

Valles Caldera Trust to Publish Accounts of Non-public Meetings

By: Dave Menicucci, Special to the Monitor

The Valles Caldera Board of Trustees has revealed that they will begin to release records of non-public meetings that are conducted. These records will be placed on the Valles Caldera National Preserve website starting sometime within the next few weeks.

The practice of holding non-public meetings is apparently legal within the framework of the Preserve's founding legislation and the bylaws but has been a topic of controversy and rancor among some of the watchdog groups associated with the preserve.

Tracy Hephner, chairperson of the Trustees, said in a recent Monitor article that these non-public events were approved at regular public board meetings in accordance with the bylaws and were used mainly to educate the board on technical issues regarding the preserve. "We never made any operational or policy decisions in these meetings," she says.

Hephner explained that previous legal counsel had advised the board not to keep records of the non-public events but that this advice had recently changed. With all of the scandals that have occurred in recent years relative to boards of directors of public companies and institutions, there is increased scrutiny of board activities and a higher standard of expected performance. She says that "complete record keeping is part of this new approach and the Valles Caldera Trust intends to move in this direction."

Bill Keleher, vice chair of the board, explained that the records of the meetings may not be in the exact form of minutes, as are customary for the board's public meetings, but that they will be in sufficient detail to document the principal elements of the discussion and activities.

Records of past non-public meetings will be made public to the extent that they are available. "We can't publish what we don't have," says Hephner, "but we will release what we do have." Keleher adds that in the case of past meetings where detailed records don't exist, board members will cooperate reasonably in providing recollections to satisfy any specific needs.

The Valles Caldera website is: <http://www.vallescaldera.gov>. The exact location of the records at website is yet to be determined.