

Valles Caldera National Preserve
Interim Grazing Program
Stewardship Register

Stewardship Action: Interim Grazing	File Number: PLAN – 7
Target Start Date: June 2004	Responsible Official: Preserve Manager
Target Completion Date: September 2005	Signature Date: March 2, 2004
Actual Start Date: June 1, 2004	Actual Date of Completion

Proposed Action:

The Valles Caldera Trust is proposing to continue the current grazing program (as amended May 20, 2003) through the interim grazing seasons until the completion of a preserve-wide analysis regarding the stewardship of the Preserve with regard to livestock management is complete. The duration of this decision shall not exceed the grazing season of 2005.

Background:

All Stewardship Actions are framed to meet the intent of the Valles Caldera Preserve Act (Public Law 106-248 July 25, 2000). Of relevance to the management of livestock and the “working ranch” elements of the Act is, Section 102 Findings and Purposes (a) Findings (8) which states, “the Baca Ranch can be protected for current and future generations by continued operation as a working ranch under a unique management regime which would protect the land and resource values of the property and surrounding ecosystem while allowing for the ranch to eventually become self sustaining. Also in Section 102 Findings and Purposes under (b) Purposes (5) “to provide for sustained yield management of [Baca] ranch for timber production and domesticated livestock grazing insofar as is consistent with other purposes stated herein.”

Under this primary purpose as well as additional statements of purpose and need presented in the August 2002 Environmental Assessment (EA), The Valles Caldera Trust proposed, analyzed and selected an interim grazing strategy that was conservative with regard to the numbers of animals permitted and the spatial area of the preserve available for grazing. To ensure the program would not create effects outside the parameters identified in the EA, the decision was limited to the duration of a single season.

This Decision was amended in May of 2003 based on information gained during implementation of the 2002 grazing season, additional data on forage availability during drought years, the EA and amendment, and comments received during the public scoping period (Amendment May 2003, Appendix B). The decision also considered the results of informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and New Mexico Game and Fish Department; the public, Native American Pueblos and Tribes, other agency comments, and applicable laws and regulations.

Below is the content of the selected alternative (Alternative 2) as amended. The original EA, the Amendment and the Project Analysis file are available for public review at the Valles Caldera Trust offices at 2201 Trinity Drive Suite C, Los Alamos, NM 87544.

Definitions

Assigned Use: The amount of percent of available forage calculated to provide for livestock needs. Based on the potential production under Favorable and Unfavorable growing conditions, rangeland acres within the pasture, and desirable allowable use by livestock. It is generally described as an Animal Unit Month (AUM) within a grazing pasture.

Animal Unit: An animal unit (AU) is one mature cow of approximately 1,000 pounds and her weaned calf, usually 6 months of age or their equivalent. Examples of other AU values for different class of livestock or ungulates include:

Steer/Yearlings/Replacement Heifers	0.7 AU
Elk	0.7-1.0 AU
Sheep	0.2 AU

Animal Unit Month: The amount of forage required by an AU for 1 month. This analysis uses 900 pounds of air-dry forage as required to support an animal unit month.

Favorable Growing Conditions: Prevailing weather and climate that is beneficial to the development of herbaceous plants (grasses, forbs and grass like plants).

Unfavorable Growing Conditions: Prevailing weather and climate that diminishes the development of herbaceous resources.

Drought: Prolonged dry weather when precipitation is less than 75% of normal as defined by the Society of Range Management (SRM, 1989).

Alternative 2 (in detail, as amended):

This alternative was developed with the same emphasis, pasture areas, available use areas and assigned use levels as in the 2002 Environmental Assessment using the three large valles (Valle Grande, Valle San Antonio and Valle Toledo) and with the addition of the Cerro Seco Pasture to support the herd. Use was not assigned nor will livestock use the Jaramillo Creek, Sulfur Canyon pastures, the southwestern portion of the VCNP, slopes greater than 30%, and past timber harvest units (VCNP EA for the Interim Grazing Strategy; August, 2002; page 38-39). ***This Alternative remains the same in all aspects as describe in the EA of August 2002 with the exception of including the Cerro Seco Pasture for livestock grazing.***

The available forage expressed in Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the Cerro Seco Pasture is illustrated in the last row of the table below. Please note; available AUMs in the Cerro Seco Pasture are not assigned to support an increase in herd number, but provides data as to how much forage is available should the Trust decide to use that Pasture to relieve grazing pressure from other Valles.

