

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Final Public Use and Access Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Sandoval and Rio Arriba Counties, New Mexico

Lead Agency: Valles Caldera Trust,

This *Final Public Access and Use Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* describes six alternatives for the development of facilities and infrastructure to provide increased access to and in the Valles Caldera National Preserve and to protect natural and cultural resources from the impacts of increased visitation. The plan will also guide programs and activities for public access and use for recreation, education, scientific research, and other purposes. This plan describes the environment that would be affected by the alternatives, and the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives.

The purpose of this plan is to expand the current level of public access and use on the preserve while protecting and preserving its natural and cultural resources and values and to provide quality outdoor recreation and interpretive opportunities that promote long-term financial self-sustainability consistent with other purposes. This plan is needed to provide more access, more spontaneous access, and more freedom to explore the preserve; provide facilities and infrastructure that would be adequate to meet public safety standards as required by the Valles Caldera Preservation Act if access were increased; provide adequate infrastructure to protect the natural and cultural resources of the preserve from potential impacts due to increased access; provide a portal or physical point of access to the preserve; manage the preserve in a sustainable manner; and provide programs, activities, and facilities that promote long-term financially sustainable management of the preserve at a scale appropriate to public demand and values and consistent with other purposes.

Two levels of planning and impact analysis are included in this document. Shorter-term decisions are analyzed in more detail at an implementation level. The implementation level focuses on the development of a portal or physical point of access to the preserve and the development of a visitor contact station or visitor center and associated facilities. These actions could be implemented without additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance. Long-term management direction is presented at a programmatic level, and will be used as a guide for future decisions. Elements of the plan presented at this level would not be implemented without additional future NEPA documentation.

The no-action alternative (alternative 1) would result in the removal of the existing temporary staging areas and the elimination of the interim recreation program. The Valles Caldera Trust (VCT) would phase out current access through these staging areas and phase out interim programs and activities, which have not been reviewed for direct, indirect, or cumulative effects. Under Alternative 2: Banco Bonito Visitor Contact Station, a small-scale visitor contact station would be developed at the Banco Bonito area in the southwestern part of the preserve. Additional development would include day-use facilities, a small parking area, and double-lane roads at specific locations to provide access to the preserve for personal vehicles and/or shuttles. Facilities and infrastructure developed in the future would include fishing access sites, trailheads, overlooks, campgrounds, and picnic areas. The central feature of Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Shuttle System is the development of a full-service visitor center in the preserve near the Valle Grande to provide interpretive and other services to visitors. Access to the preserve would be primarily by shuttle; personal vehicles would be allowed for specific activities by permit only. Facilities and infrastructure developed in the future would be similar to those under alternative 2. Alternative 3B: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Personal Vehicle would be the same as alternative 3A, but the primary mode of transportation onto the preserve would be personal vehicles. Shuttles would only be used for tours and group events or to reduce congestion on high-use days. Alternative 4A: Vista del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Shuttle System is similar to alternative 3A but would locate the full-service visitor center south of NM-4 below Rabbit Mountain, overlooking the Valle Grande. Alternative 4B: Vista del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Personal Vehicle would be the same as alternative 4A, but the primary mode of transportation onto the preserve would be personal vehicles.

The potential environmental consequences of the alternatives are addressed for visitor experience, visual resources, transportation, vegetation, fish and wildlife, special-status species, geology and soils, water, natural sounds, cultural resources, socioeconomics, environmental justice, carbon footprint, and preserve management and operations.

The *Draft Public Access and Use Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* was released for public review and comment for a 60-day minimum review period on June 11, 2012; the public comment period closed August 14, 2012. The VCT received 125 separate written communications in the form of letters, email, and project comment forms. Seven of these comments were from agencies or Pueblos, and 118 were from members of the public, including citizen groups or organizations. Based on the information provided in the Draft EIS and comments from the public, the VCT selected Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Shuttle System as the preferred alternative. This document was revised in response to public comments and identifies the preferred alternative. A 30-day no-action period will commence, after which the preferred alternative will be documented in a record of decision. For further information, contact Marie Rodriguez:

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The Valles Caldera Trust is proposing to implement a comprehensive public access and use plan for the Valles Caldera National Preserve. The plan proposes the development of facilities and infrastructure to provide increased access onto and within the preserve and to protect natural and cultural resources from the impacts of increased visitation. The plan would also guide programs and activities for public access and use for recreation, education, scientific research, and other purposes. Six alternatives are being considered, including taking no action at this time. Upon conclusion of the planning and decision-making process, one of the alternatives will be selected and become the public access and use management plan.



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What is this Document About?

This EIS includes a plan of action for expanding the public's access to and enjoyment of the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

This document is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We (the Valles Caldera Trust [VCT]) have prepared this EIS consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and our agency procedures for implementing NEPA. This EIS includes a plan of action for expanding the public's access to and enjoyment of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. This Public Access and Use Plan proposes to develop a portal from which to enter the preserve, construct a visitor center and ancillary facilities, and adopt guidance for future access and development.

Two levels of planning and impact analysis are included in this document. Both planning levels are depicted in the figures on the following page.

1. Short-term decisions are analyzed in detail at an *implementation level* of analysis. The implementation level focuses on the development of a portal or physical point of access to the Valles Caldera National Preserve (the preserve) and the development of a visitor contact station or visitor center and associated facilities. These actions could be implemented without additional NEPA compliance.
2. Long-term management direction is presented at a *programmatic level*, and will be used as a guide for future decisions. These elements are not ready for implementation decisions and require additional information. Elements of the plan presented at this level would not be implemented without additional future NEPA documentation, including public involvement, at a more detailed level.

How Did We Get Here?

Figure S-1: EIS Development Process

The events included in the planning process for this plan/EIS are depicted below.

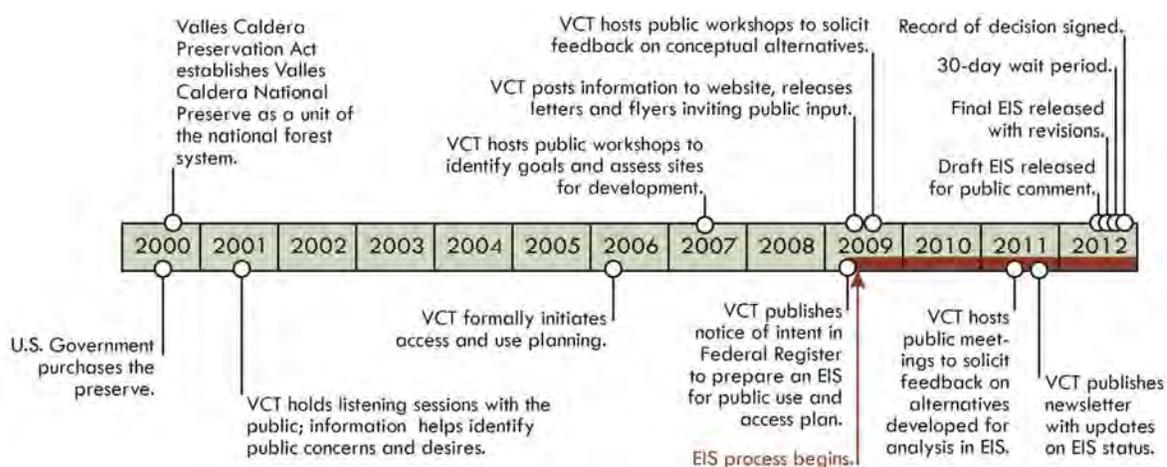


Figure S-2: Implementation Level

I: Develop a Visitor Center



2: Develop Connected Infrastructure and Facilities

Access from NM-4



Short-term visitor parking



Day-use recreation amenities at visitor center



Visitor conveniences



Group staging, interpretive information



Power, water, utilities



Figure S-3: Programmatic Level

Guide Future Development



1: Transportation System—Shuttle or Personal Vehicle



2: Transportation System Infrastructure



3: Infrastructure to Disperse Visitor Use



4: Trail System (Day Use, Backpacking)



5: Guidelines to Locate Outdoor Education, Group Staging Areas



6: Criteria for Additional Facilities



What is NEPA?

Put simply, NEPA defines a process for making decisions. The NEPA process refers to the procedures a federal agency, such as the VCT, must follow to evaluate the impacts of a proposed major action that could have significant impacts on the quality of the human environment—in this case, increasing the amount of public access and use on the preserve. Under NEPA, this decision-making process is recorded in a document called an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment (EA), depending on the degree of impacts expected.

The NEPA process is very similar to decision-making steps people use in their everyday lives. For example, assume you want to buy a car. You would first define what the car should do and why you need it. In the NEPA process, this is referred to as *the purpose and need* for the undertaking. You would define one purpose, such as to improve mobility, but could have several needs, such as a need to save money, transport several people or items, improve fuel economy, etc. Need statements answer the question, why? This first step is crucial because it determines which options you would consider for purchase. These options are referred to as alternatives under NEPA.

See chapter 1, "Purpose of and Need for Action"

Based on your purpose and needs, you would identify a *reasonable range of alternatives* from which to choose. If the car is needed to transport your kids to soccer games (among various other needs), you would probably not consider a two-seater sports car. Conversely, if you need the new car to travel in style primarily solo, you would probably not consider a mini-van.

