

**Valles Caldera National Preserve**  
**Sandoval County**  
**New Mexico**  
**Stewardship Register**

<b>Stewardship Action</b>	<b>Valle Grande Overlook</b>	
<b>File Number</b>		
<b>Target Start Date</b>	<b>Fall 2005</b>	
<b>Actual Start Date</b>		
<b>Target Completion Date</b>	<b>Spring 2006</b>	
<b>Actual Completion Date</b>		
<b>Location (approximate project center)</b>	<b>South of NM Hwy 4 at Mile Marker 40.7</b>	
<b>Latitude/Longitude</b>		
<b>Legal description</b>		
<b>UTM</b>	<b>367575.18</b>	<b>3967685.76</b>

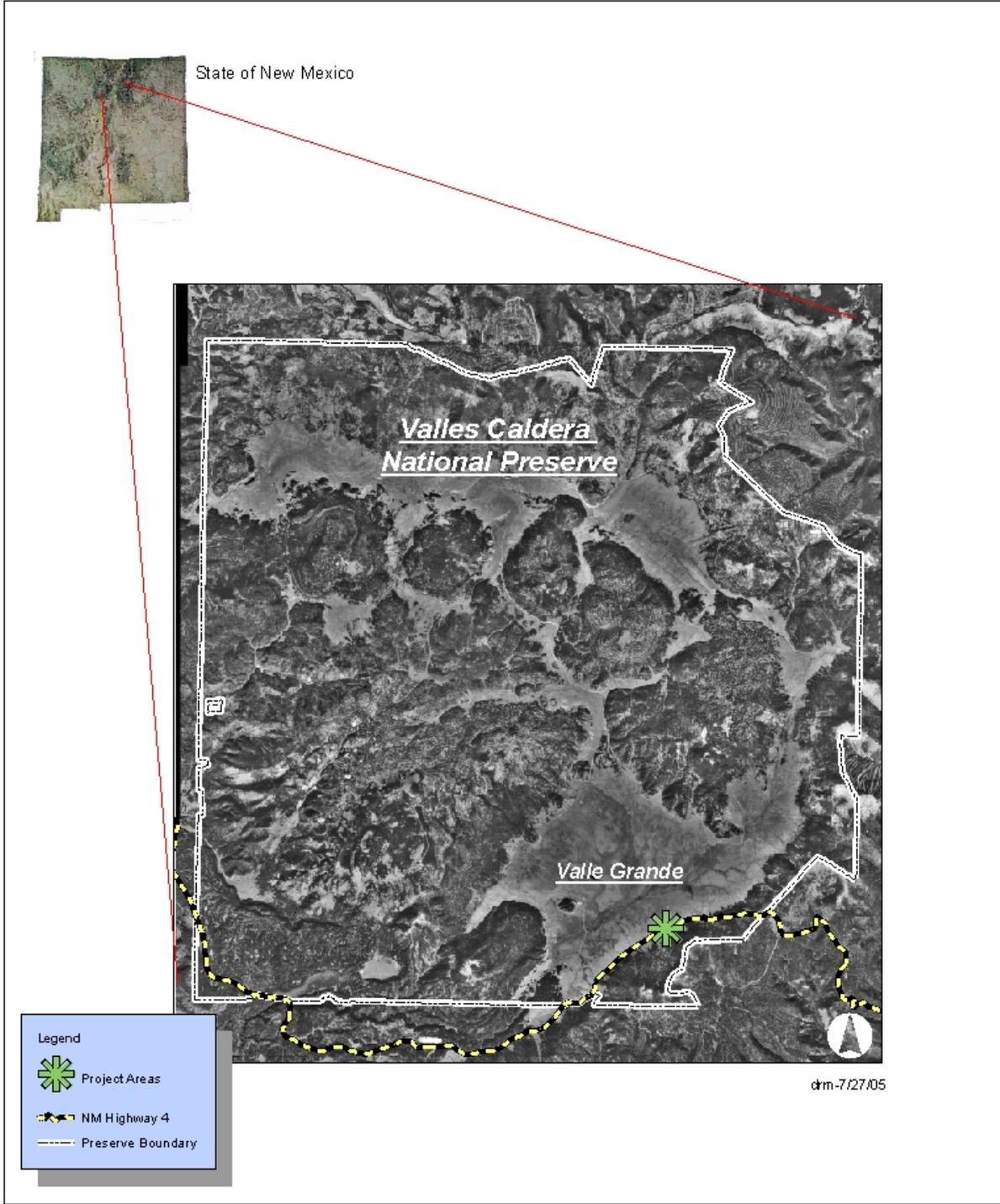


Figure 1 -- Vicinity Map

# Valle Grande Overlook

## Purpose and Need

The Valle Grande Overlook is being proposed to meet the following purposes:

1. Provide visitors traveling along New Mexico State Highway 4 (NM 4) with a safe, high quality experience, enjoying the view of the Valle Grande.
2. To create an opportunity for the Valles Caldera Trust to provide informative, interpretive or educational information about the Valles Caldera National Preserve and Trust.
3. To provide a safe, year-round location for parking and for staging Preserve activities off NM 4, this location will also include access to the Rabbit Mountain area and to various trailheads in the surrounding area.