Alternative 2-Assigned Use

35 % of the total annual forage production within:

Mountain Grasslands

Grazeable Woodlands

15% allowable use is assigned to riparian corridors found in:

Mountain Meadows (Riparian Areas)

Carrying Capacity Based on Assigned Use

	Grazeable Acres	2002 Forage Production (average) AUMs	Unfavorable Years Forage Production AUMs	Favorable Years Forage Production AUMs
Total Assigned AUM's	14,227	1,881	4,686	9,573
Cerro Seco Pasture	2,416	454	889	2,140

Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

Adaptive Management and Research

Monitoring and research are fundamental components of each Alternative, as required as part of the Act establishing the Valles Caldera National Preserve and as a “key” component of any activities that are undertaken on the VCNP. The results and information gained through monitoring and research will be used in an adaptive management process considering both socio-economic and ecological issues and concerns.

The management process is “adaptive” in that what is learned from month-to-month and year-to-year will be used to potentially alter management approaches and strategies to meet the objectives of this and other projects. Consolidation of information and data, and changed management strategies as a result of monitoring, will be summarized in the Trust’s annual report to Congress. The adaptive management strategy and research cannot be underestimated in its value as a learning tool for understanding certain aspects of management and ecology of the VCNP.

Changes in livestock numbers and allowable use may occur (within the range of the selected alternative) as a component of a proposed experimental design that is structured to evaluate grazing effects (frequency, duration, and magnitude of use), or on ecological processes, dynamics, ecological health and/or watershed protection, cattle and elk interactions, behavioral and distribution changes by elk, riparian restoration, and water quality. Proposed studies should be complementary to improving the knowledge and understanding of the VCNP and applicable to improving and sustaining the VCNP ranch operations.

During periods of drought, forage maybe provided to area livestock operators, based on range readiness assessments and other monitoring or research data for determining stocking rates and herd management. The Valles Caldera Trust may choose not to turn out livestock, reduce numbers or alter season of use, in any given year, as a result.

Other ongoing research assessing ecological parameters will continue. As part of each alternative, including the No Action Alternative, production-utilization cages will continue in both Mountain Valley and Meadow plant communities to assess use levels by livestock and elk. Rangeland Monitoring providing baseline data of the plant composition of riparian-wetland communities will continue.

Season of Use/Herd Management

Season of use will occur between June 1 and September 30. Shortening the period of livestock use on either end of the proposed season of use could occur on or after June 1, to before or on September 30.

The Trust could delay, postpone, or cancel livestock entry on to the VCNP due to climatic conditions or for other reasons outside the scope of this analysis.

During the proposed season of use, the Trust may set stocking rates (number of AUs or AUMs) for Unfavorable and Favorable growing conditions, or drought at levels lower than those analyzed under each alternative. Under drought conditions, the Trust will assign use and stocking levels based on the available forage. Stocking rates and forage use levels will be within the assigned use values within this Alternative.

The interim grazing plan includes daily use of a Range Rider to distribute and make changes in stocking density.

Upon arrival at the VCNP, all livestock will be confined for a specified period of time (3-5 days) to clean stomach contents of noxious weed seeds.

Class of Livestock

Class of livestock and/or proportion of each class may include cow/calf, replacement heifer, and/or steers.

Monitoring (in addition to research activities)

- **Range Rider Daily Logs**

Daily range rider monitoring logs will indicate where and how long the herds grazed and watered. Logs will include notes on estimated use levels, the presence and number of elk, where and how long an elk herd remains in a given area and an estimate of forage use.

- **Monitoring Protocol**

- ✓ Production/Utilization assessment following stock movements
- ✓ Data summaries
- ✓ Year-End Monitoring Review (Interdisciplinary/Interagency teams)
- ✓ Field and Data Review by an Interdisciplinary Team

- **Heritage Resource Protection**

Known sites within pastures will be monitored to establish baseline conditions and to identify any extant erosion or disturbance. On-going survey for any other projects (e.g., roads surveys) will seek to identify heritage resources that could be affected by elk and

cattle grazing. Implementation and effectiveness monitoring will occur on known heritage resource site locations.