See chapter 2, "Alternatives"

You might involve other people in your decision-making process. You may have family members who would use the car, or want suggestions from friends. This input could change your purpose and need. For example, if you tell your friend you want to buy a car to get around more (i.e., improve your mobility) and also to save money, she may ask, why not take the bus? If you reply that the bus network is not extensive enough, you would revise your purpose to be more focused. Involving other people in the decision-making process is referred to as *public involvement* under NEPA, and occurs at various times throughout the process. Although you may seek input from other people, ultimately the decision remains yours. This is true of agencies when implementing NEPA, too.

See chapter 5, "Consultation and Coordination"

Your friend may also suggest purchasing a motorcycle instead of a two-seater sports car. You may reply that you need more safety than you feel a motorcycle can provide. The motorcycle represents an *alternative that you considered but dismissed* from evaluation because it would not meet your needs (i.e., safety). Such alternatives are also identified during the NEPA process.

See chapter 2, "Alternatives"

After defining your alternatives, you would evaluate the cars selected for analysis based on a variety of categories, such as safety, comfort, maneuverability, cargo room, gas mileage, expected maintenance, etc. Some alternatives may have benefits or drawbacks in some categories but not others, and vice versa. Similarly, during the NEPA process the alternatives are typically *analyzed against the environmental resources* that would be affected by the proposed actions. For example, if an agency proposes building a visitor center, it may evaluate the effects of that action on resources such as fish and wildlife, cultural resources, vegetation, etc. In addition, NEPA recognizes that some impacts may occur as a result of the proposed alternatives that are unavoidable. These impacts must be disclosed in a NEPA document, as well as other uses or commitments of resources.

See chapter 3, "Affected Environment," and chapter 4, "Environmental Consequences"

After weighing the analysis, you would choose a car to buy from one of those you analyzed. This is known in the NEPA process as the *preferred alternative*. You would finalize the process and signify your decision by signing an agreement to purchase the car. In the NEPA process, this is accomplished through a *decision document* that follows completion of the EIS or EA.

Although the NEPA process is more involved than the car-buying example, the process is similar and used by many people, perhaps even unconsciously, to make informed decisions. NEPA guides federal agencies through this process to "help public officials make decisions . . . it is not better documents but better decisions that count" (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, 1996).

What is the Purpose of this Development? Why is it Needed?

Purpose

The “purpose” describes the overarching goal to be achieved by the proposed action.

The purpose of this plan is to expand the current level of public access and use on the preserve while protecting and preserving its natural and cultural resources and values, and to provide quality outdoor recreation and interpretive opportunities that promote long-term financial self-sustainability consistent with other purposes. There are currently no permanent facilities or infrastructure on the preserve to manage public access while complying with the mandate of the Valles Caldera Preservation act to protect and preserve the resources and values of the preserve for present and future generations. Facilities and infrastructure on public lands allow large numbers of visitors to enter and enjoy treasured landscapes and resources while protecting their intrinsic values. The plan is being proposed to address the goals for comprehensive management of the lands and facilities of the preserve established by Congress in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000 (PL 106-248) (16 USC 698v). The purpose of the plan includes two components:

- Establish a long-term vision of how public access and use would be managed on the preserve.
- Implement the development of a portal or physical point of access to the preserve as the first step in transitioning from the current interim recreation program to facilitate long-term public access and use.

Need

The “need” provides a description of the problems or issues to be specifically addressed by the proposed actions.

In order to expand the public’s access to and enjoyment of the preserve, a comprehensive system of facilities and infrastructure is needed. Specifically, this plan is needed to

- provide more access, more spontaneous access, and more freedom to explore the preserve
- provide facilities and infrastructure that would be adequate to meet public safety standards as required by the act if access were increased
- provide adequate infrastructure to protect the natural and cultural resources of the preserve from increased access
- provide a portal or physical point of access to the preserve
- manage the preserve in a sustainable manner
- provide programs, activities, and facilities that promote long-term, financially sustainable management of the preserve, at a scale appropriate to public demand and values, and consistent with other purposes

Goals and Objectives

The VCT has identified the following goals and objectives to support this plan’s purpose. The proposed action includes programs and activities that use or manage resources and facilities as well as guiding or prescribing future uses and management.

Table S-1: Goals and Objectives for the Plan

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
<p>Expand access and enjoyment of the preserve to local, regional, national, and international visitors to the Jemez Mountains while protecting and preserving cultural and natural resources and values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 1A: Provide public use of and access to the preserve for recreation consistent with the preserve's overall management goals for protection and preservation. Objective 1B: Manage the distribution of visitors and uses across the landscape to minimize impacts. Objective 1C: Expand opportunities for students, educators, researchers, and institutions to learn and teach about the preserve's natural and cultural resources. 	<p>Protect and preserve the scientific, scenic, geologic, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values of the preserve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 2A: Control or limit access in time or place to protect wildlife, permit special uses and activities, and to provide for public health and safety. Objective 2B: Minimize the impacts and disturbance of motorized vehicles on natural and cultural resources and recreation. Objective 2C: Incorporate resource conservation topics into educational opportunities for visitors. 	<p>Minimize the carbon footprint of visitor access and use, as well as maintenance and operations activities, by incorporating sustainable management practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 3A: Incorporate sustainable design and building practices into infrastructure development. Objective 3B: Encourage nonmotorized access and enjoyment. Objective 3C: Incorporate sustainability topics into educational opportunities for visitors. 	<p>Optimize the generation of income and promote long-term financial sustainability consistent with long-term protection and preservation of resources and values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 4A: Identify opportunities to generate income consistent with the requirements of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act, i.e., fees for public access and use; multiple use and sustained yield of renewable resources, such as timber and forage; donations from individuals and organizations; and interest on funds deposited at the U.S. Treasury. Objective 4B: Identify effective methods to reduce management and operating expenditures.

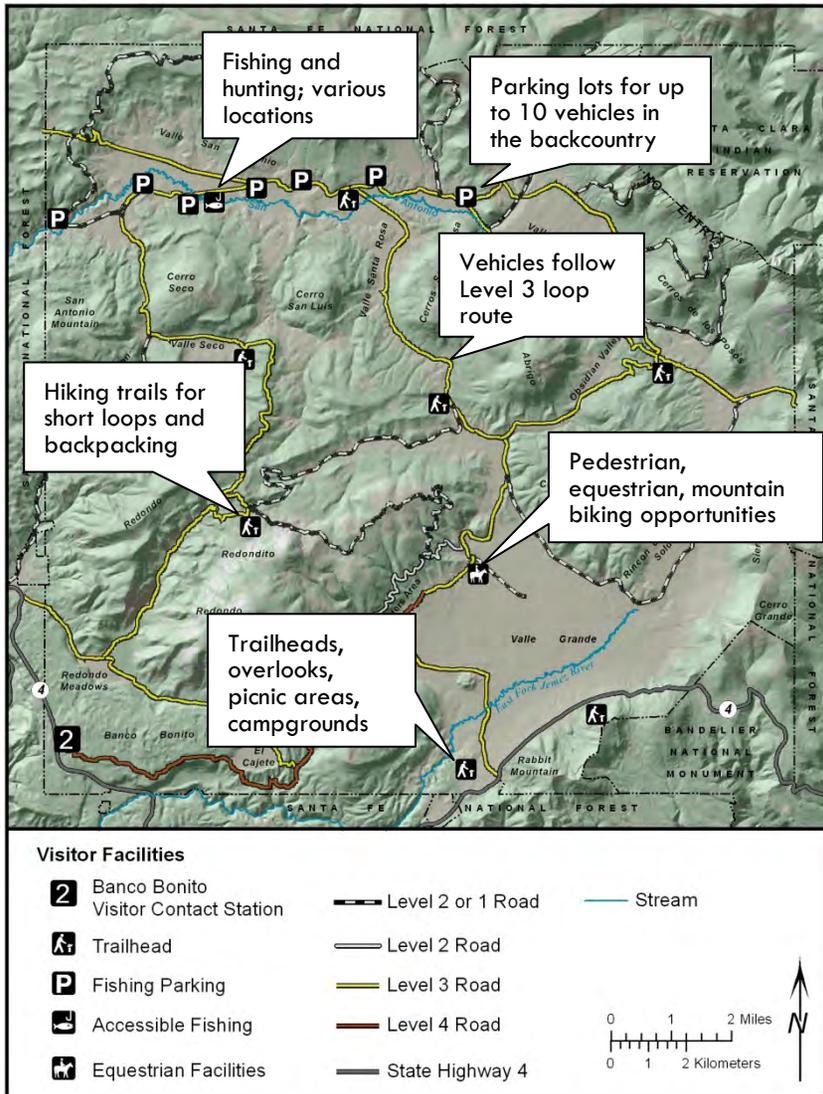
How Do We Propose to Develop the Preserve and Manage Public Access and Use?

Six alternatives are being considered in detail in this EIS, including taking no action.

Six alternatives are being considered in detail in this EIS, including taking no action. Under the no-action alternative, the Valle Grande and Banco Bonito staging areas would be removed and the current interim recreation program would be eliminated. No facilities or new infrastructure would exist. The current visitor services would not be replaced, although visitors would still be able to hike the trails at Rabbit Mountain without a permit or fee. However, spontaneous access to the preserve would be limited. The VCT would continue to conduct fee-based tours and activities on a scheduled basis. Access for the grazing program would continue, but the VCT would not enter into any new agreements or grants. The current tribal access policy would continue.

The five action alternatives analyzed in this plan are summarized in the figures below.

