

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Sandoval and Rio Arriba Counties

State of New Mexico

Environmental Assessment

Interim Program for Overnight Camping

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Stewardship Register

Stewardship Action	Interim Camping
File Number	PLAN3 EA Interim Camping
Target Start Date	Summer 2008
Target Completion Date	Until Rescinded or Revised
Location	Various Locations
Last Updated	20080307 -MER

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Environmental Assessment

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Valles Caldera National Preserve, New Mexico



Figure 1 - Vicinity Map - Valles Caldera National Preserve

Environmental Assessment

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Stewardship Action: Interim Camping

Chapter 1. Purpose and Need/Proposed Action

1.1 Purpose and Need

Currently, overnight camping is not allowed on the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Overnight opportunities on the Preserve are limited to stays in existing facilities, self-contained units placed within the footprint of existing facilities, or in temporary structures (yurts). Opportunities for overnight camping on the Preserve are needed for the following reasons:

1. To increase the efficiency of contractors, researchers, volunteers, and others performing work on the Preserve for the benefit of the Trust.
2. To enhance various recreation activities and special events by including overnight camping.
3. To support fire management activities and other similar project work by allowing temporary Incident Command Centers or personnel camps to be established.
4. To contribute information on the implementation and impacts of overnight camping to comprehensive recreation and access planning.

1.2 Proposed Stewardship Action

The Valles Caldera Trust is proposing to allow camping in tents or self-contained units at various locations on the Preserve. These opportunities may be available to groups or individuals conducting work on the Preserve including contractors, researchers, volunteers, and Trust employees or detailees. Camping opportunities may also be available to groups or individuals participating in recreation and education activities on the Preserve.

Camping will be restricted to existing parking areas (e.g., Banco Bonito), highly disturbed areas (e.g., geothermal well pads in Redondo Canyon (Figure 2) and abandoned logging roads), or within the footprint of developed facilities (e.g., Union Building). Recreation staging areas are also suitable for overnight use (e.g., trailheads). Less disturbed areas (such as log landing sites, cattle gathering sites) could also be considered for occasional use on a case-by-case basis.



Figure 2 – “Well Pad”, geothermal development by Union Oil created a series of level, graveled areas in Redondo Canyon.



Figure 3 – Abandoned gravel pits can provide discreet sites to establish administrative camps in support of field work such as natural or cultural resource inventory.