This proposal would advance the following goals of the Trust:

As Stated in the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000, Section 108. Resource Management, (d) Management Program, [Paragraph 4] provide for public use and access  
As stated in the Management Principals of the Trust, adopted by the Board of Trustees and published in the Federal Register, July 2003:  
(9) “Learning and Inspiration”  
(10) “Quality of experience over the quantity of experiences.”

NM 4 provides the primary access to the Valles Caldera National Preserve (Figure 1). Before the Preserve was established in the year 2000, the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) had improved NM 4 to meet the demand for scenic and wildlife viewing into the Valle Grande. NM 4 was widened and six paved pullouts were developed in the State Right-of-Way. Since assuming management of the Preserve, the Trust has provided opportunities for the public to access the Preserve for quality events through an advance reservation system. There are also two seasonal free trails off NM 4 that can be enjoyed spontaneously without fee or reservation. However, the six paved pullouts continue to provide the primary opportunity for motorists to enjoy a spontaneous experience viewing the Valle Grande.

Although the pullouts are heavily used by motorists, they do not provide a safe or high quality experience. Three of the six pullouts have inadequate sight distances (ability to see, or be seen by, oncoming traffic) as visitors exit and re-enter NM 4 (Figure 2). While the panoramic view is unbroken, those enjoying the view are about twenty feet from the busy highway. This is especially hazardous during winter driving conditions. The Trust has nearly<sup>1</sup> ceased to use the pullouts for any visitor parking or staging because of the inadequate site distance, pullout size, the lack of signing, and the proximity and exposure to oncoming traffic. Winter activities must now be staged inside the Preserve, with access provided by a narrow, plowed road, which limits these activities to people who come to the Preserve with four-wheel-drive vehicles.

There are no facilities at the pullouts such as benches, shade, or toilets, although the Trust has placed interpretive signs at several of the pullouts. While these signs provide a general overview of

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<sup>1</sup> Large tour buses are staged at the pullouts while visitors are transported by van onto the Preserve. Due to limited parking at the Rabbit Ridge Trailhead, visitors often park in the paved pullout and walk across NM 4 to access the trail.

the Valles Caldera National Preserve and contact information for the Trust, they provide no information on current activities or programs occurring at the Preserve. The pullouts provide no opportunity for the Preserve to provide interpretive programs to groups or individuals or otherwise advance the goals of the Preserve with visitors.

## **Proposed Stewardship Action**

The Valles Caldera Trust is proposing to develop the Valle Grande Overlook; a permanent facility that would meet the following specific objectives:

- ⌘ Safe, year-round access from NM 4.
- ⌘ An unobstructed vista to the panoramic Valle Grande for wildlife and scenery viewing.
- ⌘ A variety of comfort facilities that may express different levels of development (depending on funding available to build and maintain these facilities.) Examples include restrooms, shade, picnic areas, and adequate parking for cars, trucks, trailers and RVs.
- ⌘ Access to provide a quality experience for people of all ages and for people with disabilities.
- ⌘ Opportunities to walk, hike, and picnic.
- ⌘ Facilities to provide current information about ongoing or planned programs and activities of the Trust.
- ⌘ Facilities for interactive interpretive and educational programs that include opportunities for a self interpreted experience for groups or individuals to learn about the Valles Caldera National Preserve and Trust.

The proposal and analysis would consider alternative locations for the Valle Grande Overlook.

### ***Alternative A—No Action***

None of the activities in the Proposed Action would be implemented. Existing programs and activities would continue as currently conducted.

