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NEWS RELEASE

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VALLES CALDERA TRUST AMENDS SENATE TESTIMONY

Proposed Legislation Labeled “Inadequate”

Jemez Springs, NM – During testimony before Congress on June 30th, Stephen Henry, Chairman of the Valles Caldera Trust, addressed proposed legislation (Senate Bill No. 3452) to designate the Valles Caldera National Preserve as a component of the National Park System. Chairman Henry urged continued protection of the nationally significant natural and cultural resources of the Valles Caldera National Preserve under either Park Service or Forest Service management.

However, Chairman Henry urges caution concerning the proposed legislation. “As written, we believe Senate Bill 3452 is inadequate to meet the needs of the Preserve. We fear this matter is being legislated too quickly, and our professional staff is concerned that complicated land management issues are not being adequately aired.” To address these complex land management issues, the Trust has supplemented its testimony to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to recommend several changes to the proposed law.

Forests cover over 60% of the Preserve, and restoration of those lands is the foremost management issue. Prior to the Federal land acquisition of the Preserve in 2000, the land was heavily logged by the former private landowners. Huge areas of merchantable Ponderosa Pine were removed, and were naturally replaced by dense stands of mixed conifers affecting tens of thousands of acres. To address the dangers of fire and insect infestation, these areas must be

thinned and managed. The Trust proposes specific recommendations to amend the bill making forest restoration a management priority. Says Chairman Henry, “If we fail to restore and manage the forested lands, there will inevitably be catastrophic fires worse than the Cerro Grande Fire of May, 2000.”

The legislation needs to more specifically address wildlife management. Elk numbers have a profound environmental impact throughout the Jemez Mountains and have to be managed by hunting. The Trust recommends that the legislation require that hunting levels on the Preserve be determined by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish based on game management units for the entire Jemez Mountains, including the Santa Fe National Forest.

Chairman Henry also recommends that the Senate consider other modifications to the proposed legislation including:

- Retention of existing laws providing for Native American religious use of Redondo Peak.
- Elimination of the limitation on activities on lands above 9,250 feet. Such an arbitrary restriction will inhibit necessary forest restoration.
- Broaden authorities for grazing based on scientifically based range management criteria.
- Recognition of the extraordinary public service by the staff of the Valles Caldera Trust by confirming their employment rights under any future management regime.

The Trust is also concerned that the current Senate Bill ignores the fact that the Preserve is located in the middle of a huge ecosystem of a million acres managed by the Forest Service. As written, the bill does not require the Park Service to coordinate its management with the Forest Service. The Trust urges that the legislation be amended to require such interagency cooperation and consultation.

The Valles Caldera Trust is concerned that the legislation is being rushed. Management of the Preserve is extraordinarily complicated, and the bill was drafted with little consultation among professional land managers. Speaking for the presidentially appointed Trustees, Chairman Henry believes, “A more judicious approach over the next year would afford the opportunities to address what is best for the land and its resources, and to devise a management regime that will best meet those needs. There is no emergency as the land is being well managed in the public interest. We urge the Committee to take the necessary time to consider all the relevant issues.”

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