The History of Domestic Livestock Grazing on the Valles Caldera National Preserve

Livestock grazing was the first significant extractive use of the Preserve's resources. Early surveyors and explorers consistently identified the large grassy valles with their perennial waters as ideally suited for grazing. Prior to the 1876 survey and patent to the [Baca] land grant, the Cabeza deBacas and their neighbors were herding small flocks through the tall grasses of the valles, "probably no larger than several hundred animals apiece" (Martin, 2003). At that time "…the Baca family heirs permitted members of the Pueblo of Jémez to run sheep and horses in the Valles Caldera's rich grasslands. [1] The Jémez use of these valley ranges for herding was apparently a long-lived tradition that dated back to the early Spanish colonization of New Mexico" (Martin, 2003). These numbers increased at the turn of the century under Frank Bond who had *partido*[2] agreements with Hispanic shepherds. Clyde Smith, who was born on a homestead at Battleship Rock in1899 and worked on the ranch as a young man, estimated that there were over 100,000 sheep on the Baca Location during the summers of 1917 and 1918 (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T., 2004)

In 1939-1940 with the decline of wool prices Frank Bond added cattle to the Baca Location's ranching operations (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004). In the early 1950s, the Baca Location supported some 30,000 sheep and 5,000 cattle (Martin 2003By the late 1950s, ranchers ran as many as 12,000 cattle on the ranch (Martin 2003).

In 1963 James Patrick Dunigan purchased the Baca Location from the Bond Estate. After allowing existing grazing permits to expire, Dunigan started running his own cattle in 1965, running about 7,000 yearlings from mid-April through mid-November (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004). To expand the areas of the ranch suitable for grazing and implement a rotational grazing system, Dunigan built fences and constructed earthen tanks.

In an attempt to reduce damage from grazing, lengthen the grazing season, and accelerate the reclamation of the vast network of logging roads, Dunigan working established plots of cool season, non-native grasses (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T., 2004).

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[1] A misunderstanding between G. W. Bond and Brothers Company and Jémez Pueblo led to the arrest of members of three Jémez Pueblo families for illegal grazing around 1920, however. Even though the court proceedings, which were held in Española, determined in favor of the Indian defendants, Frank Bond ended the unwritten agreement that allowed the Pueblo to pasture their cattle and horses in the Valles Caldera. (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004)

[2] Under the *partido* agreement, their own stock served as collateral. Bond collected a fee for range use from the *partidarios*, "usually 300 pounds of wool and 25 lambs per 100 ewes." *Partidarios* also had to outfit themselves from his store, where he charged a flat 10%interest rate. With expenses mounting, most *partidarios* were lucky to keep their own sheep at the end of a contract. (Martin 2003).

History of Wildlife Management

In the late 19th century as the population in the Jémez area increased so did subsistence hunting. During this same period the increased availability of modern rifles gave rise to more recreational hunting. This combination of increasing pressures soon decimated populations of mule deer and wild turkey in the area. The popularity of elk hunting was so great that elk were eradicated across the state of New Mexico by 1910 (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004).

At the same time, a change in management policies adversely affected several other native and introduced animal populations that had become a traditional part of the Valles Caldera's ecology. Ranchers and federal agents placed poisoned grain at black-tailed prairie dog towns to rid pastures of these pests in the 1920s (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004, citing Pickens 1979, in Scurlock 1981:148). Ranchers and government officials also regarded feral burros and horses as nuisances because they competed with cattle and sheep for pasturage. In a concerted effort to rid the Jémez Mountains of such unnecessary competition to livestock industry, U.S. Forest Service personnel rounded up 1,500 burros and horses from the greater Jémez district area, including the Baca Location (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004, citing Tucker and Fitzpatrick 1972:81).

With the depletion of elk, mule deer, turkey, horse, and prairie dog populations in the Jémez Mountains, gray wolves, mountain lions, and coyotes killed increasing numbers of sheep and cattle around the Valles Caldera (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004, citing Winter 1981:178). In 1916 the United States Forest Service initiated a new predator control program (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004, citing Scurlock 1981:144). The U.S. Biological Service (now known as the Fish and Wildlife Service) sent trappers into the Jémez Mountains, including the Valles Caldera, to exterminate gray wolves and mountain lions. As recalled by Homer Pickens (1979), a long-time trapper and wildlife specialist, John Davenport, who once served as one of Frank Bond's Baca Location ranch managers, killed the last New Mexican gray wolf in the Valle Grande in 1932 (Anschuetz, K.F., Merlan T.,2004 citing Scurlock 1981).

In 1947 New Mexico Game and Fish released 47 head of elk imported from the Yellowstone, Wyoming area into the Río de las Vacas valley west of the Baca Location (Martin 2003, citing Allen 1997). Although the Jémez Mountains grasslands provided favorable habitat, the introduced elk herd increased at a slow rate, with the population reaching only an estimated 200 animals in 1961. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish introduced another 58 elk from Jackson Hole, Wyoming between 1964 and 1965. The populations continued their slow increase in the Valles Caldera over the next decade (Martin 2003, citing Allen 1997). Dramatic ecological change that had both an immediate and great impact on local elk demography occurred in 1977: In June of that year, the 25,000-acre [10,000-ha] La Mesa fire burned in the ponderosa pine forests on the Pajarito Plateau at Bandelier National Monument. The fire converted the forest into grassland and opened up considerable winter habitat for the Jémez elk population. With favorable climatic conditions, the elk herd expanded to about 7,000 in 1989. In 2001 it was estimated that between 4,000 and 6,000 elk used the Baca Ranch for summer range. [Martin 2003, citing Allen 1997].