### ***Common Elements to all Action Alternatives***

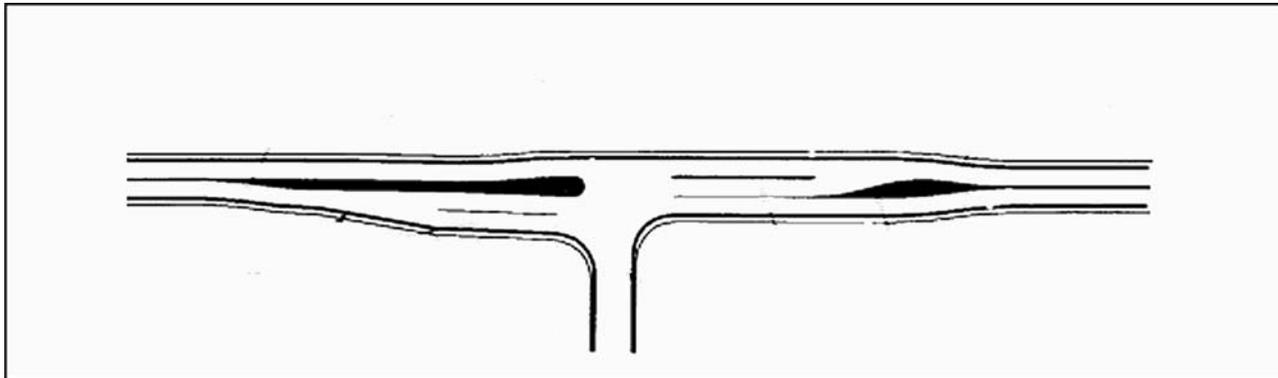
All action alternatives propose to develop a permanent facility for visitors traveling along NM 4 (Figure 3) which include:

- ⌘ Paved parking and staging for about 25 cars with additional spaces for buses or RV's. This parking area would be constructed on the south side of NM 4 and serviced by a paved, two lane road. Figure 2 depicts a likely design for the junction of the new road with NM 4.
- ⌘ Comfort facilities including toilets, which would vary in development level from a low end of portable toilets up to the more developed vault toilets
- ⌘ Other facilities, such as shaded picnic areas, trash receptacles, and walking trails that connect to hiking trails on the Preserve and Bandelier National Monument would also be developed over time. Level of development in these facilities would be expressed by a range of options, from gravel surface trails to paved trails, types of picnic areas, etc.

- ⌘ Facilities for interpretive programs including signs and group areas would be developed. Such facilities may involve some ground disturbance and the placement of benches or short rock walls, statues, displays or similar facilities.
- ⌘ All action alternatives may phase construction of these facilities based on available funding.
- ⌘ The Trust may phase in additional parking for a total of 40-50 spaces over time (Figure 3).

Public service space (small portable or permanent building where a customer service representative can issue permits, retail sales, etc.), which could also serve as a winter staging area (space along side the parking area and/or public service space use to organize winter activities)

Figure 3 shows the approximate placement of the common features. Parking facilities, restrooms and other structures would be located in the footprint shown with this map. Two areas are identified on the map because either location has similar impacts and would meet the project objectives. A final decision regarding the location would be made during the design phase of the project.



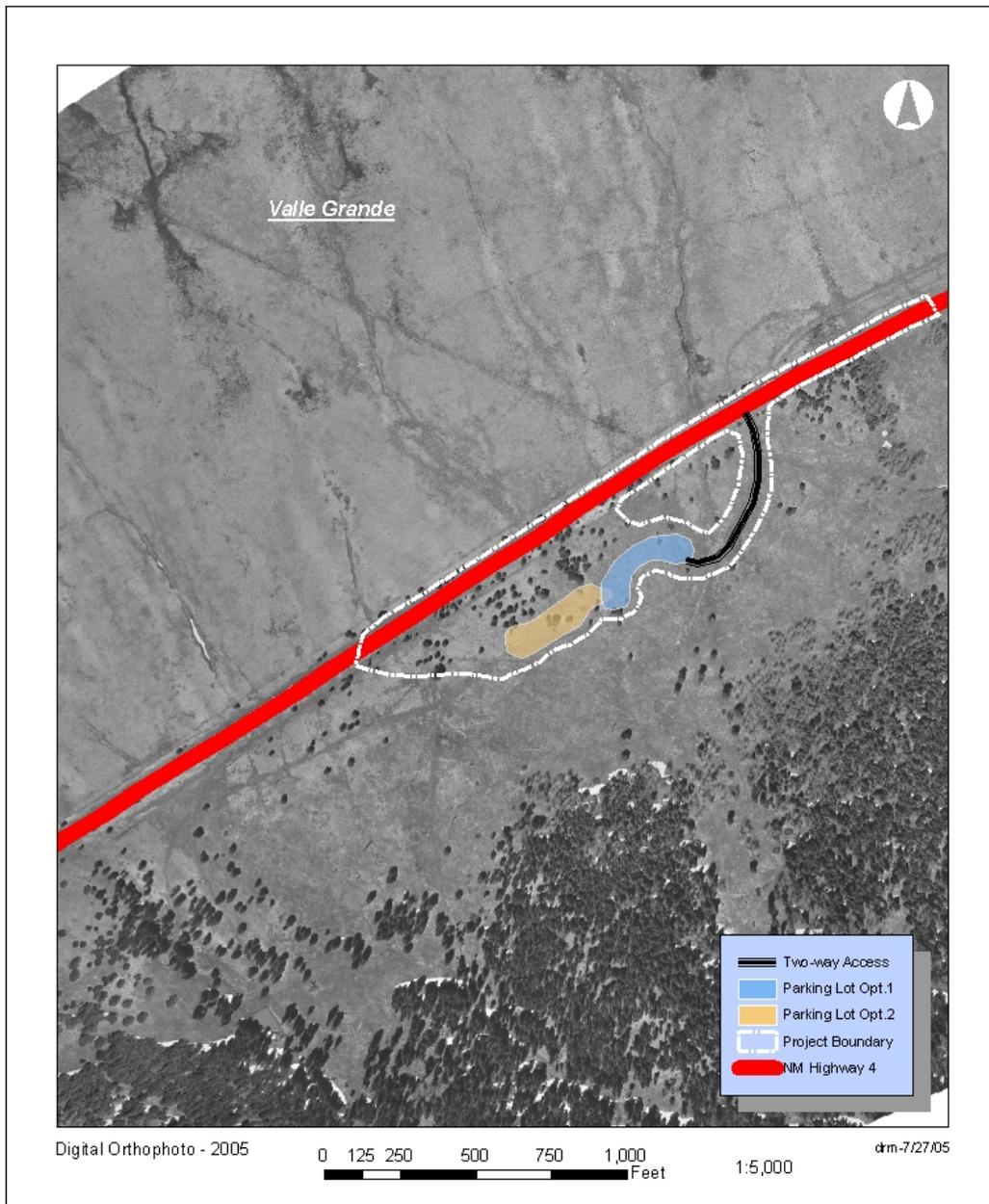
**Figure 2 -- Schematic diagram of intersection**

