



Valles Caldera National Preserve
Interim Equestrian Program
Stewardship Register

Stewardship Action: Interim Equestrian Program	File Number: PLAN3
Target Start Date: Summer 2004	Responsible Official: Preserve Manager
Target Completion Date: Seasonally Until Rescinded	Signature Date: 6/28/2004
Actual Start Date: Summer 2004	Actual Date of Completion Ongoing

Introduction

Horses have long been a part of life on the landscape of the VCNP (Valles Caldera National Preserve), and they continue to be essential to the ranching operations of the VCNP. The wide open vistas and gently sloping mountains offer experiences that riders of every level of skill and experience can enjoy as a recreational activity. This interim equestrian stewardship action is limited in its scope. It is limited by the infrastructure available on the VCNP (parking and staging areas, safe reliable water, waste water facilities, roads and communication networks), by the available staff, and by our resolve to approach programs incrementally. This incremental approach is key to our ability to adaptively manage activities and programs on the VCNP. If you would like more information on adaptive management or our approach to management please visit our web site www.vallescaldera.gov and navigate to our library. The *Valles Caldera National Preserve – Draft Framework and Strategic Guidance for Comprehensive Management* is contained in a folder titled, Comprehensive Management. This document sets forth long-term goals, sketches the range of possible programs, provides strategic guidance and sets priorities for program development, and shares key information about the VCNP.

Proposed Action:

As a first step toward providing recreational horseback riding opportunities, the VCT (Valles Caldera Trust) is proposing to open the VCNP for seasonal, back country (undeveloped) equestrian access on an interim basis. The program is proposed to occur annually from May through September. Operating hours for day use will generally be from Friday through Sunday with occasional days for special use or group events. These days may be adjusted based on demand (or lack there of). Overnight use of existing facilities may occur as a special event. Initially, daily trail riding would take place in the Banco Bonito area in the southwest portion of the VCNP. Riders would be directed on routes of varying lengths. These trails would be laid out on the existing logging road network. Initially the program will be carefully supervised by the VCT staff and volunteers. In the future opportunities for self service access may be explored to minimize both the cost and intrusiveness of program administration. Additional trail locations may be added in the future to provide variety in the program. Fees would be assessed under the Valles Caldera Trust's current recreation fee structure. Current entrance fees to the Preserve are \$10.00/Adults, \$5.00/Children under 12 and \$8.00/Seniors 65 and older. A \$10 per horse activity fee is proposed for the Equestrian Program.

Initially this is an opportunity for horse owners but opportunities for concessionaires or outfitters will also be considered on a trial or interim basis to allow visitors who cannot actually bring a horse to the Preserve an opportunity to participate in our equestrian activities.

Associated activities may include driving on existing roads, maintaining existing roads, maintaining trails, parking for passenger vehicles, vans, and horse trailers. The placement of temporary signs and hitching posts may occur within the staging area and along the trails. Field administration of the program will take place in the facilities currently being used to administer other recreation activities.

Location: (see attached map)

- Public parking and access is proposed within a non-historic (1990's) mill site off Road 7.
- Regular equestrian activities will take place primarily in the Banco Bonito area.

Purpose and Need:

- To meet the intent of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000, purpose (3)... To provide for public recreation.
- Allow the public to experience the exceptional scenery, wildlife and other assets of the VCNP.
- Provide education and interpretation to the public on the unique cultural, historical and geological values of the VCNP and also to share the mission of the Valles Caldera Trust.
- Allow the public to provide feedback to the staff on what they see as the future of the Valles Caldera Trust and give suggestions for future equestrian programs on the VCNP.
- Provide for a variety of lengths, experiences, and challenge levels so that all ages can enjoy a quality equestrian experience on the VCNP.

Performance Requirements:

Cultural Resources

1. Program implementation requires completion of the VCNP Cultural Resources Compliance Process.
2. Although riding is proposed only on existing roads and propose no new ground disturbance, these roads will be surveyed to allow appropriate monitoring.
3. Parking will be on a site used as a fence post operation in the 1990's. The site was graded annually for a period of seven years providing a fairly even distribution and depth of sawdust from the wood processing. The sawdust accumulation will mitigate the potential for any ground disturbance to occur as a result of the proposed equestrian recreation activities.
4. Road grading will be restricted to the existing road bed of open roads and identified parking area.
5. No permanent corrals, shelters, or other facilities are proposed in support of this program. Any facilities requiring ground disturbance will initiate the VCNP Cultural Resources Compliance Process
6. Administrative activities where concentrations of people may occur will be within approved parking areas or on existing roads.

Soil/Water Quality

1. Measures in place for the protection of cultural resources will also serve to protect soil and hydrological resources.
2. Trail riding activities may be limited or curtailed during the summer rains if damage to soil occurs.
3. Alternative routes will be made available as VCNP Cultural Resources Compliance Process is completed to allow recovery and maintenance of equestrian trails to take place.
4. Water for horses will be available at the parking lot and buckets will be available at live water sources to eliminate the need to bring horses onto the stream banks for watering.

Vegetation

1. Tying horses along the trails for long periods will be discouraged.
2. The placement of temporary hitching posts or hi-lines will be considered to reduce any concentrated trampling if necessary.

Wildlife

1. The number of participants will be limited commensurate with the area available to distribute people.

Invasive Plants

1. Horses will be confined to designated trails so that any weeds which occur as a result of the program can be detected and eliminated.
2. Weed occurrence as a result of the program will be monitored and recorded.
3. It will be prohibited to sweep manure from trailers on the VCNP.
4. The use of weed free feed will be encouraged.
5. Cleaning of vehicles prior to entering the VCNP will be encouraged.
6. Preventing the spread of invasive plants will be included in the interpretive information shared with our equestrian visitors.

Public Health and Safety

1. Portable toilets will be available at the parking area.
2. Water for horses will be provided at the parking area.
3. Other recreation activities such as hiking or mountain bike riding will not be occurring on the same trail as equestrian activities.
4. No stallions will be permitted.
5. Riderless animals must be secured with halter and lead.
6. No pets are allowed on the preserve with the exception of assistance animals.
7. Solo riding will be discouraged.
8. The use of helmets will be encouraged and in some instances may be required.
9. Information regarding safe practices and recommended equipment and supplies will be provided.
10. Parking will be designed to minimize the need for backing.

11. Riders will check in/out of the VCNP.
12. Riders will be located if they have not left the VCNP prior to closing.

Prepared by: Marie E. Rodriguez, Natural Resource Coordinator
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