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April 2, 2007

Dear Friends:

The attached document is an Environmental Assessment (EA) completed for the proposed expansion of Borrow Pit #2. The EA describes the proposed stewardship action including timing and location, and summarizes the expected environmental consequences.

This EA is being posted for a 30-day public comment period. The Trust will consider all comments received prior to making an implementing decision. You may submit your comments regarding this proposal to the Valles Caldera Trust electronically by selecting the feedback option or, by sending an email to Marie Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator. Marie's email address is mrodriguez@vallescaldera.gov. Written comments may be sent through surface mail to The Valles Caldera Trust, P.O. Box 359, Jemez Springs, NM 87025. Written comments may also be hand delivered to our offices at 18161 NM 4, Jemez Springs, NM 87025. You may call or make an appointment to personally visit our staff regarding this proposal, however comments should be made in writing (hard copy or electronic) to ensure they are considered accurately and in total.

Comments regarding the proposed expansion of Borrow Pit #2 will be accepted through 4:00 PM MDT on May 5, 2007.

Sincerely,

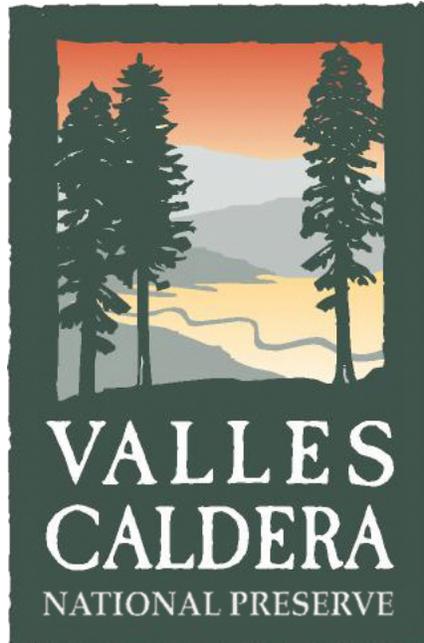
/s/Dennis Trujillo
Preserve Manager

Attachment (1)
Environmental Assessment

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Sandoval and Rio Arriba Counties

State of New Mexico



Stewardship Register

Stewardship Action	Borrow Pit #2 Expansion
File Number	50200 0704
Target Start Date	Summer 2007
Actual Start Date	
Target Completion Date	Summer 2007
Actual Completion Date	
Location	Puerto del Abrigo Sub Basin
UTM (Approximate Center)	364899.83 3976899.88
Last Updated	20070402 MER

Environmental Assessment

1. Purpose and Need/Proposed Action

1.1. Purpose and Need

The Valles Caldera Trust is proposing to expand the borrow pit known as Borrow Pit #2 (BP2) by approximately 1.7 surface acres. BP2 is located west of Cerro Abrigo within the Puerto del Abrigo sub basin. The term “Borrow Pit” is used to describe a site where native rock and aggregate are removed. The expansion is being proposed to provide local material for the maintenance work currently under way on road VC02 as well as to provide material for other annual road maintenance within the Preserve.

BP2 is an existing borrow pit that was reactivated to support the maintenance of VC02

(http://www.vallescaldera.gov/get_involved/stars/docs/200402Road%20Maintenance-SR.pdf). The existing excavation was estimated to be adequate to support the road maintenance project however, additional material is needed. The expansion of the existing pit would provide adequate material to complete the VC02 maintenance project as well as provide material for future road maintenance in the vicinity of the pit.

This stewardship action is being proposed to support efforts by the Trust to meet its management responsibilities as described in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act (the act); Section 108 Resource Management, (b) Management Responsibilities, (5) maintenance, rehabilitation, repair, and improvement of property within the Preserve. The proposed stewardship action will also support the Trust in meeting the goal established by the act in Section 108 Resource Management, (d) Management Program, (4) public use and access of the Preserve for recreation. The act further notes that facilities in the Preserve (including roads) are to meet public safety standards applicable to units of the National Forest System and the State of New Mexico.