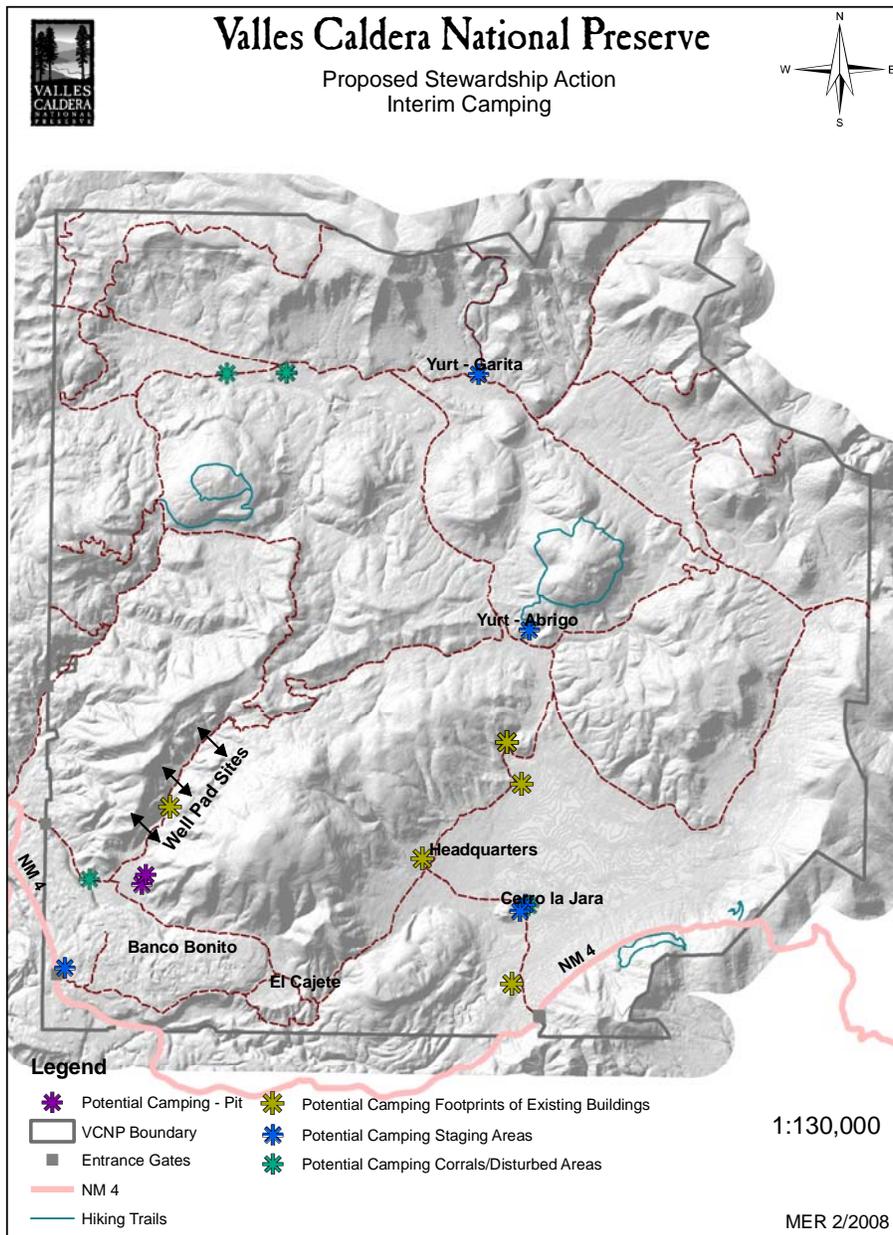


Figure 4 – Proposed Stewardship Action – Interim Camping

1.3 Goals –

This Stewardship Action is being proposed to meet the following goals established by the Valles Caldera Preservation Act and the Management Principles of the Trust:

- To provide for public use and access to the Preserve for recreation;
- To provide cost savings to the Trust through the exchange of services, including but not limited to labor and maintenance of facilities, for resources or services provided by the Trust;
- To optimize the generation of income based on existing market conditions to the extent that it does not unreasonably diminish the long-term scenic and natural values of the area or the multiple use and sustained yield capability of the land; and
- To emphasize quality of experience over quantity of experiences. In so doing, while we reserve the right to limit participation or to maximize revenue in certain instances, we commit ourselves to providing fair and affordable access for all permitted activities.

1.4 Performance Requirements –

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

1.4.1 Laws, Procedures, Policies

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

1.4.2 Mitigation Measures

- Personal use of vehicles will be at the discretion of the Valles Caldera Trust staff.
- If the completion of the Cultural Resource Compliance Process determines specific camping activities or locations would result in an adverse effect to cultural resources, then that camping activity or location is outside the scope of this EA and will not be pursued under the proposed stewardship action.
- Camping in view sheds, valleys, and where actions would directly affect open water would not be permitted.
- Camping in other than fully self-contained vehicles will be supported by portable toilets or access to toilet facilities. Small groups may be provided backcountry camping opportunities if

backcountry ethical toilet practices (Leave no Trace) can be ensured.

- Frequent (generally more than 4 times per year) use of any one site will be restricted to highly disturbed sites (the footprint of existing parking areas, such as the Valle Grande, Banco Bonito, or other staging areas; the footprint of existing facilities, such as the Union Building)
- Camping on abandoned logging roads or geothermal well pads will be directed away from locations where vegetation is well established.
- Pets, with the exception of assistance animals or animals integral to the work or activity, will not be permitted. Assistance animals or animals integral to the work or activity must be controlled or confined at all times.
- Building, maintaining, attending, or using open fire including a campfire, cooking fire, warming fire, or charcoal fire is prohibited on the Preserve at anytime except by permit.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires agencies to consider alternative actions to any proposal that involves unresolved conflicts concerning uses of available resources. While such conflicts are generally not associated with smaller projects, which are narrow in scope, the Trust has found the consideration of alternative actions to be valuable in decision making.

2.1 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

2.11 Campground Construction

The Trust explored constructing one or more strategically located developed camping facilities to support access and use on the Preserve. It was eliminated from further consideration at this time. The construction of developed camping facilities will be considered in the future in context with the development of a comprehensive program and facilities to support public use and access of the Preserve.

2.2 Alternatives Considered in Detail

2.21 Limited Overnight Camping

This is the proposed action as described in 1.0 and 1.2.

2.22 No Action

The Trust would continue to prohibit overnight camping on the Preserve.

Chapter 3. Environmental Consequences

The National Environmental Policy Act directs agencies to focus documentation on issues that are truly significant to the action in question. No significant issues were identified during the scoping or analysis process. Performance requirements were developed to address concerns. These requirements are identified in Chapter 1.

In lieu of significant issues, the analysis of environmental consequences focused on a determination of significance.

3.1 Environmental Consequences

This chapter summarizes the effects to the natural and human environment expected to occur as a result of either taking no action or implementing the proposed action. A discussion of the affected environment is provided where applicable. Effects are measured by context (the spatial or temporal extent of the effect) and intensity (the magnitude of the effect). Effects may be beneficial or adverse and may be direct, indirect, or cumulative.

A summary of the context (spatial and temporal extent) and intensity of the effects is presented followed by a supporting narrative. The spatial extent of an effect is described in a narrative statement. The temporal extent of the effect is defined by three categories of duration:

- Short-term: 0-3 Years
- Mid-term: 3-10 Years
- Long-term: 10+ years

The intensity of the effect is defined by the following four levels of magnitude (intensity is influenced by context):

Negligible:	No change would occur or the magnitude of change would not be measurable.
Minor:	Changes would be measurable but would not alter the structure, composition, or function of the resource and would be limited in context.
Moderate:	Changes would be measurable and may influence the structure, composition, or function of the resource but would be limited in context.
Major:	Changes would be measurable, would alter the structure, composition or function of the resource and may be extensive in context.

