

VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE



Don J. Usner

VALLES CALDERA TRUST

State of New Mexico

Sandoval and Rio Arriba Counties

P.O. Box 359

Jemez Springs, NM 87025

(505) 661-3333

comments@vallescaldera.gov

www.vallescaldera.gov

Implementing Decision

June 8, 2009

Stewardship Action:

Facilities Maintenance and Repair

Stewardship Register

Public Access and Use

STEWARDSHIP REGISTER - PUBLIC ACCESS AND USE

Facility Maintenance and Repair – June 8, 2009

1. Introduction

At a public meeting of the Valles Caldera Trust (the Trust), Board of Trustees (the Board), held March 12, 2009 in Albuquerque, NM, the Board directed the Executive Director and staff of the Trust to consider stewardship actions to maintain and repair existing facilities located on the Valles Caldera National Preserve (the Preserve) as depicted in the vicinity map (figure 1). Specifically, the upgrade of temporary facilities at the Valles Grande Staging Area (VGSA) and improvements to the Casa de Baca Lodge, Bunkhouse, and A-Frames in order to meet the American's with Disabilities Act, facilitate visitor access, and provide protection from fire.

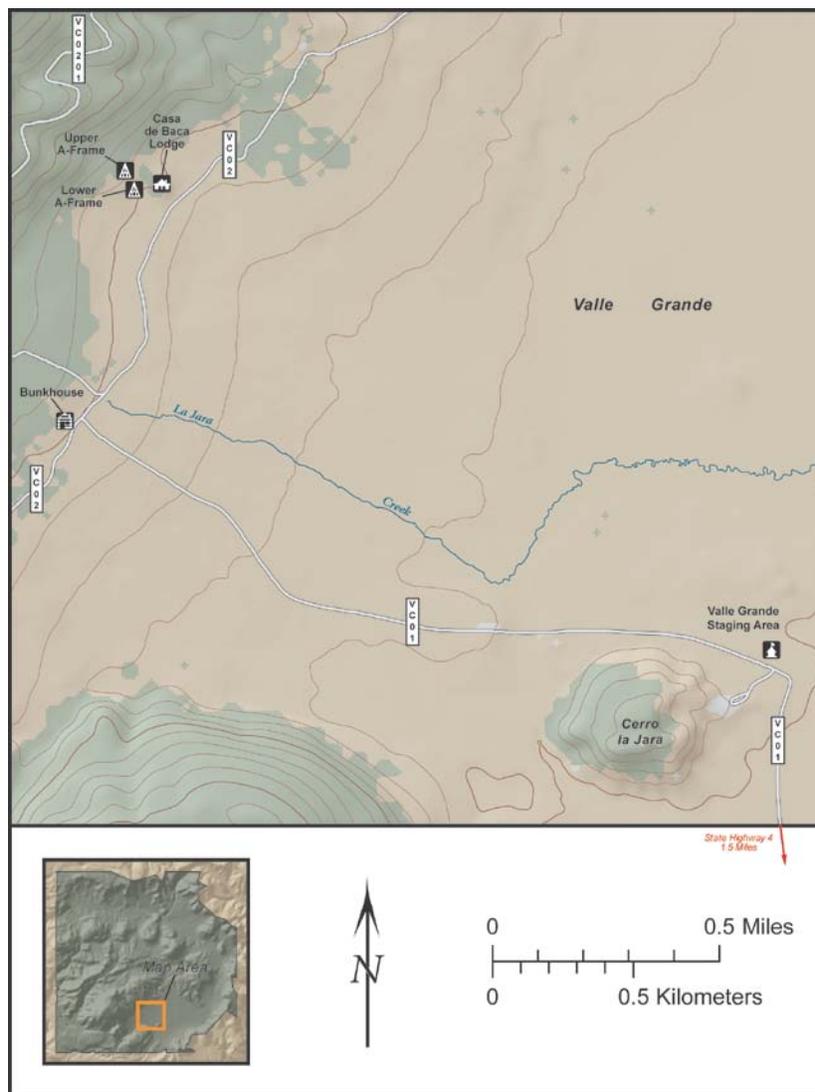


Figure 1 – Vicinity Map

2. Background

The Preserve was acquired by the Federal Government in 2000 with the signing of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act (act). The purposes of acquisition included providing access to the public for recreation and other purposes. The act required that reasonable access be granted to the public within two years of acquisition and that roads, trails, bridges, and recreational facilities constructed within the Preserve shall meet public safety standards applicable to units of the National Forest System and the State of New Mexico.