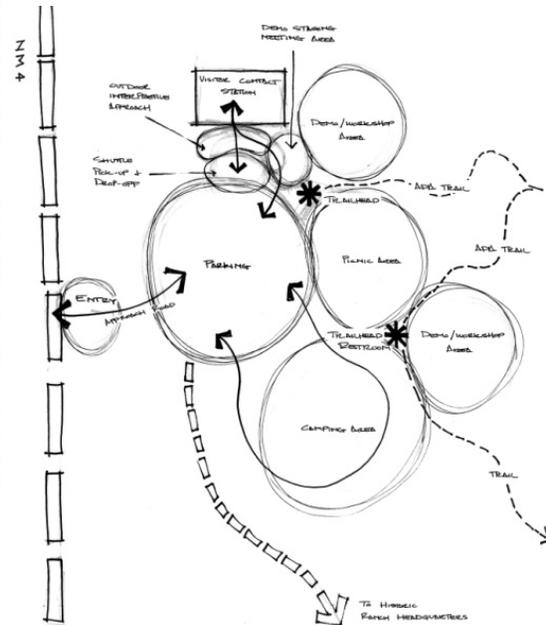
Figure S-4: Alternative 2: Banco Bonito



Note: Parking, trailhead, recreation, and other locations are conceptual only.



- Small-scale visitor contact station at Banco Bonito area.
- 2,500-5,000 square feet; ~50,000 visitors/year.
- Limited day-use amenities at visitor contact station.
- No lodging development.



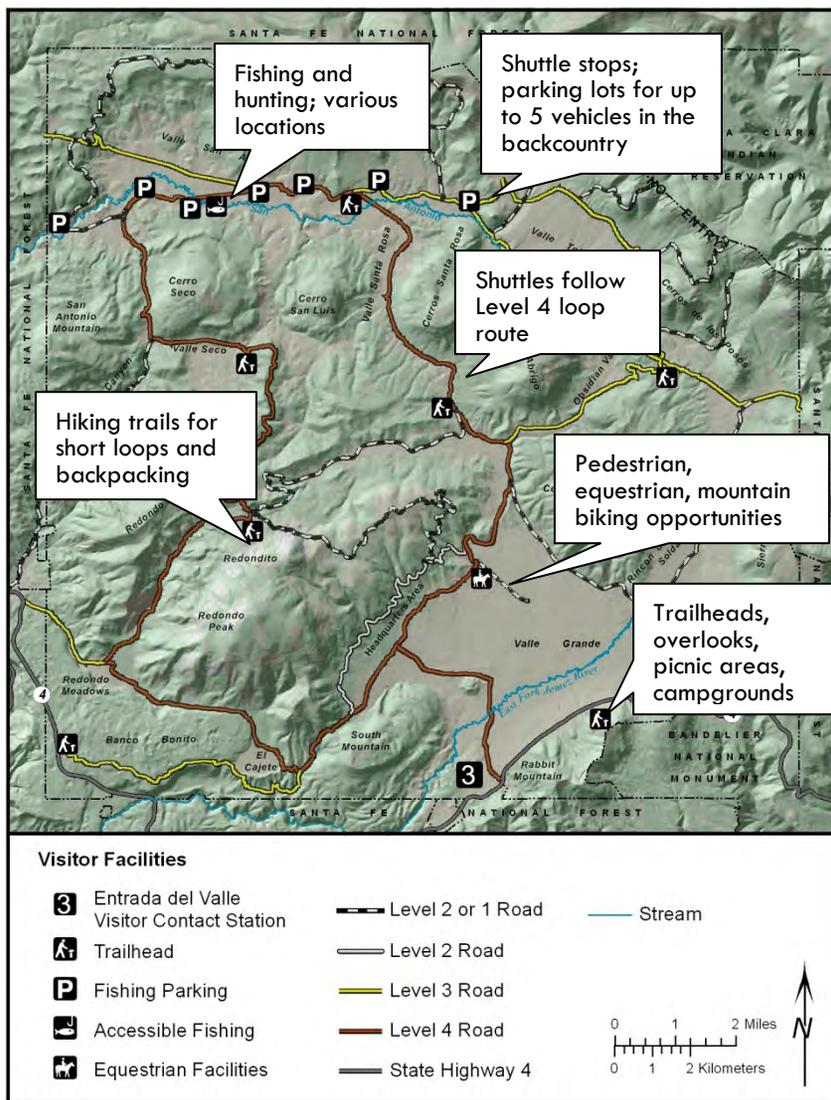
Minimal development; previously disturbed site.



Day-use facilities, small parking area, double-lane roads at specific locations for personal vehicles and/or shuttles.

- Primary access via personal vehicle.
- Shuttles as warranted on high-use days, special events, and tours.

Figure S-5: Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle—Primary Access via Shuttle System



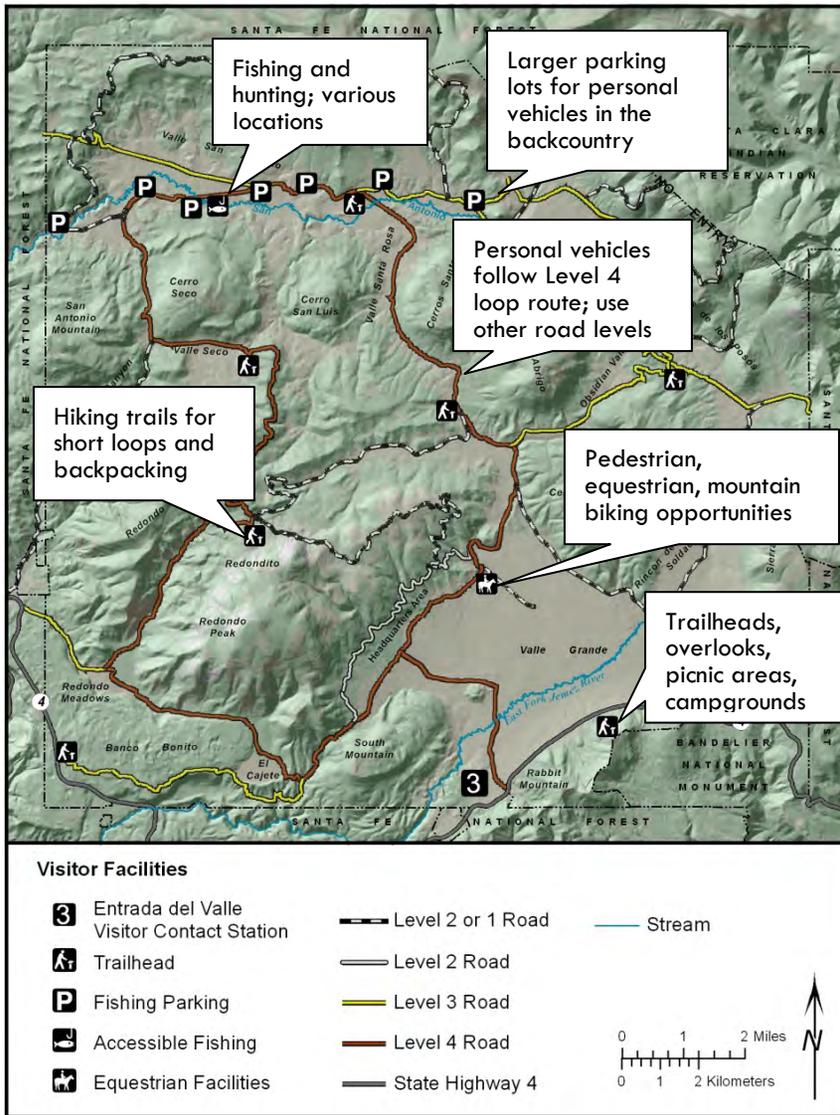
Note: Parking, trailhead, recreation, and other locations are conceptual only.

- Full-service visitor and interpretive center.
- 10,000 square feet; ~120,000 visitors/year.
- Covered dropoff, lobby, reception, orientation areas; theater, exhibit halls, classroom, retail, food service, observation decks.
- Previously undisturbed site near Valle Grande.
- No lodging development.

- Primary access via shuttle system.
- Personal vehicles for specific activities by permit only.

Day-use facilities focus on East Fork of the Jemez River, overlooks, picnic areas, group/special event staging, interpretive sites. New access road from NM-4.

Figure S-6: Alternative 3B: Entrada del Valle—Primary Access via Personal Vehicle



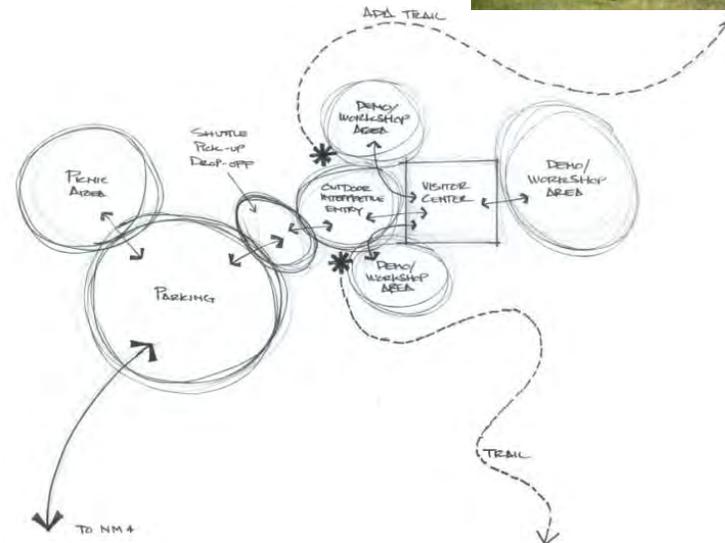
Note: Parking, trailhead, recreation, and other locations are conceptual only.



