered an interim livestock grazing program within Valles Caldera National Preserve. The Trust has also acquired data about forage and elk, and assessed rangeland and watershed conditions. Based on upland and riparian assessments, the condition of Preserve rangelands can be described as “medium” on a scale of “low” to “high.” Based on suitability and capacity assessments, 95% of the Preserve that is suitable for supporting elk is also suitable for grazing domestic livestock. According to these Preserve-wide assessments, the Trust’s interim grazing program has allocated and managed forage appropriately on the Preserve.

Proposed Action

The Trust is proposing to allocate forage within the Valles Caldera National Preserve to support elk and other herbivores; to preserve and protect ecosystem processes and habitats; to support livestock grazing and other commercial purposes; and to support scientific, education and other public uses.

The Trust is proposing to continue to manage grazing programs for domestic livestock. These programs could be one year or multiple years. They could include grazing by cattle or other domestic herbivores. The Trust will also consider other commercial uses of forage, including harvesting of native seeds and plants.

The Trust is proposing to manage infrastructure associated with the allocation and use of forage, including the repair, maintenance, removal, obliteration and rehabilitation, or construction of earthen and other water tanks, water distribution systems, fences and other

barriers, and corrals and pens.

This proposal will include objectives¹, monitored outcomes² and performance requirements³ for management of forage, riparian resources and associated habitats. These objectives, monitored outcomes and performance requirements will guide the use of forage and will provide metrics useful for adaptive management. They will also guide future activities on the Preserve that may affect forage and riparian resources and associated habitats.

The Trust is not proposing actions to directly manage forage on the Preserve with fire, through mechanical treatment or by other means. The Trust will consider actions to manage forage, such as prescribed fire or forest thinning, in the future with other activities to manage vegetation.

Alternatives developed for this stewardship action will consider different levels of investment in infrastructure; varying the allocation and use of forage in time, space and quantity; as well as taking no action at all.

Purpose and Need

Direction to manage the Preserve as a working ranch is found in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000 (PL 106-248), Section 108 Resource Management, (d) Management Program. In this section, Congress assigned the Trust six goals for comprehensive management:

- (1) Operation of the Preserve as a working ranch, consistent with paragraphs (2) through (4);
- (2) The protection and preservation of the scientific, scenic, geologic, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural and recreational values of the Preserve;
- (3) Multiple use and sustained yield of renewable resources within the Preserve;
- (4) Public use and access to the Preserve for recreation;
- (5) Renewable resource utilization and management alternatives that, to the extent practicable –

- (A) Benefit local communities and small businesses;
 - (B) Enhance coordination of management objectives with those on surrounding National Forest System land and; and
 - (C) Provide cost savings to the Trust through the exchange of services, including but not limited to labor and maintenance of facilities, for resources provided by the Trust; and
- (6) Optimizing the generation of income based on existing market conditions, to the extent that it does not unreasonably diminish the long-term scenic and natural values of the area, or the multiple use and sustained yield capability of the land.

Since 2002, the Valles Caldera Trust has administered an interim livestock grazing program within Valles Caldera National Preserve. Under this program, a percentage of the forage in and around the major valles is allocated for livestock use from June through September (historically, the grazing season was managed from May through October). The remainder of the forage has been allocated for wildlife use and ecosystem services.

Under the interim livestock program, forage use has been limited to less than 40% of annual production and sensitive areas have been protected. However, this has been accomplished while operating at less than 25% of the livestock capacity established in the Environmental Assessment (EA). Preserve-wide assessments indicate that rangeland and watershed conditions on the Preserve can be improved and that the Trust needs to manage the livestock program in context with managing grazing by elk.

The interim livestock program relies on existing Preserve infrastructure and facilities. Much of this infrastructure was constructed over the last 100 years to support ranching activities that included the management of sheep, horses and several types of cattle. Some of this infrastructure is in disrepair. Water tanks have breached and are causing erosion and sediment deposition in streams. Few of the fences were constructed to facilitate wildlife movements and many were constructed with “sheep fence,” which is particularly hazardous to elk calves. Preserve fences do not comprise a comprehensive system of barriers for the efficient control of livestock and protection of resources.