The act specifically permits this activity in Section 105 The Valles Caldera National Preserve, (e) withdrawals, (2) Materials for Roads and Facilities; where it is stated, that “- *Nothing in this title shall preclude the Secretary, prior to assumption of management of the Preserve by the Trust, and the Trust thereafter, from allowing the utilization of common varieties of mineral materials such as sand, stone, and gravel as necessary for construction and maintenance of roads and facilities within the Preserve.*”

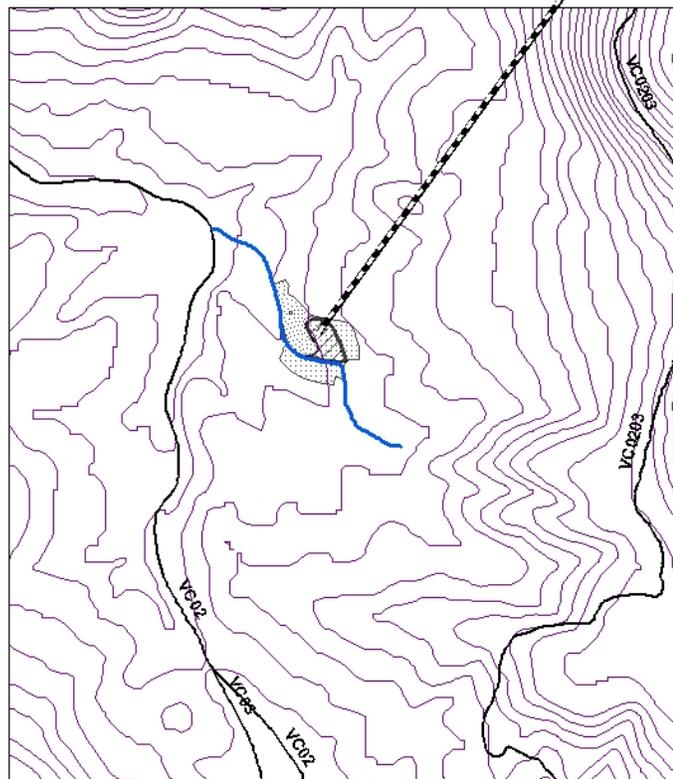
1.2. Proposed Stewardship Action

The proposed stewardship action would expand the current size of the pit from 2.6 acres to 4.3 acres. Prior to excavation, all shrubs and trees would be removed from the additional 1.7 surface acres through cutting, pushing, removal and/or mastication. Excavation of the hardrock material will involve the use of heavy equipment including metal-track bulldozers and will result in complete disturbance of the area where rock is removed. Existing road access is adequate to support the action.

Valles Caldera National Preserve

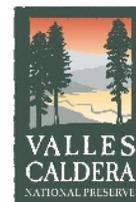
Proposed Expansion Borrow Pit #2

Project Map



Legend

-  Borrow Pit #2 (Existing)
-  Proposed Expansion
-  Footprint
-  vc_10mcontour arc
-  vc_route_v1 arc
-  BP#2 Access Road



1:12,000

MER 5/10/2006

1.3. Performance Requirements

- All performance requirements listed previously in the VC02 Road maintenance Stewardship Register will be incorporated.
- The soil, rock, organic material, and some or all vegetation will be piled on site for later use in site rehabilitation.
- Oversized material, if present, will be stock piled on site for future use as rip-rap or derrick material.
- Temporary erosion control features will be used during the life of the material source.
- Permanent drainage control measures will be established after the site has been rehabilitated.
- When excavation of the site has been completed, and the site will not be used again, the sides will be sloped, graded, or scaled and the general pit area smoothed and stabilized.
- Organic material from the removed vegetation or soil stabilization structures will be used to enhance the nutrient availability and site conditions for establishing native vegetation (in lieu of planting or seeding).
- Drainage and erosion control features established in the access road will be maintained during the life of material source.

