

Report on the Analysis of Public Comments from
Public Access and Use Public Meetings
Conducted by the Valles Caldera Board of Trustees
July 31–August 16, 2007

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Background and Purpose

Four public meetings were held in the summer of 2007 to solicit comments from the public about the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Ostensibly, the purpose of the meetings was to help the Valles Caldera Board of Trustees determine the public’s desires for the future use of the Preserve. Meetings were held in four locations and hundreds of comments were collected. These comments were summarized in a report by the Mary Orton Company, LLC.¹ The meetings and the subsequent report cost approximately \$150,000.

The final report contained no analysis of the data; comments were simply listed. In December 2007, at a public meeting of the Valles Caldera Trust, several members of the public questioned why the report contained no analysis of the data. The response was that the contractor (Orton) had been directed to supply data only. The Trustees provided no further explanation and indicated that no additional analysis was planned.

Data in their raw form—in this case a list of comments from the public—have relatively little value and cannot provide guidance about how the Preserve should be managed or directed. By most professional standards, the issuance of a final report lacking analysis would be unacceptable.

This report documents an effort to conduct a more complete analysis of the data that were collected. The results of this analysis are useful in helping to shape the future path for the Valles Caldera National Preserve, one that is in concert with public needs and desires.

Goals for This Analysis Effort

1. To understand what the public values about the Valles Caldera National Preserve
2. To understand the public desires regarding the future management of the Valles Caldera National Preserve

Approach

The public meetings and the Orton report were divided into sections, each of which solicited comments from the attendees. The first section focused on the values of the Preserve as perceived

¹ “Valles Caldera Trust—Public Access and Use Public Meetings; Public Meetings Summary—Combined Report,” The Mary Orton Company, LLC, Fall, 2007.

by each workshop participant. The second section focused on potential uses. A third section focused on the challenges to be overcome, essentially a look into the future.

For each section, which we call a major category, comments are listed. We reviewed each comment within the major categories, and, based on its content, we placed it in a summary subcategory. For example, the meeting moderator asked attendees what they valued about the Valles Caldera. A number of people responded that they valued “wildlife.” All comments that contained the word “wildlife” or alluded to wildlife using similar words (e.g., “wild animals”) were placed in a subcategory called “wildlife.” All similar comments about wildlife were included in the category. In like fashion, other comments were categorized in different subcategories. The results of this categorization are presented in the section of this report labeled “Results.”

There is a confounding factor for the reader to understand. The data used in this analysis were “summaries” of the original data. The summarization process was not described in the Orton report. Thus, it is unknown how many similar or exact comments any one comment in the Orton listing represents. For example, it is possible that three identical comments might have involved “viewing wildlife” as a value. These identical comments might have been listed in the Orton report as a single comment about “viewing wildlife.” Thus, the percent of total responses for any single subcategory may be somewhat inaccurate.

Unfortunately, without the raw data—which are not available—or an explanation of the summary techniques, there is no way to determine to what extent this confounding effect may be prevalent. It is possible that the exact number of comments might be skewed for certain subcategories relative to others, as explained above. If a subcategory that contained significant summarization is compared with another subcategory that contained no summarization, the difference between the two subcategories may not accurately reflect reality. This uncertainty relates to the *absolute accuracy* of the comparison of categories.

However, the comments in the Orton report are numerous and it is not unreasonable to assume that similar summarization methods were applied equally to all of the comments. Thus, although absolute accuracy might be affected, the overall representations of the various subcategories are expected to be sufficiently accurate to meet the objectives of this report. Therefore, the work went forward with the assumption that the data reasonably represent the will of the meeting attendees.

The data used in the creation of the graphics are found in the Appendix.