To meet the goals in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act, the Trust needs to develop a program for multiple use and sustained yield of forage resources on the Preserve. Infrastructure (including fences, tanks, corrals and other structures) needs to be removed, repaired, maintained or constructed to support management of livestock, improvements to range and watershed conditions, and other programs within the Preserve. The Trust needs flexibility to respond to environmental and market conditions, to take advantage of partnership opportunities, and to try innovative approaches to address administrative and resource issues.

Decision(s) to be Made

The Executive Director of the Trust is the Responsible Official charged with making the implementing decision for this stewardship action at the direction of the Board of Trustees. The Responsible Official will decide whether and how:

- To allocate a portion of the Preserve's forage to livestock and other commercial purposes, as well as scientific, educational and other public purposes.
- Forage allocation and use will occur in time and space, and the quantity and distribution of such use.
- Infrastructure, including earthen tanks, water holding and distribution systems, fences, barriers, corrals and pens, will be managed.

The decision to implement any action alternative will include:

- The goals, objectives and monitored outcomes for livestock management and other activities that use or affect forage, riparian resources and associated habitats.
- The performance requirements that will guide the development and management of programs and facilities for livestock management and forage use.

Scope of the Analysis

1. Environmental Documentation

The Trust's implementation procedures⁴ for the National Environmental Policy Act

(NEPA) indicate that long-term programs for the management of livestock normally require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (§101.51). These procedures also identify activities where an implementing decision could be made after the preparation of an EA (§101.52), including “Livestock management actions utilizing land, resources, and facilities of the Preserve, defined in location and time, the effects of which are anticipated to be short-term and minor in scope.”

The proposed action to allocate forage use does not fall clearly into either an action requiring an EIS or an action that could be implemented after preparing an EA. Although the Trust is proposing to make a decision on the use of forage that extends forward in time for an undefined period, the stewardship action would be defined in location and time on an annual basis. The program would not require irretrievable commitments of the Preserve’s resources. The management of associated infrastructure would be expected to have effects that are short-term and minor in scope.

The Trust is proposing to prepare an EA to determine whether to prepare a finding of no significant impact (§1508.9) or an EIS. A finding of no significant impact (FONSI) refers to a document prepared by a federal agency that presents the reasons why an action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (§1508.13).

2. Public Scoping

This Stewardship Action is of interest to many stakeholders, including the following:

- ♦ Ranchers interested in grazing livestock on the Preserve;
- ♦ Organizations and individuals concerned with the potential environmental consequences resulting from livestock grazing;
- ♦ Recreationists concerned that livestock will affect their recreation experience;
- ♦ Educational and research institutions studying grasslands, grazing, elk and associated interactions and effects;
- ♦ Neighboring land managers who see opportunities to collaborate with Trust in addressing regional issues;

The Trust is committed to informing and involving the public in planning and decision-making for multiple use and sustained yield of the Preserve's forage resources. The Trust also foresees opportunities to collaborate in the development and planning of annual programs for the use of forage based on the selection of an action or no action alternative.

On June 15, 2007 The Valles Caldera Trust hosted an open house to give the public an opportunity to provide comments on the proposed stewardship action or acquire more information about the proposal and the planning process. The meeting began with an informative presentation, followed by an "open house" period for public comments, questions, and an opportunity to visit with staff and resource specialists.

The Trust will be holding a second open house in the late summer or early fall. The second open house will be held in the Espanola area at a location to be determined

If you are unable to attend the open house, you may submit questions or comments to the Trust electronically through our website; by emailing Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator at mrodriguez@vallescaldera.gov; or by mailing correspondence to the Valles Caldera Trust, P.O. Box 359, Jemez Springs, NM 87025.

Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map - Depicts the regional location of the Valles Caldera National Preserve.
2. Suitability Map – Depicts areas of the Preserve suitable for grazing by elk and domestic livestock.
3. Production Map – Depicts the annual forage production Preserve-wide under typical climate conditions.

¹ "Objective" means the desired outcome that can be meaningfully evaluated by location and timing within the Preserve.