## ***Performance Requirements Common to all Action Alternatives***

Performance requirements would include those necessary to avoid adverse impacts to water quality, road use and other concerns. These will be developed further as part of the analysis process.

Examples of these requirements include:

- ⊗ The Valles Caldera Trust Cultural Resource Compliance Process would be completed prior to any ground disturbing work.
- ⊗ All connections and/or changes to NM 4 would be designed to meet the design requirements of NMDOT including signage and the development of acceleration and deceleration lanes.
- ⊗ Entrance from NM 4 would allow ample space for turning or exiting if the entrance is closed.
- ⊗ Structures would be designed to be compatible with the Preserve's working ranch theme.
- ⊗ Improvements would be designed to minimize their visibility from the Valle Grande, specifically important view locations such as the staging area (viewing the project as middleground) and the headquarters (viewing the project as background).
- ⊗ All facilities including trails would be designed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- ⊗ All construction activities would include appropriate measures to assure minimal impacts to water quality and air quality.



**Figure 3 -- Common Features**

### Alternative B—Southside Parking & Southside Overlook

This alternative locates all facilities on the south side of NM 4, avoiding any development in the Valle Grande. An overlook to the Valle Grande would be constructed directly north of the parking area and accessed by a short ADA compliant trail. Other comfort facilities would be located in the vicinity of the overlook. Figure 4 depicts a conceptual design, but should not be considered final. Figure 5 shows a map of the approximate location of the viewing platform.

