

## Caldera Trust Moves to Secure Future

By: Dave Menicucci, Special to the Monitor

As a late autumn snow gently fell upon the campus of the Santa Fe Community College, the Valles Caldera Trust Board met in the Jemez Room and passed two significant resolutions. For the first time limited overnight camping will be allowed at the Caldera, starting this spring. Additionally, the board authorized the staff to initiate phase 2 of its public access and use plan.

This access and use plan is a one of the Trust's principal efforts to resolve how the preserve can best meet the complex and often seemingly contradictory objectives that were outlined in the enabling legislation. The end product will be a comprehensive program that can meet the primary needs of the public while generating sufficient revenue to cover most or all of its operational expenses.

Currently the preserve spends over \$3M for operations but collects well less than \$1M in revenue, mostly from hunting and fishing. Bill Keleher, Trust chairman, said that the plan is essential because "the prospect of continuing government appropriations for operations is bleak."

Phase 1 of the planning process was initiated last July with a series of four open forums in which the public was invited to comment on how to use the property. "This was a data gathering activity," said Jeffrey Cross, the preserve's executive director. A lengthy list of desirable activities was identified ranging from star gazing and birding to traditional ones, such as trophy elk hunting and hiking.

A summary of the data collected in the \$100,000 study is available from the Valles Caldera office in Jemez Springs. In response to a question by Tom Ribe, of Caldera Action, Marie Rodriguez, a preserve staff member, said that the data will not be subjected to additional analysis, but that the raw data are available to the public upon request.

In preparation for this next phase the trust has recently issued a request for proposals to develop a business plan. "This will allow us to look at the whole scope of potential activities on the preserve," said Tracy Hephner, a trustee, "and all will be analyzed." Jim Range, another trustee, said that the business plan is part of the board's responsibility to thoroughly evaluate the preserve's potential for financial self-sufficiency. A copy of the RFP can be found at the preserve's website, [www.vallescaldera.com](http://www.vallescaldera.com).

Cross emphasized that the quality of any comprehensive land-use plan depends on "knowing and understanding your property." He said that much of the first five years' work on the preserve was spent surveying the resources. In phase 2 all this information will be integrated with the data obtained from the public forums as well as the results of the business planning effort. The completion date for the final plan has yet to be determined, but is expected to be the consuming activity for the staff in 2008.

While planning takes place in the Jemez Spring offices, campers will soon be enjoying the enchanting cool summer nights in the great valleys and forested knolls of the preserve. After a long-standing discussion, the board agreed to allow overnight camping

activity that is integrated with existing programs, such as fishing, scientific research, or hiking.

However, camping activities for the general public will still be restricted. Cross explained that under NEPA rules unrestricted camping would be considered a new activity requiring a full environmental assessment, an arduous process. Cross believes that camping can be legally integrated into existing activities that have already met NEPA regulations. Dennis Trujillo, the preserve's manager, explained that this initial program will provide data and experience that will make the ultimate, fully public program much easier to implement. Details will appear on the preserve's website this spring.

In other action, the board approved an indefinite number of executive sessions in 2008 and set dates for upcoming board meetings: May 14 (Albuquerque), June 12 (Jemez), September 11 (Española) and Dec 11 (Santa Fe). Five trustees were in attendance yesterday, including Tracy Hephner, Dan Jiron, Bill Keleher, Stephen Henry and James Range.