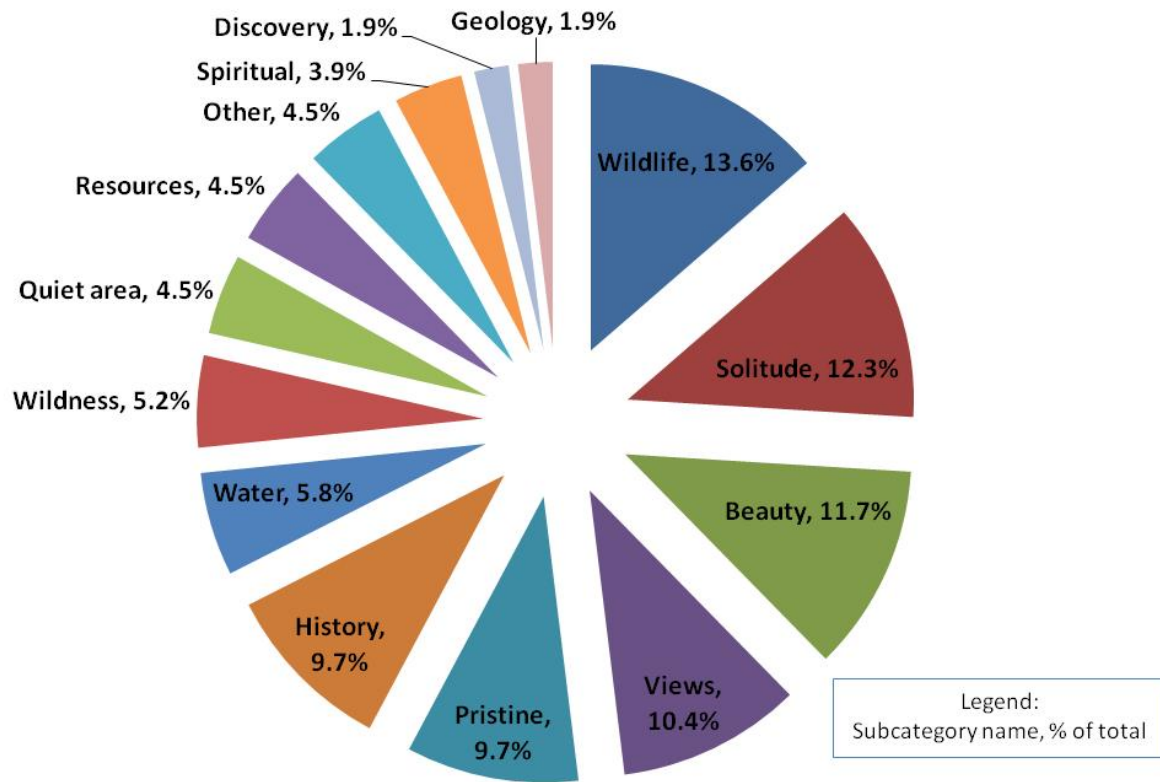
Results of the Analysis

The analysis began by focusing on the first two sections: the areas of perceived value for the preserve and the desirable activities on the Preserve.

First we studied the comments from Section 1, which focused on “values.” One hundred and fifty-four comments were examined and placed in subcategories. Generally, subcategories were developed based on frequency of occurrence. The objective was to create subcategories that

contained meaningful number similar comments. A number of comments had essentially no meaningful content. They were placed in an “Other” subcategory.

Values Categories for Valles Caldera National Preserve



The chart above entitled “Values Categories for the Valles Caldera National Preserve” shows the results for the distribution of the subcategories of Values. The data are presented in an exploded pie chart format and indicate the percentage of total responses for each subcategory. As can be seen, a significant majority of the respondents value the property in its current form, which is a place that is quiet, serene, wild, and naturally beautiful.

Others value it for its resources including wildlife and resources (specific resources not identified), spiritual experience, and history. A few comments could not be categorized and were consolidated in the “Other” category.