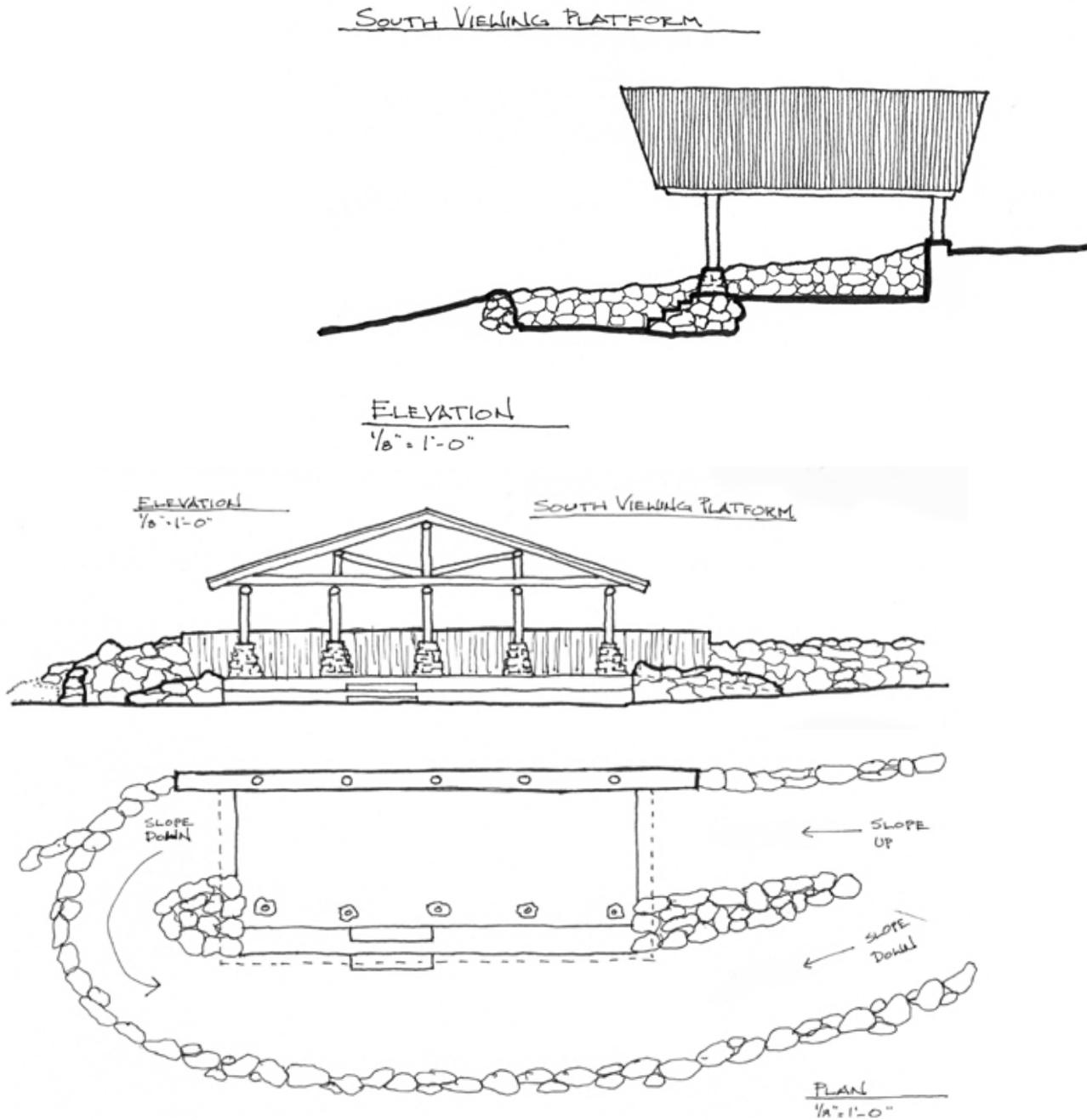
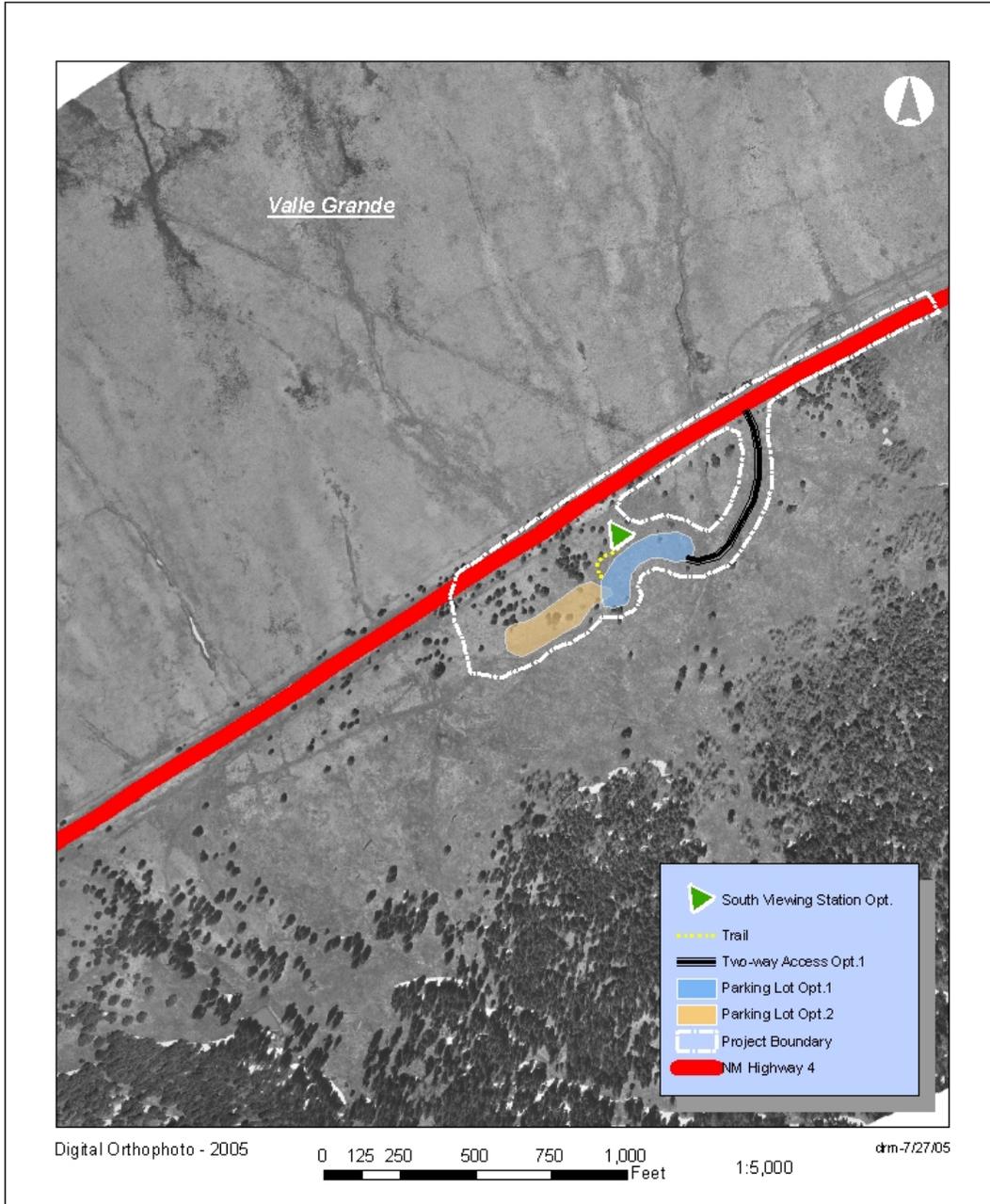