- Full-service visitor and interpretive center.
- 10,000 square feet; ~120,000 visitors/year.
- Covered dropoff, lobby, reception, orientation areas; theater, exhibit halls, classroom, retail, food service, observation decks.
- Previously undisturbed site near Valle Grande.
- No lodging development.

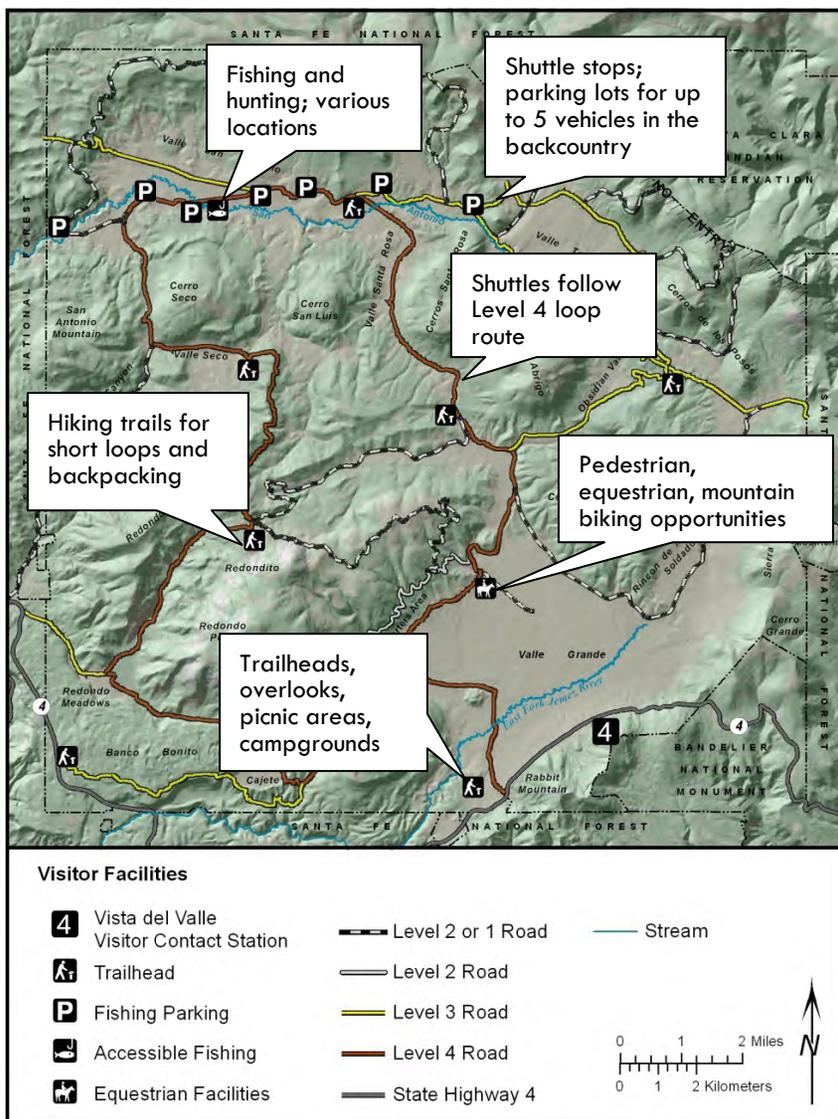


- Primary access via personal vehicle.
- Shuttles for high-use days, tours and group events.



Day-use facilities focus on East Fork of the Jemez River, overlooks, picnic areas, staging for groups and special events, interpretive sites.

Figure S-7: Alternative 4A: Vista del Valle—Primary Access via Shuttle System



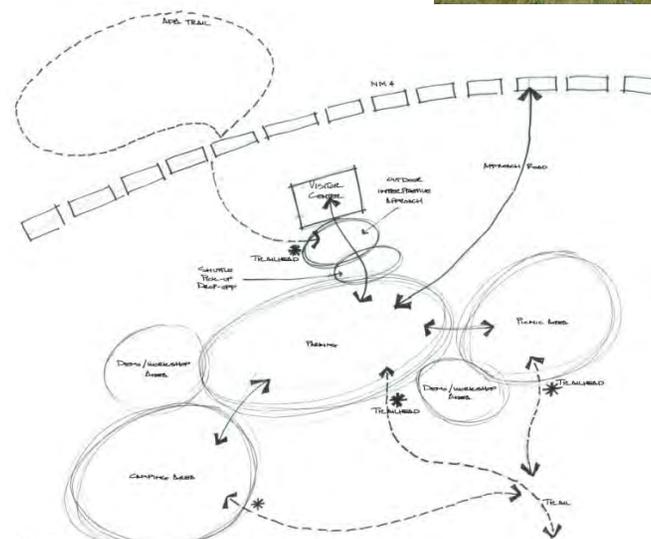
Note: Parking, trailhead, recreation, and other locations are conceptual only.



- Full-service visitor and interpretive center.
- 10,000 square feet; ~120,000 visitors/year.
- Services and amenities same as alternative 3A.
- No lodging development.
- Previously undisturbed area overlooking Valle Grande.

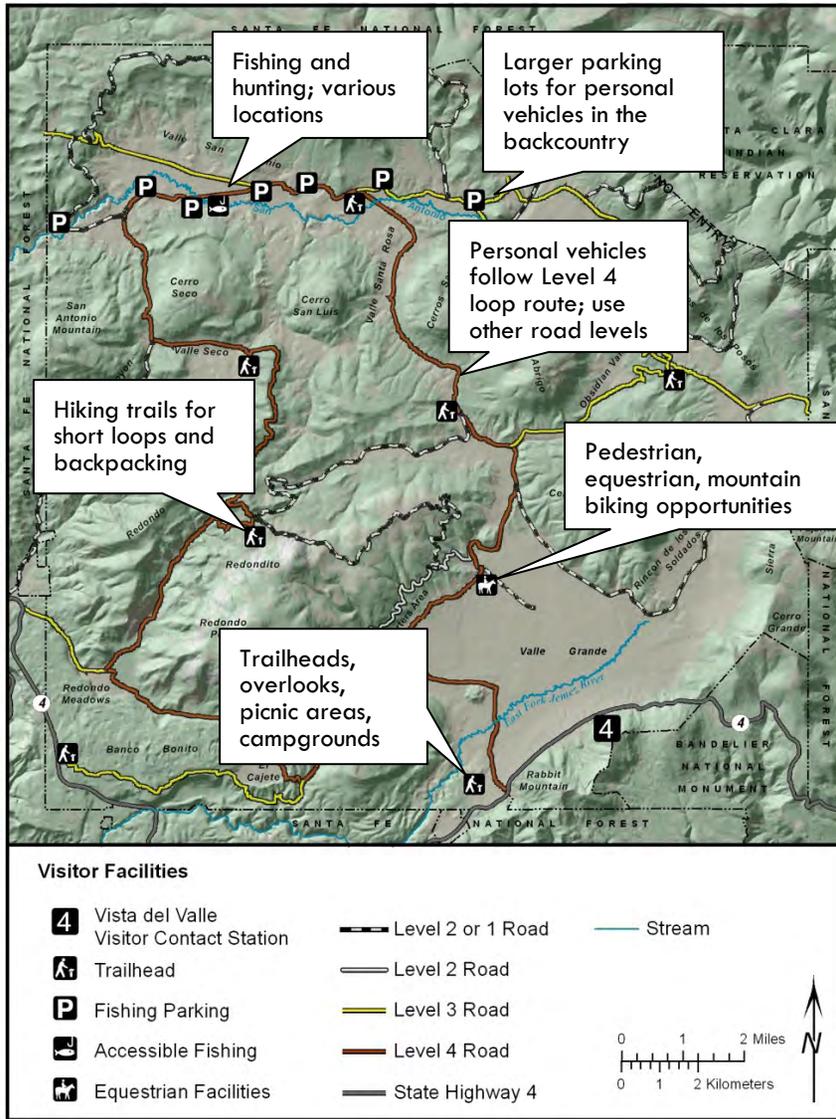


- Primary access via shuttle system.
- Personal vehicles for specific activities by permit only.



Day-use facilities focus on views of Valle Grande, geology, proximity to Bandelier National Monument. Underpass below NM-4 for wildlife viewing.

Figure S-8: Alternative 4B: Vista del Valle—Primary Access via Personal Vehicle



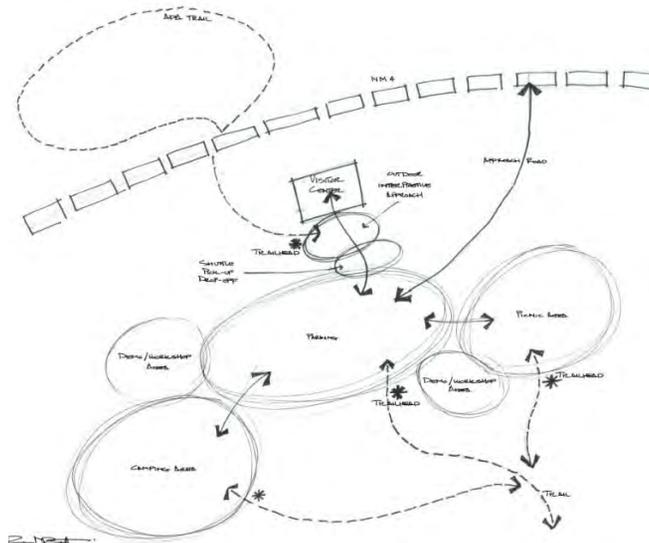
Note: Parking, trailhead, recreation, and other locations are conceptual only.