Maintenance

The headquarters corral, non-historical hay sheds, and pasture fences will be maintained to support 10-15 horses for Range Riders and other administration and security uses. Fence lines known to be a hazard to elk movement could be modified by dropping or removing the top wire, and/or by removing segments of fence line not needed for ranching operation.

Special Use Pastures

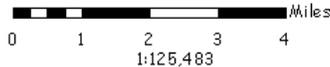
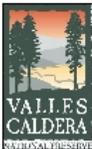
The fields, headquarters and San Antonio TRAPs will be used to facilitate ranch operations. It is anticipated that these pastures will be used by horses (riding stock for range rider and fencing crew) and by some cattle needing medical attention.

Round Mountain and Willow Mountain pastures will be used during the delivery of cattle (on or about June 1) for quarantine, medical examinations, vaccinations, and handling prior to initiating the prescribed grazing system.

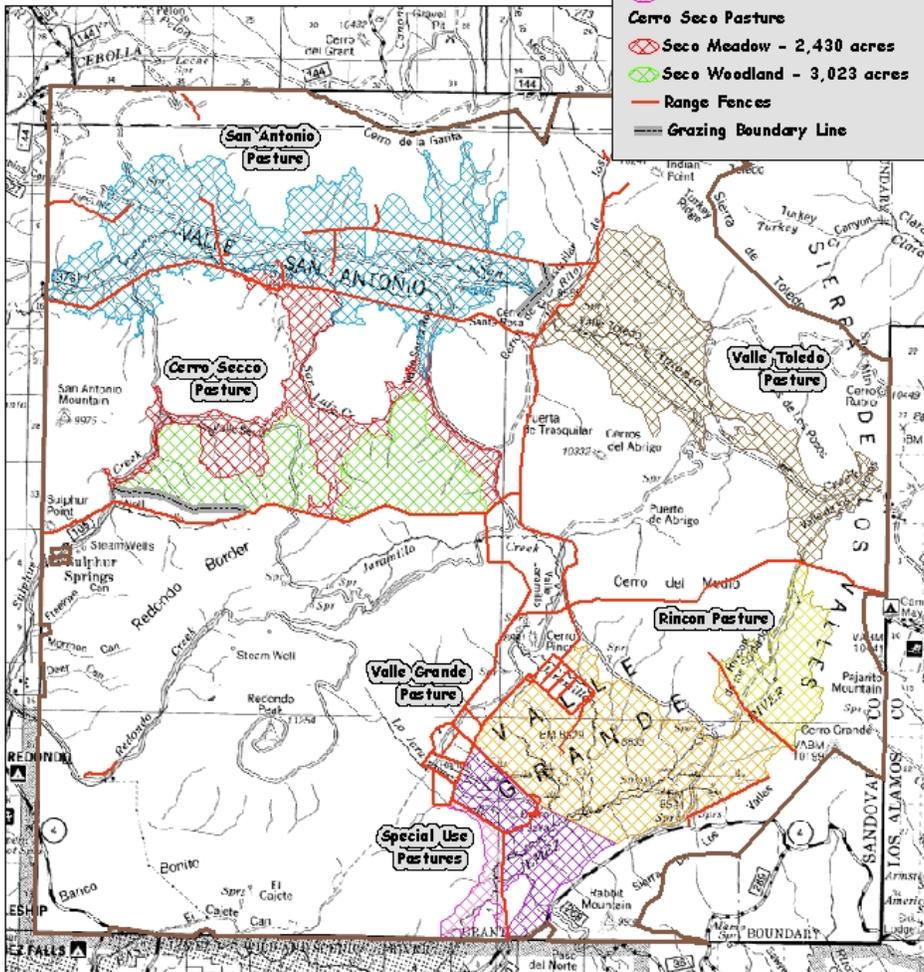
Shipping pasture will be used only during the fall when cattle are brought into the shipping pens to be transported off the Valles Caldera National Preserve

Forage in these Special use pastures was not used to calculate available forage for cattle.