Figure 4 – Alternative B Conceptual Design



**Figure 5 -- Alternative B Map**

## Alternative C—Southside Parking & Northside Overlook

This alternative locates the Valle Grande Overlook on the north side of NM 4 while parking, staging and comfort facilities are located south of NM 4. Visitors would use a walking trail and a pedestrian underpass beneath NM 4 to access the overlook. Figure 6 depicts what a facility might look like, but should not be considered a final design. Figure 7 depicts two possible locations for the overlook. Both sites will be analyzed; a final determination would be made during the design phase of construction.

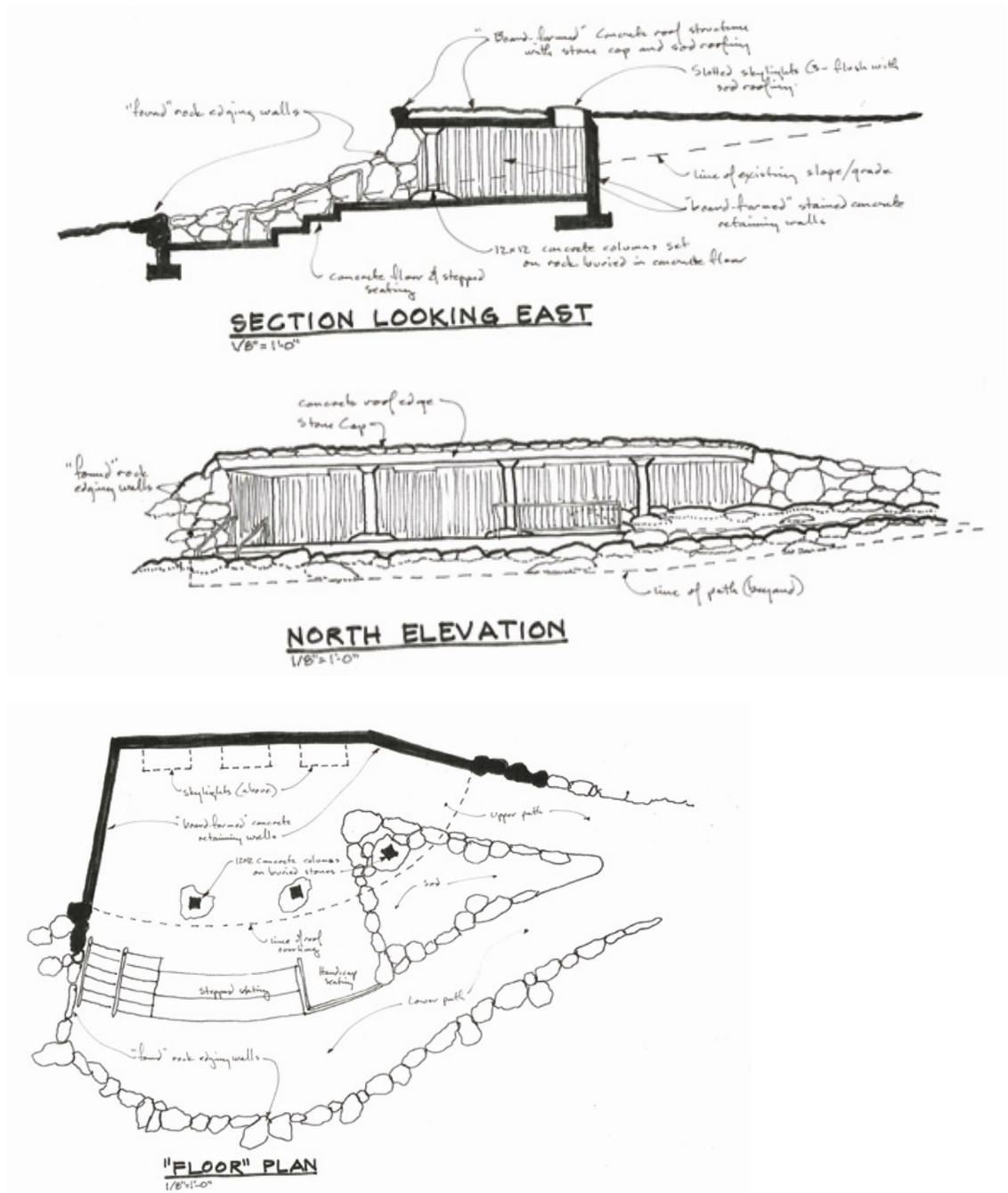
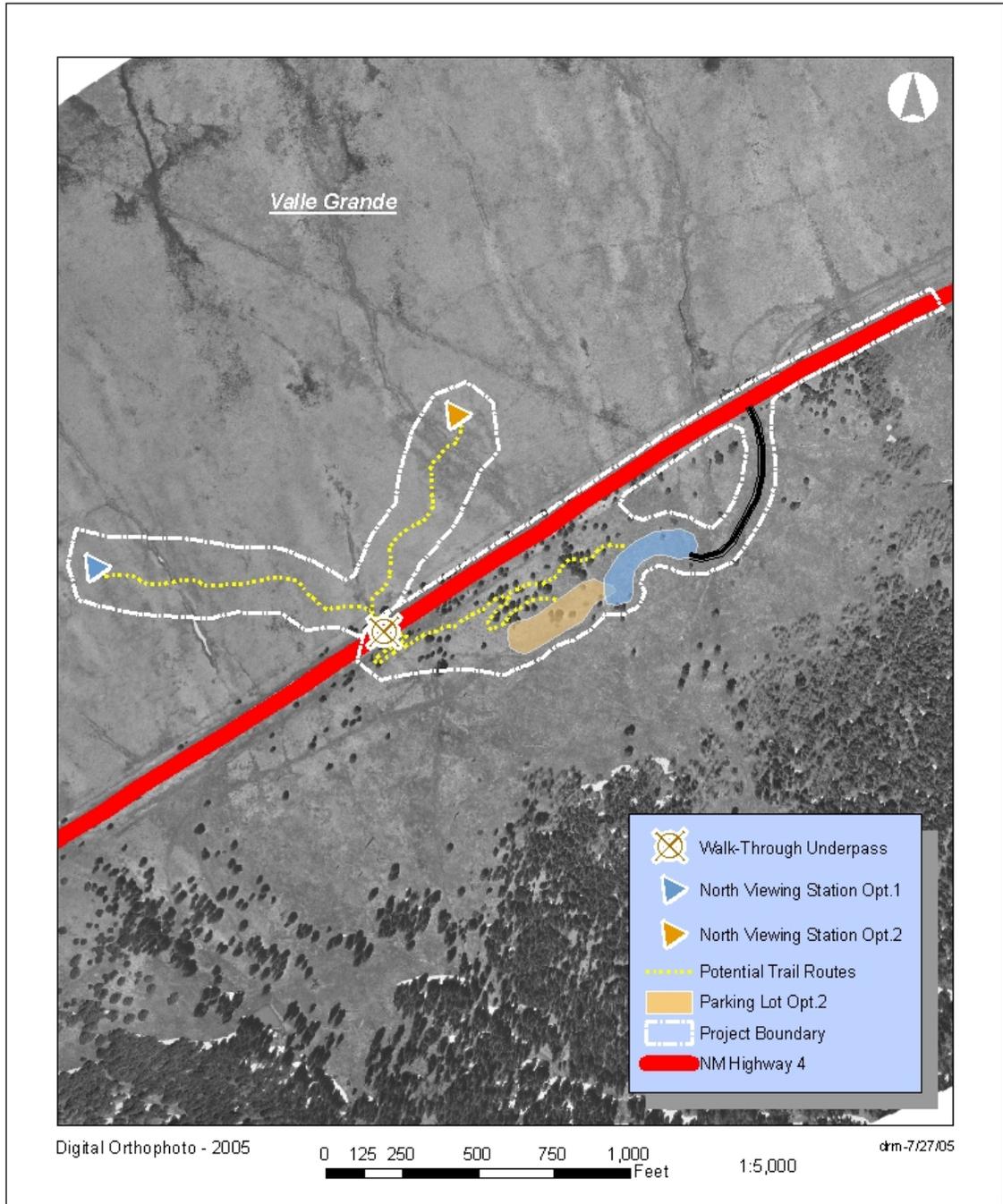