- Full-service visitor and interpretive center.
- 10,000 square feet; ~120,000 visitors/year.
- Services and amenities same as alternative 3A.
- No lodging development.
- Previously undisturbed area overlooking Valle Grande.



- Primary access via personal vehicle.
- Shuttles for high-use days, tours and group events.



Day-use facilities focus on views of Valle Grande, geology, proximity to Bandelier National Monument. Underpass below NM-4 for wildlife viewing.

What Else Did We Consider?

The following alternatives were eliminated from detailed analysis because they did not meet the purpose of and need for action or were not technically or economically feasible.

- Continuation of the interim recreation program
- Open access for dispersed recreation: the Valle Vidal model
- Wilderness/roadless management emphasis: San Pedro Parks Wilderness model
- Smaller-scale development at Valle Grande locations
- Visitor center at the current Valle Grande staging area
- Visitor center at the headquarters area

How Would the Actions Described in the Public Access and Use Plan Affect the Environment?

Environmental consequences were analyzed in comparison to baseline conditions.

Environmental consequences were analyzed in comparison to baseline conditions using the VCT's definition of negligible, minor, moderate, and major levels of effect. Although the same *level* of effect (e.g., minor) may apply to more than one alternative for a given resource, the specific *change* may be different. For example, a minor effect on a particular resource could result from shuttle use (alternative 3A) as well as from personal vehicle use (alternative 3B) in the preserve, although the specific change (the type of vehicular access) would be different. Because the NEPA process is intended to help agencies make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences, distinctions between the impacts of the alternatives are summarized in figure S-9 and the following text (as well as in table 2-11 in chapter 2). Where no clear distinctions occur, those impacts are not mentioned (e.g., major impacts are expected to cultural resources for all action alternatives). In general, alternatives 3A/3B and 4A/4B would have the greatest magnitude of impacts because they would involve the highest levels of visitation and the most extensive plans for construction of visitor centers and associated amenities.

Implementation-level Actions

With the exception of visitor experience, socioeconomics, and preserve management and operations, beneficial impacts are expected under alternative 1 for all resource topics due to substantially restricting public access. Distinctions between the action alternatives for the remaining resources are described below where applicable. The level of impact incorporates the effects of mitigation measures, which would be applied where feasible to minimize adverse effects.

Visitor Experience

Alternative 1 would not meet one of the purposes of this plan as stated above and as directed by the Valles Caldera Preservation Act, which is to implement the development of a portal or physical point of access to the preserve. Alternative 1

would also result in adverse impacts on visitor experience by severely restricting access. The proposed action alternatives would meet this purpose through the development of a visitor contact station (alternative 2) or a visitor center (alternatives 3A/3B and 4A/4B), which would result in beneficial impacts on visitor experience. Alternatives 2 and 4A/4B may involve some backtracking to reach the visitor contact station/visitor center.

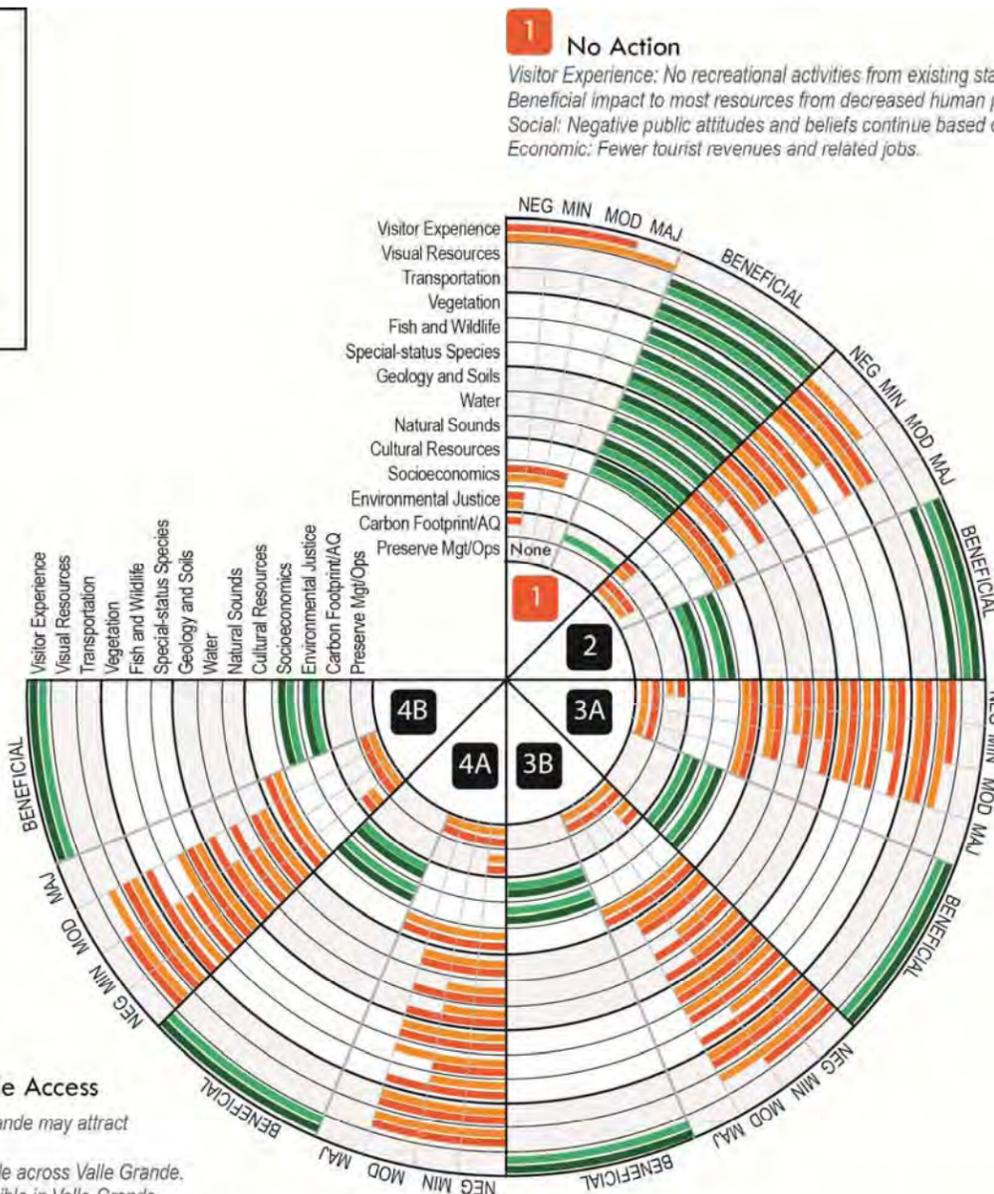
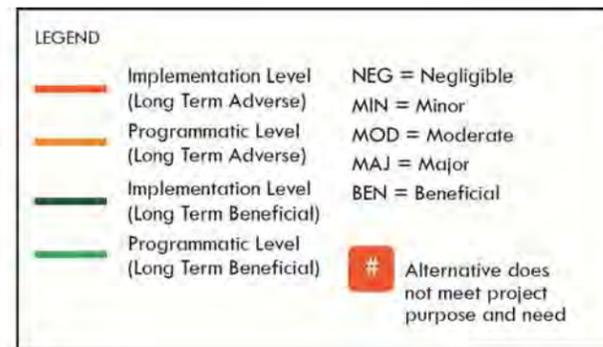
Visual Resources

Alternative 2: The alternative 2 site has been previously disturbed, so a minimal amount of vegetation would be removed to accommodate the new facilities. The visitor contact station's footprint and low profile would occupy a small amount of the landscape. The surrounding vegetation would visually absorb human alterations to the landscape. The views into and from the Valle Grande would be improved by removing the current temporary visitor contact station presently set in sight from a variety of viewpoints. Programmatic direction would guide any future development to ensure long-term protection of the scenic corridor along the Valle Grande.

Alternatives 3A and 3B: These alternatives propose development on the edge of the Valle Grande in an undisturbed area within the scenic Valle Grande corridor. The new facilities would impact 5 to 10 acres of previously undisturbed vegetation. The site would be partially obstructed from view from New Mexico Highway 4 (NM-4) by a small rise. The structure would be in proportion to the tall evergreen trees that surround it, as well as the large rock outcrop that fronts it. These features would provide a natural enclosure for the building that would help it blend into the landscape, thus mitigating the intensity of the impacts to the scenic corridor along the Valle Grande

Alternatives 4A and 4B: The alternative 4A and 4B site would be located in an undisturbed area south of NM-4, and would provide views of the Valle Grande. Some tree removal would occur to clear the way for development; however, post construction landscaping would mitigate the intensity of the effect. The water pumping system may traverse approximately 1 mile of the Valle Grande. Because the Valle Grande is the preserve's signature landscape, impacts could be extensive depending on the degree of disruption created by the pumping system. In addition, the visitor center would be visible from the vicinity of the headquarters area across the Valle Grande, although it would appear small in the distance and would be designed to fit into the natural surroundings. The water pumping system may also be visible across the Valle Grande depending on its location and size.

Figure S-9: Summary of Impacts



1 No Action
 Visitor Experience: No recreational activities from existing staging areas; no spontaneous access.
 Beneficial impact to most resources from decreased human presence.
 Social: Negative public attitudes and beliefs continue based on lack of access.
 Economic: Fewer tourist revenues and related jobs.