**Valles Caldera National Preserve
 Proposed 2003 Grazing Pastures**



- San Antonio Pasture - 6,548 acres
- Valle Grande Pasture - 4,336 acres
- Toledo Pasture - 3,792 acres
- Rincon Pasture - 1,258 acres
- Special Use Pasture - 1,552 acres
- Special Use Pasture - 436 acres
- Cerro Seco Pasture
- Seco Meadow - 2,430 acres
- Seco Woodland - 3,023 acres
- Range Fences
- Grazing Boundary Line



3/7/03

Purpose and Need:

Following the 2003 grazing season, an assessment of implementation and monitoring data indicated that we could continue to implement the selected interim strategy, as proposed through the interim period until the completion of a comprehensive grazing analysis.

While the assessment of the 2003 season recommended adjustments to the program, these adjustments are within the parameters of the existing Environmental Analysis and do not bring forth new information indicating the need for additional analysis.

**Findings of No Significant Impact
for the
Valles Caldera National Preserve
Interim Grazing Program**

Valles Caldera National Preserve
Sandoval County
May 20, 2003
Affirmed January 26, 2004

Findings of No Significant Impact

Considering the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Valles Caldera National Preserve Interim Grazing Program Environmental Assessment (as amended), I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not warranted. Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects discussed in the Environmental Assessment and Amendment have been disclosed within the appropriate context and will have little intensity. This determination is based on the following factors:

- This action will have neither significant beneficial nor adverse effects. Sufficient information has been disclosed in the analysis to make a reasoned choice between alternatives and no significant impacts to the human environment have been identified. Information gained during the 2002 program through monitoring and ranching logistics supports the conclusions expressed in the analysis indicating that no significant effects occurred and none are anticipated.
- This action will not significantly affect the public health or safety. All proposed activities are in compliance with relevant Federal, State and local laws, regulations, and requirements designed for protection of the environment. The proposed actions will not exceed New Mexico State water and air quality standards.

- The effects of this action are neither uncertain nor involve unique or unknown risks. The action and effects are based on sound land and rangeland management philosophy and techniques.
- There will be no significant adverse impacts to unique areas or resources, parklands, wetlands, floodplains, prime farm land, range lands, or wild and scenic rivers. No significant effects are anticipated to any ecologically sensitive or critical areas.
- This action will not cause significant effects when considered individually or when considered cumulatively. Nor will this action result in establishing a precedent for future actions.
- There will be no significant adverse impacts to historic or cultural resources. Properties that are eligible or potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places were located during previous cultural resource surveys in the project area. Site avoidance and site monitoring recommendations are identified in the heritage resource report for this project (SFNF Report 2002-10-024). This report recommends heritage resource clearance; the project will have "no adverse effect" to cultural resources. This project is in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, in consultation with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office. The VCNP has also conducted consultation with local Native American communities who were interested in the project but did not have significant cultural or traditional concerns.
- The decision will not likely cause highly controversial environmental effects because controversy in this context refers to cases where there is a substantial dispute as to the size, nature or effect of the actions, rather than opposition to its adoption. There have been no substantial disputes as to the size, nature or effects of this action.
- There will be no expected significant irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. There will be no significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects to soil, water, fisheries, or wildlife resources or other components of the environment. The analysis of cumulative effects considered past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions on the VNCP.
- Biological Evaluations (BEs) for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive wildlife have been completed and are located in the Stewardship Register. The BEs indicated that the proposed project, as amended, will have no significant affects or impacts to any Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive species. All mandatory terms and conditions have been incorporated into this project.

- The proposed action will not significantly affect aquatic systems and recreational fisheries. The effects that will occur are based on sound aquatic conservation and resource principals for the benefit of recreational fisheries.
- This Federal action has been conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons (including populations) from participation in, deny persons (including populations) the benefits of, or subject persons (including populations) to discrimination because of their race, color or national origin, as directed by Executive Order #12898.

Anyone concerned about the Findings of No Significant Impacts on this project is encouraged to contact me prior to contesting this decision. It may be possible to resolve the concern or misunderstanding in a less formal manner. For further information on the Amendment to the Interim Grazing Strategy please contact me a (505) 661-3333 or write to 2201 Trinity Drive, Suite C, Los Alamos, NM 87544.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment Completed in August of 2002, the amendment completed in 2003, data collected during the 2002/2003 grazing seasons, as well as the associated project record and Finding of No Significant Impact; it is my decision to continue the Interim Grazing Strategy through the 2004/2005 grazing seasons.

Dennis Trujillo

Preserve Manager

Date