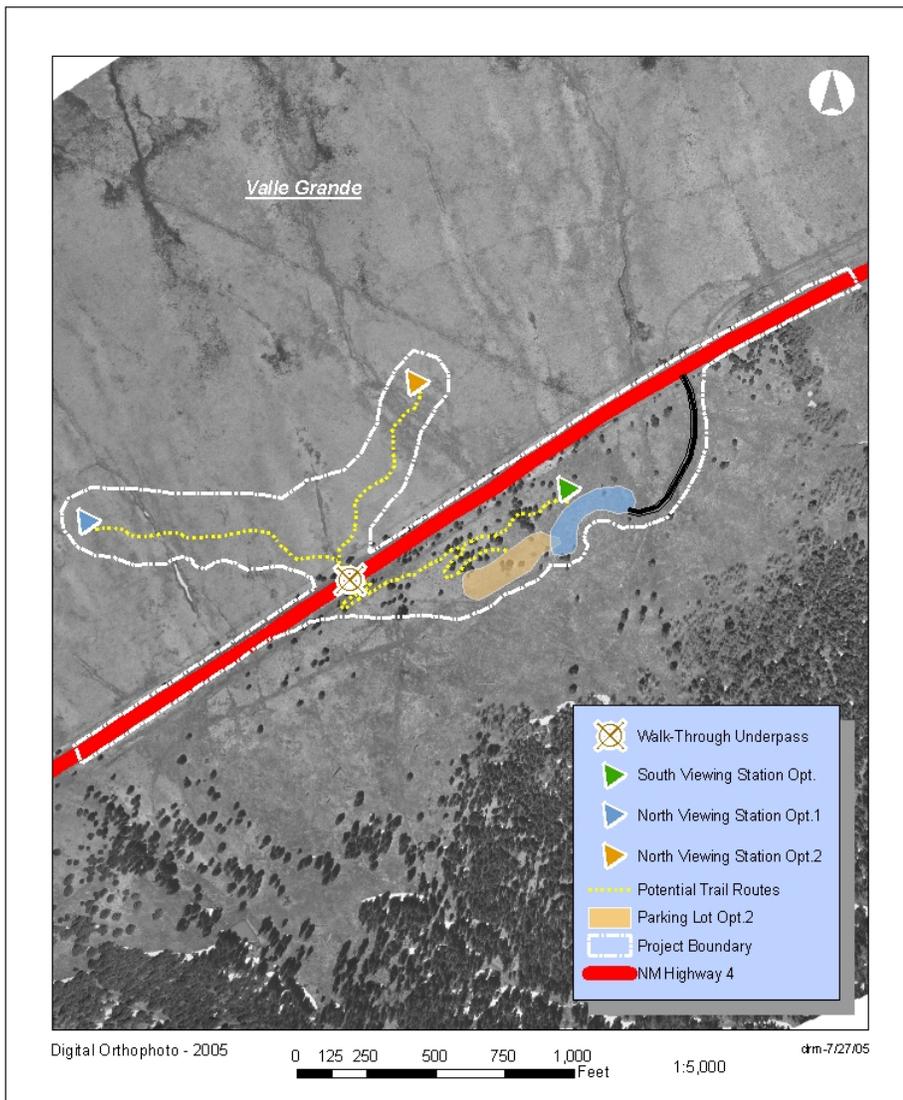
Figure 6 -- Alternative C Conceptual Design



**Figure 7 -- Alternative C map**

### **Alternative D—Southside Parking & Southside/Northside Overlook**

In the short term, this alternative would develop facilities (including overlook) around the parking lot, similar to Alternative B, but it includes the long-term intent to build the northside viewing area as well. This viewing area would be similar in design as the facility shown for Alternative C. Figure 8 shows a map of the relative locations of the facilities. In the long term (5-10 years), this alternative could provide two viewing areas, the first one located on the southside near the parking lot, and later, as funding allows, the second one located on the northside, away from the road, parking, and other facilities.



**Figure 8 -- Alternative D map**

### ***Performance Requirements of Alternatives C and D***

For construction of a pedestrian underpass beneath NM 4, drainage would be designed to protect the road, as well as keep the trail from becoming the main drain for the small basin uphill.