3.1.1 Flora

Affected Environment

Overnight camping could occur within any upland ecotype on the Preserve.

No Action

Narration: There would be no effect to the flora.

The Proposed Stewardship Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Limited to the specific location and duration where camping occurred.	Negligible/Minor

Narration:

The intensity and frequency of the action would be permitted based on the level of previous disturbance. Any disturbance would be localized and short-term in context, and negligible to minor in intensity.

3.1.2 Fauna

Affected Environment

No threatened or endangered species reside in the planning area. There are no Important Bird Areas (IBA) identified in the Preserve. There are no associations or important links between the Preserve and the closest known IBA's (Valles Caldera Trust 2002a).

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect to fauna or faunal habitat.

The Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Limited to the specific location and duration where camping occurred.	Minor

Narration:

The proposed action would not affect the habitat or suitability for any wildlife species. Wildlife could be disturbed by camping. The disturbance would be localized and short-term in context and minor in intensity. .

3.1.3 Soil Resources

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Limited to the specific location and duration where camping occurred	Moderate

Narrative:

The intensity and frequency of the action would be permitted based on the level of previous disturbance. The disturbance would be localized and short-term in context, and moderate in intensity.

3.1.4 Water Quality

About 75 miles of perennial waters flow from the forests and meander through the grasslands of the Preserve. The water quality of the major streams (San Antonio Creek, East Fork of the Jemez River, and Sulfur Creek) are impaired with temperatures and turbidity outside levels that support their designated use for cold watery fisheries.

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct/ Indirect	Limited to the specific location or directly adjacent to camping locations.	Negligible

Narrative:

The intensity and frequency of the action would be permitted based on the level of previous disturbance. Camping would not be permitted in any location where it would directly affect open water.

Performance requirements that limit the location and duration of camping on previously undisturbed sites would prevent any indirect effects to water quality. These performance requirements would eliminate the potential for camping to occur to the degree where it could combine with other activities (fishing or livestock grazing) to cumulative affect water quality.

3.15 Air Quality

Affected Environment

The proposed action is within the Middle Rio Grande Airshed in Sandoval County, New Mexico. This is an attainment area, considered having air quality as good as or better than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These standards are set to protect human health and general welfare.

No Action

Narration:

There would be no effect.

Proposed Action

Summary:

Effect	Context	Intensity
Direct	Limited to the specific location and duration where camping occurred	Minor

Narrative:

There may be minor, short-term effects to air quality in any camping area. These effects (dust) would not be noticed outside the area of activity.

3.1.6 Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

Historic and prehistoric resources are ubiquitous on the Preserve. These cultural resources relate to use during the Paleo-Indian period ca. 9500 – 5500 B.C., the Archaic period from 5500 B.C. – 400 A.D., the Ancestral Pueblo period 400 A.D. to 1600 A.D., through historic uses after 1600 A.D., including livestock grazing, logging, limited agriculture, and harvest of mineral and plant resources. Prehistoric artifacts are dominated by obsidian tool making, and the most commons archaeological sites include lithic scatters and subsurface deposits, and sites with defined features such as rock shelters, terrace walls and field houses. Features associated with the historic period include aspen carvings, isolated cabins, corrals, and sawmill remnants.

No Action:

Narrative

There would be no effect to cultural resources.

Proposed Action

Summary:

The Valles Caldera Trust Cultural Resources Compliance process results in an evaluation and determination of possible effects to cultural resources. Interim camping activities determined to affect cultural resources are outside the scope of this EA and the proposed stewardship action as described under 1.4.2 Mitigation Measures.

Effect	Context	Intensity
No Effect	N/A	N/A

3.1.7 Socio-economic Impacts

Affected Environment

The Valles Caldera National Preserve is located primarily in Sandoval County with some inclusion in Rio Arriba County and adjacent to Los Alamos County. It is adjacent to the Jemez National Recreation Area and would have a regional area of impact within the Jemez Valley and adjacent communities.

No Action:

Narrative

No effect

Proposed Action

Narrative:

There would be no effect to local, regional or other socio-economic conditions.

Overnight camping is being proposed to support ongoing activities and traffic levels, and those that are reasonably foreseeable. The proposed action is not expected to directly or indirectly increase traffic, area use, or create any changes in local or regional activities. Any socio-economic or environmental effects will not be disproportionate to any individual or population.

3.2 Public Health and Safety

The overnight camping activities as proposed are not inherently risky to participating individuals and would not have an effect on overall public health and safety.

3.3 Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area

The Trust's proposal for overnight camping does not include the construction of any temporary or permanent facilities or level of use.

3.4 Controversy, are Uncertainty, or would Establish Precedence.

Overnight camping as described in the proposed action is limited and more controlled than the type of overnight use typically permitted on Forest System Land.

3.5 Cumulative Effects

The proposed action would not increase or decrease the context or intensity of the effects associated with any past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future action. The effects of the proposed action would not be increased in context or intensity when combined with the effects of any past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future action.

3.6 Compliance

Overnight camping would not violate any local, state, or federal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.