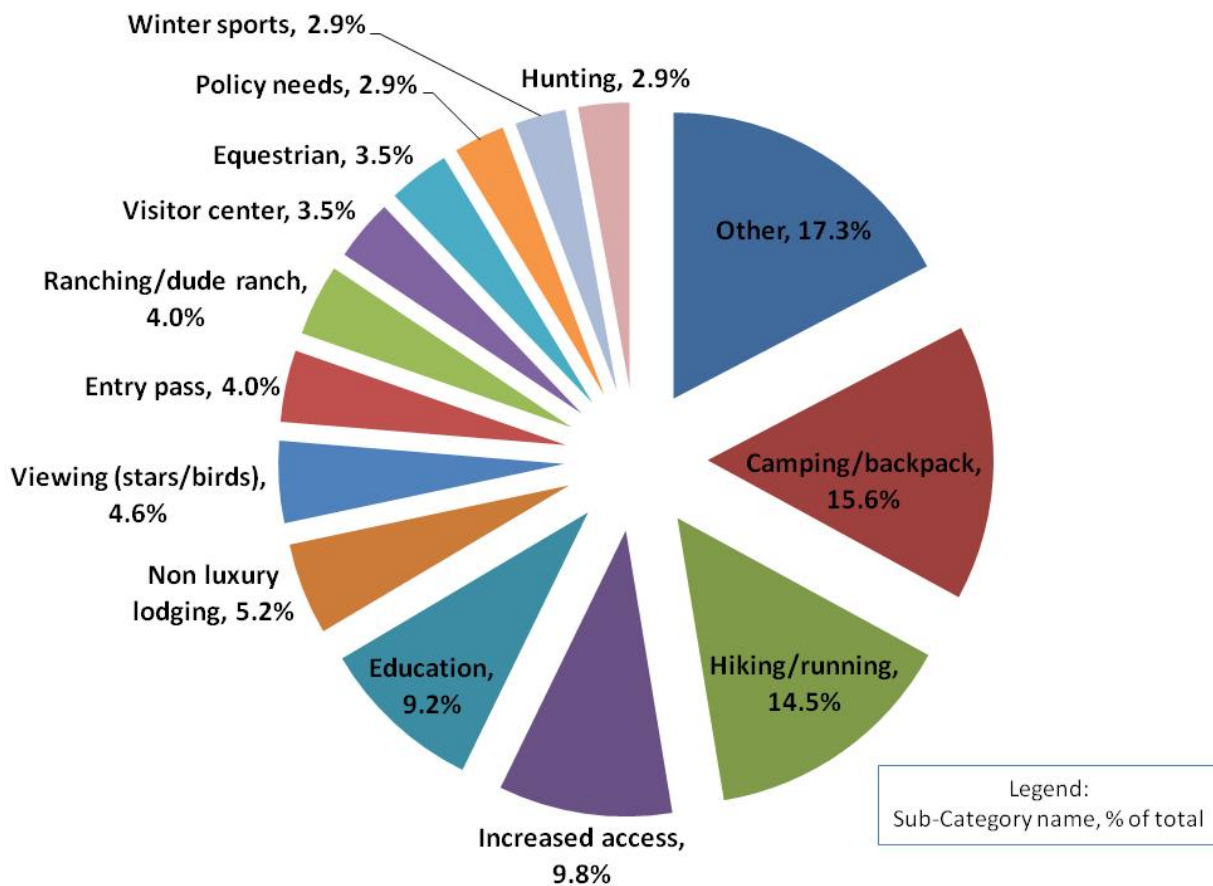
No comments fell into categorical areas that indicated further development of the Preserve is desired, such as profit potential from lodging or motorized sports.

These results imply that the public—at least those who participated in the public meetings—prefer that the Preserve be maintained in a state close to its present condition and that commercial

development—even limited development—of the property is not an option preferred by the majority.

Section 2, the desirable activities on the preserve, contained 173 comments. The range of suggested activities is quite broad, covering many subject areas. In some cases, some of the suggested activities only had two or three suggestions. Creating a separate category for each of them would create an unwieldy and cluttered chart. Therefore, these smaller sets of comments were placed in the general subcategory called “Other.” Since there was so much diversity, the “Other” category expanded to become the largest subcategory. Some of the suggested activities in the “Other” subcategory include fishing, logging, luxury hotels, gathering (down timber, mushrooms), photography, picnicking, and kiting.

Desirable Activities on the Valles Caldera National Preserve



The chart above, entitled “Desirable Activities on the Valles Caldera National Preserve,” visually displays the range of activities and the percentage of total comments each set of comments represents. As can be seen, the range is wide and varied, and is even more so than is obvious when

the “Other” subcategory is considered because it also contains a very wide range of desirable activities.

Generally, the vast majority of comments suggest a desire for activities that are related to outdoor activities, especially ones that are related to natural or wild-area experience. Few comments related to activities that would require significant infrastructure development such as those associated with business or commerce.

Section 3 of the workshops dealt with the opportunities and challenges for the Preserve. Each major activity subcategory, as expressed in Section 2, was addressed, along with others.² For each of these subcategories, the participants were asked to respond with comments about several characteristics within the subcategory. These included General Comments, Conflicts and Compatibilities, Infrastructure needs, Revenue Generation, and Resource Protection. In some subcategories, additional characteristics were included, but since they generally included few comments, they were ignored.

The comments do not lend themselves to categorization as were done in Sections 1 and 2 because the meeting organizers had preselected characteristics, so each set of characteristics was essentially identical for all subcategories. Summing the comments in each characteristic grouping would therefore be meaningless.