To meet the benchmark for reasonable public access the Trust established the Valle Grande Staging Area, two portable buildings were erected to provide shelter and a secure location to facilitate public access to the Preserve for recreation activities as well as access and communications for administrative use of the Preserve.

The portable buildings in VGSA, originally established to provide shelter and security and facilitate communications, have grown into a *de facto* Visitor Center providing visitor information and services including reservations and retail sales. Since being established the VGSA has grown from serving approximately 690 visitors in 2002 to over 15,000 in 2008 (Valles Caldera Trust, 2009).

Also since acquisition, the Trust has completed engineering and historical assessments on the Preserve's existing structures. Routine maintenance and repairs have been completed to provide for public safety. Maintenance and repair have included rodent control and prevention, improvements to electric and ventilation installments, improvements to water treatment and plumbing, and upgrades to kitchen materials and appliances to permit catering and food preparation. Minor improvements to permit entrance to the buildings and restrooms by wheelchair have been made, but the buildings including access to the buildings; do not currently meet the standards for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The report, "*Documentation and Preservation of Historic Buildings on the Valles Caldera National Preserve, Sandoval County, New Mexico*" prepared by SWCA Environmental Consultants in 2007, found the Casa de Baca Lodge to "have sufficient historical or associative significance to be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places" and cited the replacement of the highly flammable cedar shake roof to be a priority for protection and preservation of the building (SWCA Environmental Consultants, 2007).

3. Proposed Stewardship Action

3.1. VGSA Upgrade

The Trust is proposing to replace the current portable buildings at the VGSA, with a new portable building. The new building would have a "ranchesque" façade in keeping with the general appearance of buildings in the historic ranch headquarters and as expressed in the gate at the Valle Grande Entrance located off NM 4, and would include a covered porch and lobby for visitors to enjoy. The new building would expand interpretive and retail space as well as

administrative areas. Ancillary infrastructure would include a pit or compost toilet, a portable water tank, upgraded electrical services (solar and generator), an aboveground (but shielded) propane tank, and a wood stove for heating.

The Trust is proposing to install the new building within the general footprint of the current VGSA, to the north of the existing portable buildings. The new building would be expected to serve administrative use and interim recreation while planning and analysis are completed regarding the location and construction of permanent visitor facilities. Depending on the outcome of this comprehensive planning effort, the proposed building would be expected to be in use at the VGSA for 3-5 years.

3.2. Baca Lodge Improvements

The proposed improvements to the Casa de Baca Lodge include the development of parking, surfaces, and ramps necessary to provide access to the building compliant with ADA. Specifically, vehicle parking within close proximity or shuttle access would be provided. The route from the parking/drop-off area would be 3-feet wide to accommodate a wheel chair with the grade to the entrance, not to exceed 5 percent. Interior modifications are being proposed to provide ADA compliant access to restroom(s), kitchen, living, and sleeping areas. To reduce threats from wildland fire, the Trust is also proposing to replace the cedar shake roof with fire resistant material.

3.3. A-Frame Improvements

The proposed improvements to the A-Frames include development of parking, surfaces, and ramps necessary to provide access to the building compliant with ADA as previously described. Interior modifications are being proposed to provide ADA compliant access to restroom, kitchen and living areas and downstairs bedroom

3.4. Bunkhouse Improvements

The proposed improvements to the Bunkhouse include the development of parking, surface, and ramps necessary to provide access to the building compliant with ADA as described for the Casa de Baca lodge. Interior modifications are being proposed to provide ADA compliant access to restroom, kitchen, living, and sleeping areas.

4. Purpose and Need

The proposed improvements and upgrades are needed to provide accessibility to visitors including the public, volunteers, contractors, researchers, commercial users as well as employees.

Upgrades and improvements would increase both safety and security for all visitors by meeting required building codes and standards and providing fire resistant roofing.

The stewardship actions are being proposed to meet the purposes for acquisition and management goals put forward in the act as described in section 1.2 above. The upgrade to the VGSA is needed to accommodate current levels of use and improve the quality of service to visitors to the Preserve as the Trusts plans and develops permanent visitor facilities.

Improvements to the Casa de Baca Lodge and Bunkhouse are needed to meet the American's with Disabilities Act, and provide for public safety, expanding the Trust's ability to use these facilities for service and revenue generation.

