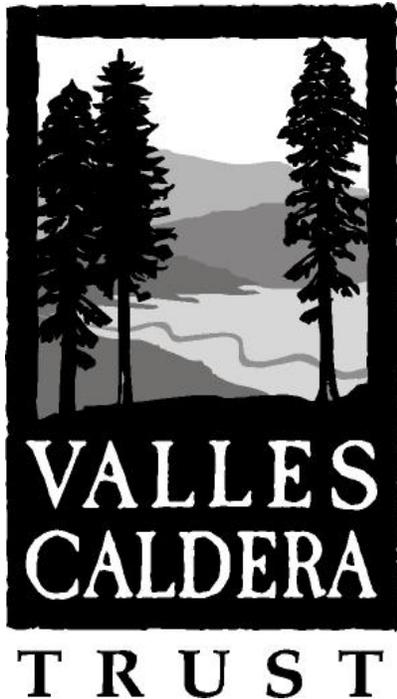


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Media Contacts:
National 4-H WHEP
Summer Eaton
575-646-2362
seaton@nmsu.edu

Valles Caldera
Dr. Bob Parmenter
505-428-7727
BParmenter@vallescaldera.gov

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Valles Caldera Named to Host National 4-H Event

More than 100 to Participate

Jemez Springs, NM. – More than a hundred future ecologists, ranchers, environmentalists and current All-American kids will descend upon the Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP) next summer. The VCNP has been selected to host the 2010 **National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program Invitational (WHEP)**. The event will gather more than a hundred youngsters and their mentors from around the country for five days of competition, learning and fun at the Preserve and in Los Alamos next summer. “We are excited about hosting the 2010 WHEP event,” said Gary Bratcher, Executive Director for the VCNP. “We believe the VCNP will offer participants a lifetime of memories and demonstrate that the Caldera is ideally suited to provide multi-day educational programming to a wide range of audiences.”

The Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP) is a 4-H youth natural resource program dedicated to teaching wildlife and fisheries habitat management to youth in the United States. “4-H WHEP provides an opportunity for young people to experience real world natural resource management issues and the science that informs management decisions,” said Dr. Sam Smallidge, New Mexico Extension Wildlife Specialist and co-chair for the 2010 New Mexico Invitational committee.

The National 4-H WHEP Invitational is a competitive event, whose primary focus is wildlife and natural resource education. Natural resources management is learned through participation in the contest and the associated field trips, educational events, and demonstrations. The contest includes five components: 1) Wildlife Identification 2) General Wildlife Knowledge 3) Wildlife Management Practices 4) Written Management Plan, and 5) Oral Defense of a Written Plan.

“While the competition is important, it is not the sole focus of the program. The youth are exposed to field trips and fun activities,” states Summer Eaton, National 4H WHEP committee member and co-chair for the 2010 New Mexico Invitational. “ WHEP events help participants develop critical thinking skills and learn how to work as a team. The participants are given real world situations and work together to provide solutions to natural resource problems that managers face every day”

The VCNP was selected because it provides an outstanding venue for the contest and associated educational activities. The WHEP event will also be able to take advantage of the close working relationship between the VCNP and the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Cooperative Extension Service youth education and science programming which enhances the education mission of the VCNP. Youth in 4-H and FFA programs from around the US will have an ideal setting in which to learn about wildlife habitat, New Mexico’s outstanding natural resources, and participate in the annual contest.

“We have a number of wildlife habitat restoration projects, fish and wildlife studies and many ongoing research projects available to the students” said Dr. Bob Parmenter, VCNP Science and Education Director. “These projects, coupled with scientists from the university and the National WHEP program, will provide a valuable science-based outdoor laboratory for the participants.”

The event will begin July 25th and run through July 29th. The participants and host volunteers will conduct classroom work and be housed at the Hilltop Inn at Los Alamos.