Instead of categorizing and presenting the results in a pie chart, we attempted to derive the central points that were made within each characteristic area. For example, in the Hiking sub-category in this section and within the General Comments characteristic (unclear) area, there are seven comments. We read all of the comments and then selected and recorded some central themes that were obvious. In some cases the comments were so diverse or obtuse that no central theme could be derived. An “N/A” in any cell means that we could not discern any cogent theme. This process was repeated for each sub-category in Section 3 and the results are presented in the table below.

Summary Table of Central Themes for Characteristics of the Subcategories in Section 3

| Sub-Category | General Comments | Conflicts and Compatibility | Infrastructure Needs | Revenue Generation | Resource Protection |
|---------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| Hiking | More hiking; additional trails; backcountry | Biking, ranching, conflict; dude ranching compatible | Trails needed; parking, access, freedom | Fees suggested between \$20/day and \$100/yr. | Monitor resource degradation |
| Camping | Spontaneity desired | Grazing, cars, conflicts, share resources with hunters | Huts, yurts, campgrounds | Fees suggested between \$6-\$100/night. | Damage deposits, stress “leave no trace.” |
| Equestrian | Rotate trail use among equestrian, | Compatible with photos, fishing, | Parking, corrals, overnight use | NA | Grassland management |

² The subcategories were apparently selected by Orton because they do not correspond to those in Section 2.

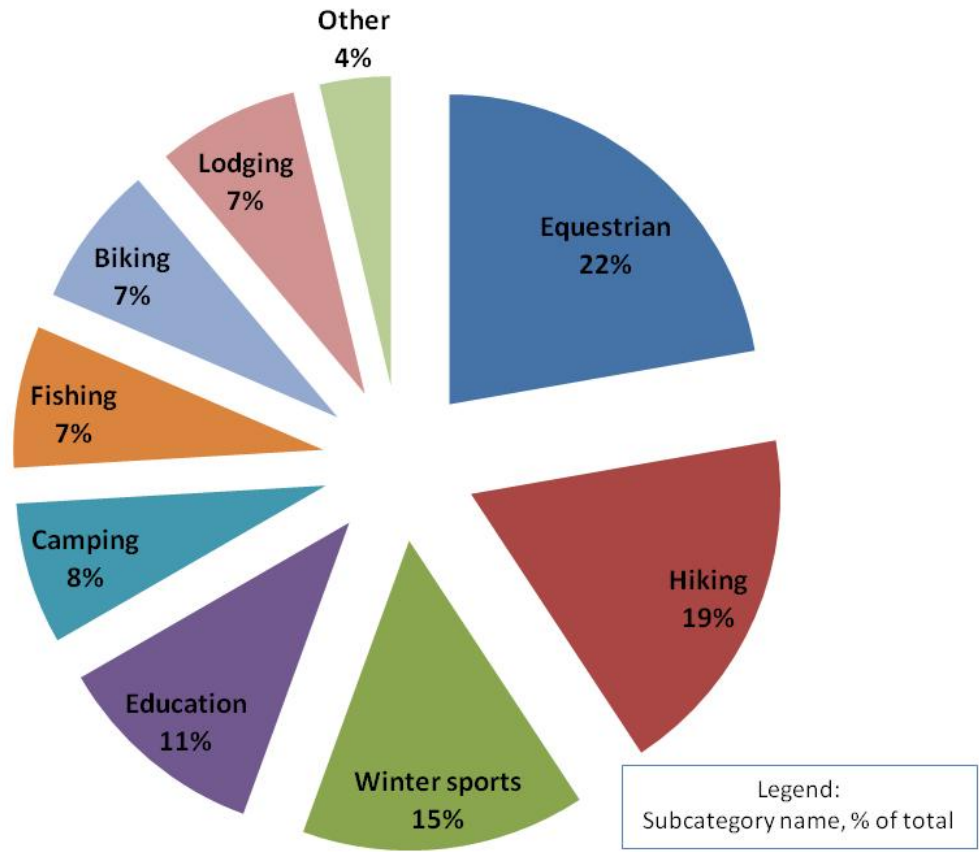
| | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| | hiking, and biking trails? | camping, winter sports, hiking? | | | |
| Hunting | Manage elk herd, don't hire sharpshooters, current system working | Incompatible with fishing and hiking and many others. | Lodging, camping, security, road improvements | Increase state 78% limit for in-state elk permits to increase state hunting | NA |
| Fishing | Too rigid a system, open other waters | Compatible with hunting and grazing; incompatible with grazing | Flat-water fisheries | Raise fees to \$200/day | N/A |
| Education | High level of interest for grade-school and mid-school programs; teach sustainability | N/A | Visitor center and classrooms needed; better signage?; videos, self-help resources needed? | Charge for overnight stays--\$100/night; Universities pay to stay and work. | Maintain forage for wildlife |
| Research | N/A | N/A | Parking, roads, overnight facilities | Fees for researchers, govt grants, other fees | N/A |
| Viewing | Would like to restore mule deer; need safety controls | Incompatible with hunting | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Grazing | N/A | Separate grazing from other activities | Fences, water, corrals, roads, loading stations, housing | Dude ranching | N/A |
| Dude Ranching | Could be combined with education | Conflicts with commercial grazing; conflicts with hunting and fishing | Ranch house, medical facilities, lodging, housing | Insurance expensive relative to potential income | Ranch will pay for resource protection |
| Lodging | No hotels or lodges desired | Conflicts with view from Highway 4 | Need better facilities | Synergize activities with local community; get maximum from each user; fees of \$350/day | N/A |
| Shopping | No shopping—keep rustic appearance | N/A | Gift shop, equipment rental, toilets, utilities needed | N/A | N/A |
| Biking | N/A | N/A | Open road in winter | Sell related support products | N/A |
| Statutory | VCNP needs | N/A | Sustained yield | Donations, foundation | NEPA applied |