2 Banco Bonito
 Visitor Experience: Increased public access and recreational activities.
 Visual Resources: Visitors and vehicles visible across valleys (all action alternatives); VCS site has high capacity for visual absorption; existing visual conditions improve.
 Transportation: Highway performance good, potentially degrading during peak visitor use (all action alternatives). Visitor contact station (VCS) location would be disassociated from Valle Grande, resulting in potential backtracking to VCS.
 Vegetation: ~3 acres of grassland/forest land affected at VCS site. No rare plants affected; location previously disturbed.
 Fish and Wildlife: VCS site not expected to substantially affect elk calving or foraging.
 Geology and Soils: VCS site soils have very limited suitability for commercial building.
 Water: No wetlands, streams, or wet meadows affected by VCS. Water use increase to 2 million gallons/year.
 Economics: Increased visitor spending.
 Social: Positive public attitudes and beliefs.

3A Entrada del Valle: Shuttle Access
 Visitor Experience: Substantially increased public access and recreational activities.
 Visual Resources: Visitor center visible in undisturbed location; some shielding from natural elements.
 Transportation: Highway performance similar to alternative 2 but substantially more visitors. No backtracking required to reach visitor center.
 Vegetation: ~5-10 acres undisturbed habitat affected by visitor center, including rare wet meadow.
 Fish and Wildlife: Elk that are known use the southern edge of the Valle Grande for summer foraging and calving habitat may be disturbed or displaced.
 Special-status Species: Several special-status species could be present near visitor center.
 Geology and Soils: Visitor center site soils have no limitations for commercial building.
 Water: ~0.5-1.0 acre of wet meadows affected by visitor center facilities. Water use increase to 4.4 million gallons/year.
 Economics: Substantially increased visitor spending.
 Social: Positive public attitudes and beliefs (all action alternatives).

4B Vista del Valle: Personal Vehicle Access
 Implementation level (i.e., visitor center) impacts similar to alternative 4A.
 Programmatic level (i.e., personal vehicle access) impacts similar to alternative 3B.

4A Vista del Valle: Shuttle Access
 Visitor Experience: Views of Valle Grande may attract spontaneous visitors.
 Visual Resources: Visitor center visible across Valle Grande. Water pumping system may be visible in Valle Grande.
 Transportation: Increased traffic on NM-4 from shuttle system. Highway performance similar to alternative 3A. Backtracking may be required to reach visitor center.
 Vegetation: ~5-10 acres undisturbed grassland/forest near NM-4. Several slope wetlands (relatively rare) could be affected by construction at visitor center site.
 Fish and Wildlife: Proximity to NM-4 has reduced wildlife value.
 Special-status Species: Visitor center site near critical habitat for Mexican spotted owl; Jemez Mountains salamander within 1.0 mile; peregrine falcon may nest nearby.
 Soils and Geology: Visitor center site soils have very limited suitability for commercial building.
 Water: Water use increase to 4.4 million gallons/year; potential decreased water availability to wetlands and streams.
 Natural Sounds: Noise from visitor center concentrated outside preserve's main landscape.

3B Entrada del Valle: Personal Vehicle Access
 Similar to alternative 3A; differences include:
 Visitor Experience: More spontaneous public access.
 Visual Resources: Personal vehicles visible throughout preserve.
 Transportation: Increased safety concerns with substantial traffic increase from personal vehicle use. Elk that are known use the southern edge of the Valle Grande for summer foraging and calving habitat may be disturbed or displaced.
 Fish and Wildlife: Increased disturbance to wildlife from personal vehicle use.
 Special-status Species: Increased potential for collection of special-status species.
 Water: Increased release of contaminants into waterways from personal vehicle use.
 Natural Sounds: Noise from variety of engine types and substantial traffic increase.

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Transportation

For all action alternatives, there would be increased traffic on NM-4 and into the visitor contact station or visitor center. Currently, NM-4 operates at Level of Service (LOS) A. Under alternative 2, performance may degrade on high-use days during peak season to LOS B. For alternatives 3A/3B and 4A/4B, degradation may reach LOS B or LOS C. Despite the change, NM-4 would continue to operate at or near free-flow conditions and traffic delays would be minimal for all action alternatives. Improvements to the entrances to the preserve from NM-4 would mitigate traffic delay and safety concerns.

Vegetation

The action alternatives would affect different amounts and types of vegetation resulting from the siting of the visitor contact station or visitor centers.

Alternative 2: Approximately 3 acres of montane grassland and some surrounding ponderosa pine forest land would be affected in an area that has already been disturbed.

Alternatives 3A and 3B: Approximately 5 to 10 acres of undisturbed lower and upper montane grassland, wet meadow, mixed-conifer forest, ponderosa pine forest, and blue spruce fringe forest would be affected.

Alternatives 4A and 4B: Similar to alternatives 3A and 3B, approximately 5 to 10 acres of grassland and forest would be affected. Somewhat greater intensity of tree removal would be necessary under this alternative. Several slope wetlands, which are relatively rare in the southern Rocky Mountains, could be affected by construction.

Fish and Wildlife and Special-status Species

None of the alternatives would be expected to adversely affect federally listed species. The increased visitation anticipated under the action alternatives could increase the potential for wildlife (including special-status species) to become habituated to human presence and possibly become nuisance animals, particularly near the visitor contact station or visitor center or future ancillary infrastructure such as trailheads, picnic areas, or campgrounds.

Additional visitation would increase traffic volumes, which would increase disturbance levels preserve-wide to wildlife in general and increase the risk of animal/vehicle collisions. More unlimited access via personal vehicle under alternative 2, and to a greater degree under alternatives 3B and 4B, could result in the greatest intensity of disturbance as well as the potential collection of special-status species such as the wood lily, or illegal hunting of special-status species and other wildlife. In spite of a long history of intensive, extractive uses, such as livestock grazing and logging, the preserve and its wildlife have always been protected from the level of disturbance that occurs from broad motorized access by the public. Alternatives 3A and 4A would mitigate this impact by employing a shuttle system as the primary means of public access.

Specific species may be affected under each action alternative as follows:

Alternative 2: Elk now concentrate on the grassland valleys in the east and north sections of the preserve, so the proposed visitor contact station is not expected to substantially affect elk calving or foraging. The visitor contact station location may provide suitable habitat for the northern goshawk (a special-status species), which could forage in the area. Foraging habitat is not limited in the preserve for the goshawk, so no long-term impacts on goshawk populations would be expected. No critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl (a special-status species) exists in the area. Few trees that are preferred by the owl for habitat would be removed. No impacts would be expected on the owl.

Alternatives 3A and 3B: Several special-status species could be present in the vicinity of the visitor center, including the southern red-backed vole, wrinkled marshsnail, American marten, dwarf shrew, water shrew, Gunnison's prairie dog, and long-tailed vole. No critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl exists in the area, and substantially more potential habitat exists elsewhere throughout the preserve. Impacts may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, the Mexican spotted owl. Elk that are known use the southern edge of the Valle Grande for summer foraging and calving habitat may be disturbed or displaced.

Alternatives 4A and 4B: The underpass and wildlife viewing area associated with alternative 4A would provide an unobtrusive vantage point for visitors to observe elk and other wildlife from a distance. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl where utilities are currently proposed. However, surveys conducted for the Mexican spotted owl have yielded negative results preserve-wide. Habitat characteristics where the utilities are currently proposed are not unique on the preserve or in the region. Impacts may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, the Mexican spotted owl. Several historic locations for the Jemez Mountains salamander (a special-status species) exist within 1 mile of the proposed visitor center. The footprint of the visitor center and parking lots would eliminate underground habitat for the salamander. The Las Conchas fire in 2011 likely burned a substantial amount of designated critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl, and resulted in direct mortality to most individual Jemez Mountain salamanders. Changes to habitat from the fire would likely inhibit recolonization by the salamander. Cliffs on the eastern boundary of the preserve in proximity to the proposed visitor center present marginal nesting habitat for American peregrine falcon (a special-status species), which could be affected by increased human activity. A large population of mountain lions has been documented on Bandelier National Monument, making mountain lion migration between the monument and the preserve likely. The presence of the visitor center and increased visitation could affect mountain lion migration. However, mountain lions can coexist with human presence, and the species may currently avoid areas in proximity to NM-4. Site-specific development is likely to have less of an impact on mountain lions than the overall increase in human presence preserve-wide.

Geology and Soils

The following list shows the suitability of soils for activities that would occur under the action alternatives.

- Commercial building—very limited for alternatives 2, 4A, and 4B; not limited for most of the alternative 3A/3B area.
- Local roads and streets—somewhat limited for alternatives 2, 3A, and 3B, and some areas for alternatives 4A and 4B due to frost, slope, and flooding; very limited for some areas for alternatives 4A and 4B due to slope, large stones, and frost.
- Shallow excavations (utility lines, parking lots)—very limited for all action alternatives; some areas of alternatives 4A and 4B somewhat limited.
- Septic tank absorption field—very limited for all action alternatives.

Water

Water consumption at the visitor contact station or visitor centers proposed under the action alternatives would be as follows:

Alternative 2: Approximately 2 million gallons of water per year. The nearest available source of water is an existing well at Jemez Falls Campground in the Santa Fe National Forest, approximately 8,000 linear feet away.

Alternatives 3A and 3B: Approximately 4.4 million gallons of water per year. Water could be supplied by three springs about 1,300 feet away. If the springs are not viable, a well would be drilled with an associated water pumping system powered by solar energy or electrical power from an existing transmission line.

Alternatives 4A and 4B: Approximately 4.4 million gallons of water per year. This site poses many obstacles to securing a viable water source. There is a spring with unknown production volume approximately 1 mile to the northeast north of NM-4, which would require pumping water through part of the Valle Grande. Establishing this water source could result in direct impacts on wetlands and wet meadows in the Valle Grande.