1.4. Description

The borrow pit is located on the west flank of Cerro Abrigo within the Puerto del Abrigo sub-basin. The vegetation within the affected area consists primarily of medium sized ponderosa pine with some inclusions of aspen. The soils that underlay the forest are Calaveras soils, which are deep and well drained with a slight hazard of water and wind erosion.

The grassy toe slope adjacent to the access road is supported by Cosey soils. Cosey soils are deep and well drained with a moderate hazard rating for water erosion and a slight hazard rating for wind erosion.

Jaramillo creek is located one mile south of the proposed excavation site.

Cerro Abrigo was intensively clear-cut in the 1960's. A spiraling road network was constructed up the mountain to facilitate the clear-cutting. Cerro Abrigo has reforested with second growth ponderosa pine and other conifer species as well as large patches of aspen. The Trust is currently providing guided and unguided hikes for the public on Cerro Abrigo. The panoramic views from all sides of the mountain and the diverse forest make the Abrigo trail one of the most popular hikes on the Preserve. BP2 is not visible from the Abrigo Trail.

2. Alternatives

The National Environmental Policy Act requires agencies to consider alternative actions to any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning uses of available resources. While such conflicts are generally not associated with smaller projects, which are narrow in scope, the Trust has found the consideration of alternative actions to be valuable in decision making.

2.1. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

2.1.1. Creating a New Borrow Pit

The Trust explored developing a new borrow pit in lieu of expanding BP2. A suitable site was located on the northwestern flank of Cerro Abrigo. This area contained suitable aggregate material, was easily accessible and was not visible from VC02 or the Abrigo Trail. However, it was located within an area currently managed as winter roosting habitat for bald eagles. Access to this area is restricted from mid-October through early spring. Utilizing this area as a borrow source would constrain road maintenance activities to an unacceptable degree.

2.2. Alternatives Considered in Detail

2.2.1. Expanding Borrow Pit #2

This is the proposed action as described in 1.0 and 1.2.

2.2.2. No Action

No action would be taken to develop an aggregate material source at this time. Aggregate would be procured off site to complete the maintenance of road VC02.

3. Environmental Consequences

Issues

The National Environmental Policy Act directs agencies to focus documentation on issues which are truly significant to the action in question. No significant issues were identified during the scoping or analysis process. Performance requirements were developed to address concerns. These requirements are identified in Chapter 1.

In lieu of significant issues, the analysis of environmental consequences focused on a determination of significance.

3.1. Environmental Consequences

This chapter summarizes the effects to the natural and human environment expected to occur as a result of either taking no action or implementing the proposed action. A discussion of the affected environment is provided where applicable. Effects are measured by context (the spatial or temporal extent of the effect) and intensity (the magnitude of the effect). Effects may be beneficial or adverse and may be direct, indirect, or cumulative.

A summary of the context and intensity of the effects is presented followed by a supporting narrative. The spatial extent of an effect is described in a narrative statement. The temporal extent of the effect is defined by three categories of duration:

- Short-term: 0-3 Years
- Mid-term: 3-10 Years
- Long-term: 10+ years

The intensity of the effect is defined by four levels of magnitude (intensity is influenced by context):

Negligible:	No change would occur or the magnitude of change would not be measurable.
Minor:	Changes would be measurable but would not alter the structure, composition, or function of the resource and would be limited in context.
Moderate:	Changes would be measurable and may somewhat influence the structure, composition, or function of the resource but would be limited in context.
Major:	Changes would be measurable, would alter the structure, composition or function of the resource and may be extensive in context.

3.1.1. Effects to Flora

Affected Environment

The area to be excavated is forested with ponderosa pine and blue spruce with some minor aspen in the understory. The tree canopy is quite dense, approximately 60%. Trees are less than 16” in diameter. There are no known threatened or endangered plant species in the VCNP (Valles Caldera Trust 2002).