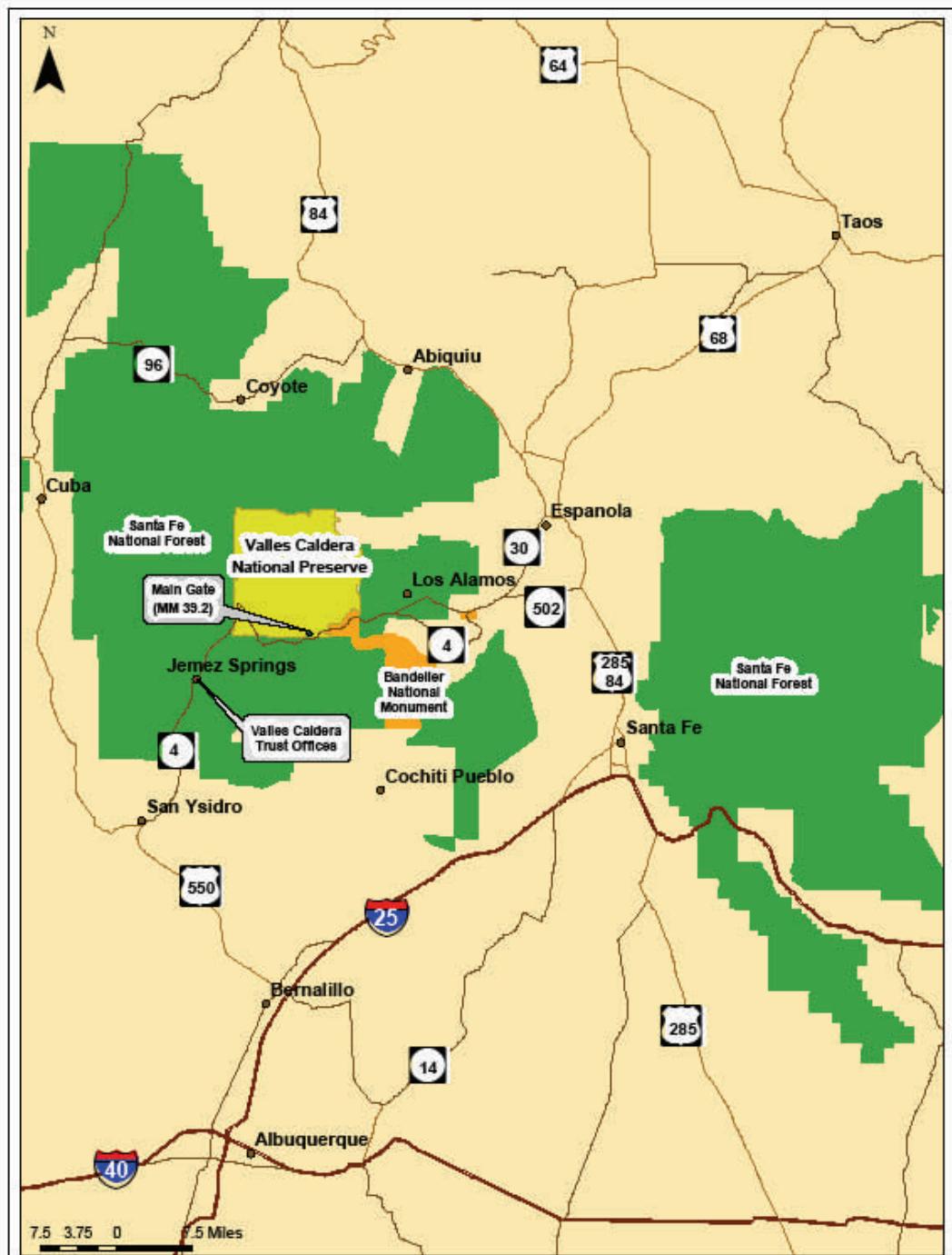
² "Monitored outcome" means the short-, mid- or long-term outcome selected for systematic evaluation.

³ "Performance requirement" means the limitation placed on the implementation of a stewardship action necessary for compliance with applicable laws, regulations, standards, mitigating measures or generally accepted practices.

⁴ National Environmental Policy Act Procedures for the Valles Caldera National Preserve, Federal Register / Vol. 68, No. 137 / Thursday, July 17, 2003 / Notices

⁵ National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA); 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347

Attachment 1—Valles Caldera National Preserve Vicinity Map



Proposed Stewardship Action—Multiple Use and Sustained Yield of Forage Resources