5. Performance Requirements

The following laws, procedures, policies and mitigating measures will be applied to reduce or eliminate potential effects to the natural, cultural, or human environment:

5.1. Laws, Procedures, Policies

- The Valles Caldera Preservation Act (including authorities)
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- ADA
- Valles Caldera Trust – NEPA Procedures of the Valles Caldera National Preserve (including authorities)
- Valles Caldera National Preserve Cultural Resource Compliance Process (including authorities)

5.2. Mitigation Measures

- Personal use of vehicles will be at the discretion of the Valles Caldera Trust staff.
- Barriers such as landscape grade fences, rocks, logs, or natural materials will be installed along the access and egress to buildings (Casa de Baca Lodge, Bunkhouse and A-frames) to prevent expansion of the road prism over time.
 - Such barriers will be specifically located to provide a buffer to large trees and other special resources.
- Barriers such as landscape grade fences, rocks, logs, or natural materials will be installed surrounding designated parking to prevent incidental and unintentional expansion of parking areas and widening of access roads.
- Historic structures report will be used to maintain the character and architectural integrity of the Casa de Baca Lodge.
- Implementing activities will be reviewed through the Trust's Cultural Resources Compliance Process.
- Contracts will provide for oversight by an archeologist during ground disturbing activities and will require clear procedures if potential effects to any eligible, or potentially eligible, features discovered.
- A Job Hazard Analysis will be prepared for all aspects of project implementation. Hazards identified with transportation and erection of the portable building will be mitigated.
- A resource protection plan will be incorporated into the Job Hazard Analysis or any agreement or contracting instruments to ensure that prevention and response to accidents and injuries or hazmat incidents provides for the protection of both people as well as natural and cultural resources.

6. Goals, Objectives and Monitored Outcomes

6.1. Goals

The stewardship action is being proposed to meet management goals identified in the act,

- Section 108, b) Management Responsibilities, paragraphs 1-5:
 - 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.*
- Section 108 (d) Management Program, paragraph 4:
 - 4) *providing for public use and access to the Preserve for recreation*
- Section 108, b) Public Use and Recreation paragraph 1:
 - 1) *IN GENERAL.—The Trust shall give thorough consideration to the provision of appropriate opportunities for public use and recreation that are consistent with the other purposes under section 105(b). The Trust is expressly authorized to construct and upgrade roads and bridges, and provide other facilities for activities including, but not limited to camping and picnicking, hiking, and cross country skiing. Roads, trails, bridges, and recreational facilities constructed within the Preserve shall meet public safety standards applicable to units of the National Forest System and the State of New Mexico.*

6.2. Objectives

Objectives are to provide improve the safety, quality, and service provided at the VGSA and expand opportunities for public and administrative use of some facilities on the Preserve (Casa de Baca Lodge, Bunkhouse and A-frames).

6.3. Monitored Outcomes

All buildings inspected and permitted, meeting public safety standards for the State of New Mexico, compliance with ADA, and conformance with the National Historic Preservation Act.

7. Setting

Facility upgrades and improvements are being proposed on four sites (Figure 1): VGSA, Casa de Baca Lodge, Bunkhouse, and two A-Frame cottages.

7.1. VGSA

The Valles Grande Staging Area is located in the Valle Grande, approximately 2.5 miles from the Valle Grande Entrance on VC01. It is currently comprised of two portable buildings set in an “L” shape with a portable shelter for the placement of equipment and portable toilets distributed in various locations. Parking occurs in an unmarked area between the portable building and the

corrals used for shipping and receiving cattle. The corrals were constructed in the 1980s by the Dunigans, owners of the Baca Ranch prior to Federal acquisition. While under private ownership this area was use to ship and receive an average of 5000 cattle per year, which arrived and departed in semi-trucks.



Figure 2 – Valle Grande Staging Area

7.2. Casa de Baca Lodge

The Casa de Baca Lodge (aka the Kiva Lodge; aka the Dunigan Lodge; aka Casa de Baca) was constructed by Pat Dunigan in 1964. The lodge sits on the northwest side of Road VC02, overlooking the Valles Grande (Figure 4) and covers a total of 4,784 square feet. The Lodge is considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria a, b, and c, and consideration g (which allows properties of sufficient importance to be considered eligible despite their having been built within the last 50 years). The Lodge is considered architecturally distinctive, embodying an unusual combination of modernist and primitivist architectural elements and concepts, and is the work of architect, James Tittle of Abilene, Texas.