No Action

Narration: There would be no effect to the flora.

The Proposed Stewardship Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Long term, limited to the planning area	Moderate

Narration:

Excavating the site will temporarily eliminate vegetative cover from 1.7 acres of forest. Performance requirements described in Chapter 1 are anticipated to encourage natural vegetation to initiate within one year and vegetative cover to return within 3-5 years following reclamation, depending on climatic conditions. Initially cover would be in the form of native grasses. Over time, conifers would be expected to reclaim the site.

These effects will be localized, limited to the footprint of the proposed project area.

3.1.2. Effects to Fauna

Affected Environment

No threatened or endangered species reside in the planning area. There are no Important Bird Areas (IBA) identified in the Preserve. There are no associations or important links between the project area and the closest known IBA's (Valles Caldera Trust 2002a).

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect to fauna or faunal habitat.

The Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Indirect	Limited to the planning area	Minor

Narration:

The changes in the structure, composition, and distribution of plants would be reflected in changes in habitat. Changes would be limited to the project area and would not directly affect the availability, suitability, or use of habitat for any species.

3.1.3. Effects to Soil Resources

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Localized within the planning area	Moderate

Narrative:

The primary effect to soils would be from the removal of the aggregate material. Performance requirements designed to stabilize soil and encourage revegetation will serve to limit these effects to the proposed project footprint.

3.1.4. Air Quality

Affected Environment

The proposed action is within the Middle Rio Grande Airshed in Sandoval County, New Mexico. This is an attainment area, considered having air quality as good as or better than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These standards are set to protect human health and general welfare.

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Localized within the planning area	Minor – Short Term

Narrative:

There may be a minor effect to air quality during excavation activities. These effects (dust) will not affect any residential populations. Dust abatement requirements identified in the construction contract for road VC02 will serve to mitigate the affects to visitors in the area.

3.1.5. Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

An archaeological survey was completed on 100% of the project area. Findings from that survey indicated that no cultural resources are located within the area of potential effect and there is a low potential for unrecorded resources to be buried.

No Action:

Narrative

There would be no effect to cultural resources. Off site aggregate would be procured from an approved source with assurance the no artifacts would be present.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
No Effect	N/A	N/A

3.1.6. Socio-economic impacts

Affected Environment

BP2 is not located within any city or village limits.

No Action:

Narrative

Approximately \$250,000 - \$300,000 dollars would be transferred to the local and/or regional economy, primarily in the cost for transport of the aggregate material.

Proposed Action

Narrative:

There would be no effect to local, regional or other socio-economic conditions.

The expansion of BP2 is being proposed to support ongoing activities and traffic levels, and those that are reasonably foreseeable. The proposed action is not expected to directly or indirectly increase traffic, area use, or create any changes in local or regional activities. Any socio, economic or environmental effects will not be disproportionate to any individual or population.

3.2. Public Health and Safety

Either expanding BP2 or taking no action will not directly affect public health and safety. The expansion of the borrow pit indirectly supports the maintenance and upgrade of the Preserve's roads.

3.3. Effects to the Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area

The proposed action expands an existing borrow pit. In addition, there are numerous roads and borrow pits throughout the Preserve. Implementing the proposed action would not significantly alter the unique characteristic of the Preserve.

3.4. The Degree to which the Effects of the Proposed Action would be Considered Controversial, are Uncertain, or would Establish Precedence.

The construction and expansion of borrow pits to support road maintenance activities is commonplace on roaded landscapes in forests and rangelands.

3.5. Cumulative Effects

The proposed action would not increase or decrease the context or intensity of the effects associated with any past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future action. The effects of the proposed action would not be increased in context or intensity when combined with the effects of any past, present or reasonably foreseeable future action.

3.6. Compliance

The expansion of BP2 as proposed is would not violate any local, state or federal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.