For all action alternatives, the VCT would assess the potential for using nonpotable water sources. Potable water would be used only for human consumption. The VCT would consider the use of recycled and reclaimed water, would capture and harvest water, and would use graywater for irrigation and possibly in restroom toilets.

Natural Sounds

Noise from people using the visitor contact station or visitor center would affect the preserve's natural sounds under all action alternatives, varying by season. Under all action alternatives, sound opportunity classifications would degrade to the same degree. Noise generated at the alternative 2 site would be somewhat absorbed by the vegetation that surrounds it. Noise impacts under alternatives 3A and 4A would be greater due to substantially increased visitation over alternative 2 at the visitor center location. Alternative 2 would increase noise levels throughout the preserve

by providing broad motorized access to the public. Noise impacts would be somewhat greater under 3B and 4B as an even great number of visitors and vehicles would be distributed throughout the preserve.

Cultural Resources

Major impacts on cultural resources due to trampling, vandalism, unauthorized collection, or visual intrusion would be likely for all action alternatives. Appropriate mitigation would be developed through the National Historic Preservation Act section 106 process to reduce impacts to a less than significant level. In addition there would be direct impacts to archeological sites present on the alternative locations being considered for development. The following sites have the potential to be impacted under each of the action alternatives:

Alternative 2: Twelve of the 13 archeological sites on or near the proposed visitor contact station site have been determined to be eligible for or recommended as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These are primarily agricultural features from the early Pueblo peoples.

Alternatives 3A and 3B: Ten of the 11 archeological sites on or near the proposed visitor center site have been determined to be eligible for or recommended as eligible for listing in the NRHP. These sites consist of lithic scatters and early to mid 20th century trash and livestock pens.

Alternatives 4A and 4B: All of the 11 archeological sites on or near the proposed visitor center site have been determined to be eligible for or recommended as eligible for listing in the NRHP. These sites consist of lithic scatters as well as ceramic pottery pieces not usually found at higher elevations.

Socioeconomics

Alternative 1 would result in adverse socioeconomic impacts due to decreased tourism revenue. The visitor contact station or visitor centers proposed under the action alternatives would become self-contained destinations and would draw a high number of visitors, which would result in higher economic benefits to local communities from visitor spending. These alternatives would require more staffing and associated services, resulting in slight increases in local employment.

Environmental Justice

Under the action alternatives, increased visitation may result in slight beneficial impacts on environmental justice populations due to increased local spending by visitors. Increased visitation would increase demand for additional employees and an opportunity to comply with limited English proficient guidance by hiring bilingual individuals. This would result in a slight beneficial impact to local environmental justice populations. In addition, the VCT would investigate the possibility of employing “Cultural Guides” from the local Tribes and Pueblos to provide educational services. Finally, the preserve would continue to be an active grazing area and a place for traditional cultural practices, both continuing to benefit minority communities. There would be no appreciable differences in these effects between the action alternatives.

Carbon Footprint and Air Quality

Under the action alternatives, a substantial increase in visitors driving to the preserve would occur, with associated increases in greenhouse gas emissions based on expected visitation. At the regional level, these impacts would be slight. The construction of the visitor contact station or visitor center would conform to sustainable design standards to the extent possible, with no measurable differences between the action alternatives other than footprint size. Increased visitation to the preserve is not expected to exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards under any alternative.

Preserve Management and Operations

Under alternative 1 administrative support to provide public access and use would be reduced with the closing of the Valle Grande Staging Area. Under the action alternatives, staff would be required to operate and maintain the visitor contact station or visitor center. Funding would be required to develop these facilities, with fewest funds required for alternative 2 due to its small scale. These requirements would be greater for alternatives 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B due to the increased size of the proposed facilities and the greater numbers of visitors expected.

Programmatic-level Actions

With the exception of visitor experience, socioeconomic, and preserve management and operations, beneficial impacts would be expected under alternative 1 for all resource topics due to substantially restricting public access. At the programmatic level, the differences between action alternatives for visual resources, geology and soils, water, cultural resources, environmental justice, and carbon footprint and air quality would not be substantial. Measurable differences between the remaining action alternatives are described below where applicable. The level of impact incorporates the effects of mitigation measures, which would be applied where feasible to minimize adverse effects. In general, alternatives 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B would have the greatest magnitude of impacts because they would involve the highest levels of visitation.

Visitor Experience

Recreational activities managed from the Valles Grande and Banco Bonito Staging Areas would be discontinued under alternative 1. Spontaneous access to the preserve would be limited to hiking the trails with access off NM-4 (Coyote Call and Valle Grande trails). The existing network of trails in the Banco Bonito area would remain open for horseback riding and special events under all action alternatives. Programmatic-level actions proposed under the action alternatives would result in more recreational opportunities with a wider range of options compared to current conditions, which would constitute a beneficial impact. The action alternatives would meet the objective to expand access and enjoyment of the preserve to local, regional, national, and international visitors to the Jemez Mountains while protecting and preserving cultural and natural resources and values.

The action alternatives would all result in increased opportunities for learning about the preserve and the surrounding regional areas.

Shuttle use to access recreational destinations (as proposed under alternatives 3A and 4A) is gaining popularity in national parks. However, visitors may also prefer the spontaneity of using personal vehicles to drive to their destinations in the preserve (as under alternatives 3B and 4B). Impacts would be beneficial or adverse depending on individual visitors' preferences.

Transportation

The use of personal vehicles under alternatives 2, 3B, and 4B would result in increased traffic volumes throughout the preserve. Road improvements would alleviate some potential congestion and traffic conflicts. Safety concerns would become more prominent, and vehicle conflicts may increase. Strict adherence to parking capacities, using clear signage to designate official parking areas with enforcement if necessary could support a more even distribution of visitors throughout the preserve.

Vegetation

Alternatives 2, 3B, and 4B would introduce more personal vehicles into the preserve, increasing the chance of human-induced wildfires and the potential for introduction of noxious weeds. All action alternatives include performance requirements to aid in the prevention of fire and control of noxious weeds. The trust works within the local interagency fire zone to prevent, detect and respond to wildland fire. Fire prevention programs are incorporated into interpretation programs on the preserve. These programs would be expanded as warranted. Additionally, the trust inventories the preserve annual to detect and control noxious weeds (Canada, bull and musk thistle and oxeye daisy). Long-term plans for restoration and management include a proposed expansion of this program to control current populations of cheatgrass and to detect and eradicate any new noxious weed species.

Fish and Wildlife and Special-status Species

The use of private vehicles under alternatives 2, 3B, and 4B would create more frequent, widespread disturbance to wildlife and special-status species than a shuttle system, and would result in more collisions with wildlife. Private vehicles would increase noise levels compared to shuttles. More unlimited access via personal vehicle could result in potential collection of special-status species such as the wood lily or illegal hunting. Wildlife, especially elk and mule deer, may habituate to predictable shuttle schedule and route, along with predictable visitor behavior along roads, decreasing the likelihood of flight and lessening associated impacts.

Natural Sounds

Under alternatives 3A and 4A, electric shuttle buses would eventually be phased in, which would be quieter than conventional gasoline-powered vehicles. Increased noise impacts would occur for alternative 2, and to a greater extent for alternatives 3B and 4B given the higher levels of visitation expected, due to a substantial increase in gasoline-powered motor vehicle use throughout the preserve.

Socioeconomics

Alternative 1 would result in adverse socioeconomic impacts from decreased tourism revenue, as well as adverse impacts on public attitudes and beliefs about the preserve due to restricted access. All action alternatives would benefit local economies in the long term through the provision of goods and services for an increased number of visitors. Local and state governments would benefit from increased tax revenues, and the preserve would benefit economically from entrance fees, particularly for alternatives 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B due to the greater visitation expected. Under the shuttle alternatives (alternatives 3A and 4A), a shuttle service would be hired and fuel for shuttles would be purchased.

Preserve Management and Operations

Under all action alternatives, additional law enforcement and interpretive staff would be required to address widespread visitor use throughout the preserve. Alternatives 3A and 4A would require maintenance and fueling of the shuttle fleet, and to a lesser extent for alternatives 2, 3B, and 4B, which would use shuttles on an as-needed basis. Alternatives 3B and 4B would require additional staff to enforce traffic laws, investigate traffic accidents, and carry out other actions related to personal vehicle use in the preserve.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts, Short-term Uses vs. Long-term Productivity, and Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

In addition to the environmental impacts of the alternatives, NEPA requires a discussion of any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should an alternative be implemented, the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, and any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources that would be involved. These elements are summarized in the table below.