| | | | | | |
|-------|------------------|--|--|---|--|
| goals | customer mindset | | (defn unclear); sustainable energy systems | grants. Set fees based on nearby parks, seasonal passes | |
|-------|------------------|--|--|---|--|

As can be seen, the information derived from Section 3 is not of substantial value due to the very wide range of items discussed. Many of the comments are disparate in nature, and there are few clear trends in thought emerging from any of the subcategories. It appears that there might have been confusion on the part of the participants relative to the objective of the exercise that generated the comments.

Section 4 consisted of 27 comments that were obtained from a written survey. The survey requested that participants document the activities that would constitute their ideal experience on the preserve. As with the comments from Sections 1 and 2, the comments were arranged in subcategories. We have totaled the comments and the results are presented in the graphic below.

Ideal Experiences at the Valles Caldera National Preserve



Based on these comments, it appears that the participants desire activities that would be experienced in a natural, wild, and rustic setting. Only lodging and education, which total less than one-fifth of the total, would require infrastructure development.

Summary

Notwithstanding the data in Section 3, the data show consistent trends that the public desires the Valles Caldera to remain in generally the same condition as it currently exists. Most of the activities that appear to be preferable are usually conducted outdoors in natural, wild settings. The only exception is the educational activities, which appear to be very popular. They would require a visitor center and classrooms to achieve a proper and expected experience.

These results provide documented evidence about the public's desire for the future management of the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Appendix

Data Used in Graphics

| Values | | | Desired activities/needs | | | Ideal Experience | | |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Category | Number of comments | % of total | Category | Number of comments | % of total | Category | Number of comments | % of total |
| Wildlife | 21 | 13.6% | Other | 30 | 17.3% | Equestrian | 6 | 3.5% |
| Solitude | 19 | 12.3% | Camping/backpack | 27 | 15.6% | Hiking | 5 | 2.9% |
| Beauty | 18 | 11.7% | Hiking/running | 25 | 14.5% | Winter sports | 4 | 2.3% |
| Views | 16 | 10.4% | Increased access | 17 | 9.8% | Education | 3 | 1.7% |
| Pristine | 15 | 9.7% | Education | 16 | 9.2% | Camping | 2 | 1.2% |
| History | 15 | 9.7% | Non luxury lodging | 9 | 5.2% | Fishing | 2 | 1.2% |
| Water | 9 | 5.8% | Viewing (stars/birds) | 8 | 4.6% | Biking | 2 | 1.2% |
| Wildness | 8 | 5.2% | Entry pass | 7 | 4.0% | Lodging | 2 | 1.2% |
| Quiet area | 7 | 4.5% | Ranching/dude ranch | 7 | 4.0% | Other | 1 | 0.6% |
| Resources | 7 | 4.5% | Visitor center | 6 | 3.5% | | | |
| Other | 7 | 4.5% | Equestrian | 6 | 3.5% | | | |
| Spiritual | 6 | 3.9% | Policy needs | 5 | 2.9% | | | |
| Discovery | 3 | 1.9% | Winter sports | 5 | 2.9% | | | |
| Geology | 3 | 1.9% | Hunting | 5 | 2.9% | | | |
| Total | 154 | | Total | 173 | | Total | 27 | |