Figure 3 – Casa de Baca Lodge

7.3. A-Frames

The two A-Frame cottages were established in 1964 at the same time as the Lodge. Although they did not detail the A-Frames in the 2007 report, SWCA Environmental Consultants noted that the A-Frames were also designed by architect Tittle, for “modern accommodations”. These structures were prefabricated in Fort Worth Texas and assembled on concrete block foundations at their current location, set against the tree line above the Casa de Baca Lodge. The A-Frames are not considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. The lower A-Frame (figure 5) and upper A-frame (figure 6) covers a total of 760 square feet on the main level and an additional 340 square feet on the second level.



Figure 4 – Lower A-Frame



Figure 5 – Upper A-Frame

7.4. Bunkhouse

The bunkhouse, shown in figure 7 was constructed in 1992 and is 2,052 square feet. The bunkhouse is located on road VC02 at the southern end of the Headquarters area with a view into the Valle Grande. The building features rock/concrete foundations, dimension lumber floor beams, plywood floor decking, log walls, prefabricated truss roofing over the sleeping areas, dimension timber rafters over the living and eating areas and R-Panel metal roofing. The Bunkhouse is not considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 6 – The Bunkhouse

8. Scope of the Analysis

The CEQ regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) directs agencies to identify those actions which are known to have no significant effect on the environment and for which the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required (CEQ, 2003). According to the NEPA procedures of the Trust, the proposed activities can be categorically excluded from the preparation of an EIS 101.6(c)(5) – “Routine repair and maintenance of facilities and administrative sites including, but not limited to, buildings, fences, water systems, roads, trails, signs, and ancillary facilities associated with the administration and management of the Preserve.”

9. Extraordinary Circumstances

The Trust has reviewed the proposed stewardship action to determine if there are any extraordinary circumstances that would require the preparation of an EA or EIS for an activity that could normally be categorically excluded. Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to: Scientific controversy; high level of public interest; extreme weather or climatic conditions; or the potential for effects on environmental resources of critical concern such as cultural resource sites and habitat for candidate, endangered, or threatened species.

There is neither expected scientific controversy nor a high level of public interest regarding these activities. The needed repair and maintenance has been discussed in several documents available to the public including the 2007 State of the Preserve and various Reports to Congress. In addition, as described in the introduction, the Board directed the Executive Director to consider these stewardship actions at a public meeting of the Board of Trustees. The direction did not generate a “high level of interest” with any of the attendees.

There will be no effect to any wildlife or habitat as all activities are proposed within existing facilities or within the footprint of existing facilities and activities. Existing facilities being considered for repair and maintenance (Casa de Baca Lodge, Bunkhouse, and A-Frames), are part of the cultural landscape of the Preserve according to a 2007 report, *Documentation and Preservation of Historic Buildings on the Valles Caldera National Preserve*, prepared by SWCA, Environmental Consultants. This report considered the Casa de Baca Lodge as potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, thus protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (16 USC 470). Its eligibility is based on architectural values and its role in the Preserve’s history (association with a person and event) as opposed to its eligibility as a historic feature greater than 50 years old. In their 2007 report, SWCA Environmental Consultants noted that this facility could be altered to meet ADA standards without concern for historic integrity, as the door is already three feet wide, and the interior of the bathroom is a product of a 1990 remodel and is not a contributor to the building’s historic integrity. They further identified the replacement of the lodge’s highly flammable cedar shake roofing as a priority action needed to protect the facility from potential damage or destruction in the event of a fire (SWCA Environmental Consultants, 2007).

The VGSA is within prehistoric archaeological site LA132045. However, this area has been the site of intensive disturbance serving as a shipping and receiving point for cattle. Prior to Federal Acquisition over 5000 cattle were received and shipped by semi-truck from this site annually. The integrity of the archaeological site deposits is severely compromised due to surface and subsurface disturbances, compaction, and subsequent rodent disturbance resulting from decades of use of the corrals. Since federal acquisition the VGSA has served as the primary location for receiving visitors to the Preserve as well as continuing to be used for shipping and receiving cattle. The proposed action includes minor ground disturbance of less intensity than either current or past actions. Site testing would occur prior to the placement of building support piers or a pit or composting toilet to effectively avoid any sub surface cultural resources or artifacts.

10. Responsible Official

The Executive Director, governed by the Board of Trustees, is the official responsible for the findings and implementing decision.

11. Implementing Decision

It is my decision to implement the proposed activities including all performance requirements. I find that the proposed stewardship action falls under a category which can be excluded from

documentation in an EA and EIS as described in section 1.7. I have carefully weighed the potential effects of the proposed activities and find that they do not constitute extraordinary circumstances as described in section 1.8.

/s/Gary Bratcher

June 15, 2009

Gary D. Bratcher
Executive Director

Date