Table S-2: Unavoidable Adverse Impacts, Short-term Uses vs. Long-term Productivity, and Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

Alternative	Unavoidable Adverse Impacts	Short and Long-Term Impacts/Maintaining Long-Term Productivity	Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources
Alternative 1: No Action	<u>Visitors</u> : Interim recreation program eliminated.	Impacts from deconstruction and removal of existing staging areas. Long-term enhancements due to reduced human activity, allowing the preserve to revert to a more natural state.	None expected.
Alternative 2: Banco Bonito Visitor Contact Station	<p><u>Visual Resources</u>: More visitors and personal vehicles visible throughout preserve.</p> <p><u>Transportation</u>: Increased traffic and potential for congestion and accidents on NM-4.</p> <p><u>Vegetation</u>: Loss of approximately 3.0 acres of grassland and forest habitat at VCS.</p> <p><u>Fish and Wildlife, Special-status Species</u>: Increased visitation may result in habitat fragmentation, adversely affect habitat use and migration patterns, result in direct mortality (e.g., through fishing), and increase the risk of animal/vehicle collisions. Some wildlife may be attracted to human presence and new sources of food. Increased visitation may also adversely affect elk calving through disturbance or disruption.</p> <p><u>Geology and Soils</u>: Soil compaction and an increased potential for erosion would occur.</p> <p><u>Water</u>: Approximately 2 million gallons of water would be required per year.</p> <p><u>Natural Sounds</u>: Noise levels would be increased substantially.</p> <p><u>Cultural Resources</u>: Cultural resources may be impacted by construction, as well as by trampling, vandalism, unauthorized collection, or visual intrusion.</p> <p><u>Carbon Footprint and Air Quality</u>: Additional visitation would result in an increase of mobile combustion sources from visitors driving to and from the visitor contact station.</p> <p><u>Preserve Management and Operations</u>: Adverse impacts expected due to the demands on staff to provide more visitor services and maintenance.</p>	<p>Impacts from deconstruction of staging areas, construction of the visitor contact station and associated facilities and other preserve roads and recreational amenities.</p> <p>Avoidance and mitigation measures implemented to minimize impacts to natural resources.</p> <p>Short-term noise from construction.</p> <p>Potential damage to or destruction of cultural resource sites. The VCT would seek to avoid, reduce, or minimize adverse effects on historic properties and areas important to Native Americans.</p> <p>Mitigation for impacts to cultural resources would be developed through the section 106 process.</p>	<p>Potential damage to or destruction of cultural resources from construction and use.</p> <p>Direct mortality to some wildlife and/or special status species.</p>

Alternative	Unavoidable Adverse Impacts	Short and Long-Term Impacts/Maintaining Long-Term Productivity	Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources
<p>Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center (Shuttle)</p>	<p>Similar unavoidable impacts as alternative 2, to a greater extent due to higher visitation and larger visitor center. Specifically:</p> <p><u>Vegetation:</u> Visitor center would impact 5 to 10 acres of previously undisturbed habitat, including some that is considered rare. Between 0.5 and 1.0 acre of wet meadows would be affected by construction of the access road and other facilities. Construction of new trails along the East Fork of the Jemez River may have unavoidable adverse impacts on riparian habitat.</p> <p><u>Fish and Wildlife, Special-status Species:</u> Wildlife and several special-status species may use visitor center area as breeding habitat, foraging habitat, or cover during daily movements.</p> <p><u>Geology and Soils:</u> Compaction as described for alternative 2, but in a larger area.</p> <p><u>Water:</u> Additional parking facilities, pullouts, trailheads, and hiking trails could affect wetlands, streams, or floodplains. Would use 4.4 million gallons of water annually.</p> <p><u>Natural Sounds:</u> Noise would increase near the visitor center and throughout preserve from shuttle bus use.</p> <p><u>Cultural Resources:</u> Unavoidable adverse impacts on cultural resources would be likely.</p>	<p>Relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity would be similar to alternative 2.</p> <p>Although short-term construction impacts would involve a larger footprint under alternative 3A, impacts to fish, wildlife, and special-status species would be localized.</p>	<p>Potential damage to or destruction of cultural resources from construction and use; expanded visitor access could lead to increased vandalism or theft.</p> <p>Direct mortality to some wildlife and/or special-status species.</p>
<p>Alternative 3B: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center (Personal Vehicle)</p>	<p>Similar impacts as under alternative 3A. Differences would be based on personal vehicle use instead of shuttle use throughout the preserve, as described below.</p> <p><u>Transportation:</u> Increased potential for motor vehicle accidents.</p> <p><u>Fish and Wildlife, Special-status Species:</u> More frequent, widespread disturbance to terrestrial wildlife, and likely increased collisions with wildlife (including special-status species). More unlimited access could result in potential illegal hunting or collection of special-status plants.</p> <p><u>Cultural Resources:</u> Damage from trampling, vandalism, unauthorized collection, or visual intrusion would occur.</p> <p><u>Natural Sounds, Carbon Footprint, and Air Quality:</u> Noise and carbon footprint impacts would increase to a greater degree than by shuttle use because more vehicles would travel through the preserve and a wide variety of engine types would result in a mixture of noise levels and emissions.</p> <p><u>Preserve Management and Operations:</u> Increase safety and law enforcement staff would be required.</p>	<p>The use of personal vehicles rather than shuttle buses to access the preserve would not change the relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity as described for alternative 3A.</p>	<p>Potential damage to or destruction of cultural resources from construction and use; expanded access via personal vehicles could lead to more vandalism or theft than shuttle use.</p> <p>Direct mortality to some wildlife and/or special-status species.</p>

Alternative	Unavoidable Adverse Impacts	Short and Long-Term Impacts/Maintaining Long-Term Productivity	Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources
<p>Alternative 4A: Vista del Valle Visitor Center (Shuttle)</p>	<p>Locating the proposed visitor center near Rabbit Mountain would result in the following differences compared to 3A (otherwise similar).</p> <p><u>Visual Resources:</u> Visitor Center would be visible from across the Valle Grande.</p> <p><u>Vegetation:</u> Construction of undisturbed site would primarily affect grasslands, and some trees would be removed for development. Several slope wetlands, which are relatively rare in the southern Rocky Mountains, could be affected by trail or utility construction.</p> <p><u>Fish and Wildlife, Special-status Species:</u> Visitor center and an increase in human presence could affect mountain lion migration from Bandelier National Monument. Several historic Jemez Mountains salamander locations exist within 1.0 mile of the proposed visitor center. The footprint of the visitor center and parking lots would eliminate underground habitat for the salamander. Cliffs in the vicinity of the visitor center present marginal potential for American peregrine falcon nesting, which could be adversely affected by increased human activity in this area.</p> <p><u>Cultural Resources:</u> Unavoidable adverse impacts on cultural resources would be likely.</p>	<p>The relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity would be the same as described for alternative 3A.</p>	<p>Same as described for alternative 3A.</p>
<p>Alternative 4B: Vista del Valle Visitor Center (Personal Vehicle)</p>	<p>Visitor center impacts same as alternative 4A. Preserve-level impacts as described for alternative 3B.</p>	<p>The use of personal vehicles rather than shuttle buses to access the preserve would not change the relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity as described for alternative 4A.</p>	<p>Same as described for alternative 3B.</p>

What Did People Say about this Plan?

The *Draft Public Access and Use Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* was released for public review and comment for a 60-day minimum review period on June 11, 2012; the public comment period closed August 14, 2012. The VCT held two public meetings (June 25 in Jemez Springs and June 26 in Los Alamos) during the review period, where staff addressed questions and comments about the plan. The VCT received 125 separate written communications in the form of letters, email, and project comment forms. Seven of these comments were from agencies or Pueblos and 118 were from members of the public, including citizen groups or organizations. Some commenters identified a preference for a specific alternative, as follows:

- Alternative 1: 7
- Alternative 2: 19
- Alternative 3A: 14
- Alternative 3B: 9
- Either alternative 3A or 3B: 5
- Alternative 4A: 14
- Alternative 4B: 3
- Either alternative 4A or 4B: 2
- Shuttle access (no alternative specifically named): 9

Some commenters had specific questions or suggestions regarding certain sections of the Public Access and Use Plan. In some instances, this resulted in changes to the EIS.

Which Alternative was Selected?

The Executive Director of the VCT has identified alternative 3A as the VCT's preferred alternative.

The VCT Board of Trustees discussed the preferred alternative for this plan during a public meeting held Thursday, September 20, 2012. After consideration of the potential impacts as disclosed in the Draft EIS and review of public and agency input, the trustees unanimously stated their preference for Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Shuttle System. The trustees noted that the site welcomed visitors into the preserve, but the location on the edge of the Valle Grande would not overtly alter the view or experience for visitors or people traveling through the area. Additionally, the trustees noted the practical aspects of the site, such as ease of entrance into and exit from the preserve for shuttles (e.g., no back tracking onto NM-4). All members of the Board of Trustees supported primary access via a shuttle system. The Supervisor of the Santa Fe National Forest stated that she believed the shuttle system would be important to maintain stakeholder's values and that it would be best for the preserve's resources and would ultimately provide the best experience. The Superintendent at Bandelier National Monument noted that the monument has had success implementing a

shuttle system to accommodate visitors during recent flood events, stating that it is best to start with a shuttle system rather than change at a later time. There may be future potential of connecting the transportation systems between Bandelier National Monument and the preserve.

The VCT has identified alternative I, the no-action alternative, as the environmentally preferred alternative. Severely restricting public access as called for under alternative I would cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and would best protect, preserve, and enhance the preserve's historic, cultural, and natural resources. The VCT acknowledges that, unlike the environmentally preferred alternative, alternative 3A would impact the preserve's biological and physical environment, including its historic, cultural, and natural resources. The VCT must find a balance between providing for multiple use while protecting the preserve's long-term values. Alternative 3A would allow the trust to both "expand the current level of public access and use on the preserve while protecting and preserving its natural and cultural resources and values and to provide quality outdoor recreation and interpretive opportunities that promote long-term financial self-sustainability consistent with other purposes," which is the stated purpose of this plan.

Now What?

This plan was revised based on public feedback and released as the Final EIS. After a 30-day wait period, Alternative 3A: Entrada del Valle Visitor Center—Primary Access via Shuttle System will be documented as the preferred alternative in a record of decision. Implementation of the plan will begin upon signature of the record of decision.

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