



Proposed Stewardship Action – Public Use and Access

To: The Board of Trustees, Valles Caldera Trust,
From: Jeffrey Cross, Valles Caldera Trust, Executive Director
Date: December 6, 2006
Subject: Request for authorization to collect data and information (Phase 1) to support planning (Phase 2) to develop programs, facilities and infrastructure for public access and use of the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Introduction

On April 20, 2006 at a public meeting held at Fuller Lodge in Los Alamos New Mexico, the Board of Trustees of the Valles Caldera Trust directed the staff of the Valles Caldera Trust to prepare a Stewardship Register for a comprehensive public recreation program on the Valles Caldera National Preserve (the Preserve).

The Valles Caldera Trust (the Trust) currently manages an interim program for public access and use of the Preserve. The interim program was developed in response to the Valles Caldera Preservation Act (Public Law 106-248), which mandates that reasonable access to the Preserve for recreation would be provided within two years of federal acquisition. The interim program provides a variety of regularly available outdoor recreation activities such as fishing, hiking, hunting, wildlife and scenic tours, wagon rides, and horseback riding, and winter recreation activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and sleigh rides.

The interim program also includes opportunities for the public to enjoy and learn about the Preserve through an array of special events, including night sky adventures, youth and adult outdoor education seminars, photography workshops, mountain biking and running events and more recently, overnight opportunities such as weddings and workshops, which use the existing facilities on the Preserve. Universities, K-12 schools, and various educational and research entities have also had access to the Preserve on a case-by-case basis.

Infrastructure development has been limited to road maintenance and improvements necessary to provide safe access while protecting and preserving natural and cultural resources. Temporary facilities, such as portable buildings and toilets, facilitate public use and access to the Preserve.

Prior to federal acquisition, 200-300 people visited the preserve annually. Since federal acquisition, that number has increased to 9,000–11,000 visitors annually. Even with the limitations of current infrastructure and facilities, this number could increase by 50-100% over the next five years. Visitors enjoy their experience on the Preserve but consistently request broader and more spontaneous access.

Proposed Action

The Valles Caldera Trust is considering alternatives for implementing long-term programs for public access to and use of the Preserve. In Phase 1, the Trust will collect data and information from the public and other sources to inform the planning process. In Phase 2, which will be authorized under a separate proposed stewardship action following completion of Phase 1, the Trust will consider alternative levels of investment and locations for the development of facilities and infrastructure to support various levels of capacity for public programs and activities.

Purpose and Need

To meet the purposes of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act, the Trust needs to develop long-term, economically viable, public programs supported by sustainable infrastructure. Programs and infrastructure for public use and access need to be consistent with the broader mandate for multiple-use management of the Preserve.

The Trust needs to move from an interim recreation program to a long-term program to meet the purposes identified in the Act and to address the desire of the public to have broader use and access to the Preserve for recreation, education and other purposes.

Section 105 of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act states “The purposes for which the Preserve is established are to protect and preserve the scientific, scenic, geologic, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values of the Preserve, and to provide for multiple use and sustained yield of renewable resources within the Preserve...”

According to Section 108, Resource Management, (b) Management Responsibilities, the “Trust shall manage the land and resources of the Preserve and the use thereof including, but not limited to such activities as—

- (1) administration of the operations of the Preserve;
- (2) preservation and development of the land and resources of the Preserve;
- (3) interpretation of the Preserve and its history for the public;
- (4) management of public use and occupancy of the Preserve; and
- (5) maintenance, rehabilitation, repair, and improvement of property within the Preserve.”

According to Section 108, Resource Management, (d) Management Program, “...the Trust shall...develop a comprehensive program for the management of lands, resources, and facilities within the Preserve...[S]uch program shall provide for—

- (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 of 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
 - (C) provide cost savings to the Trust through the exchange of services, including but not limited to labor and maintenance of facilities, for resources or services 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.”

Further guidance for the management of public use and access are provided in the Act under Section 108 (e) Public Use and Recreation and in the management principles (§101.1) adopted by the Board of Trustees and included in the procedures¹ for the Trust's implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Scope of Analysis

- The capacity for public access to and use of the Preserve.
- The types of programs and activities to be developed on the Preserve.
- The facilities and infrastructure to be developed in support of public access and use on the Preserve for recreation, education, and other purposes.
- The scale, location, and timing of such development.
- The goals², objectives³, and monitored outcomes⁴ for public activities and programs developed and implemented on the Preserve.
- The performance requirements⁵ that will guide the development and management of programs and facilities for public access and use on the preserve for recreation, education and other purposes.

Acquisition of Data and Information

Prior to initiating the NEPA process, the Trust needs to acquire additional natural, social, and economic, data and information. Towards this end the Trust will:

- Hold a series of public workshops during the winter and spring of 2007. During these workshops, the Trust and the public will collaborate in the development of a reasonable range of alternatives for implementing a comprehensive program for public use and access.
- Establish visitor use survey for long-term monitoring of visitor satisfaction as well as the characteristics of visitors to the Preserve.
- Complete a socio-economic and market analyses at various scales to look at current and future trends as well as potential markets and niches.
- Identify and survey sites potentially suitable for the development of facilities on the Preserve.
- Complete quantifiable assessment of the Preserve's scenery and the delineation of views and other sensory resources within the Preserve.

Timing of the Analysis

Following the compilation of key data and information (Phase 1), subsequent planning and decision-making (Phase 2) may require 18–24 months. Earlier completion may be possible.

¹ Valles Caldera Trust—National Environmental Policy Act Procedures for the Valles Caldera National Preserve, **Federal Register** / Vol. 68, No. 137 / Thursday, July 17, 2003 / Notices.

² Goal means a desirable condition of the Preserve sought by the Trust and/or a desirable condition as described in Public Law 106–248 or within the management principles adopted by the Trust (101.1(d)).

³ Objective means the desired outcome that can be meaningfully evaluated by location and timing within the Preserve.

⁴ Monitored outcome means the short-, mid-, or long-term outcome selected for systematic evaluation.

⁵ 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.

Authorization

The Valles Caldera Trust, Board of Trustees authorized the collection of data and information (Phase 1) to support planning (Phase 2) to develop programs, facilities and infrastructure for public access and use of the Valles Caldera National Preserve for recreation, education and other public purposes at the public meeting on December 7, 2006.

Tracy Hephner, Chair⁶

Date

⁶ Authorized by a vote of the Board of Trustees in a Public Meeting, December 7, 2007; minutes at www.vallescaldera.gov.