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## **Caldera trust puts faith in business plan**

*By ROGER SNODGRASS, Monitor Editor*

The subject of what the Valles Caldera National Preserve is going to do for a living - when and if its allowance from Congress dissipates in the next few years - kept coming up during a public meeting of the governing board.

The Valles Caldera Trust met at preserve headquarters in Jemez Springs Thursday, taking care of routine business, announcing some new recreational opportunities and hearing reports from managers.

It was the last board meeting for Executive Director Jeff Cross who departs at the end of next week for a new position with the National Park Service as chief of the Ocean and Coastal Research office in Fort Collins, Colo. He received a number of compliments for his two years of service and good wishes for the future.

But a recurring subtext, not really on the agenda, was the question of money - revenue, income, enterprise and business.

The trust has contracted with a private company, Entrix, Inc. to develop a business plan based, along with recommendations on what kind of environmental studies might be required to implement them.

When the former Baca Ranch was purchased by an act of Congress, one of the purposes mandated in the founding legislation was to "to promote long term financial sustainability consistent with the other purposes enumerated in this subsection."

Cross said one of his frustrations was that, because of the changes on the board and among the staff, a comprehensive management plan had still not been developed, and that was why most of the programs at the preserve were interim programs.

"But the idea is not to do it piecemeal," he said.

Preserve Manager Dennis Trujillo said the Turkey Hunt was a success this year, thanks in part to the contribution of 122 volunteer hours, but later in the meeting the trust's vice-chair Ed Tinsley said it was a lot of work for a net income of \$17,000.

"That doesn't go very far toward \$5 million," Tinsley said.

Tinsley, Republican candidate for Congress from New Mexico's southern district, appointed as the financial expert on the board, said the trust was faced with a challenging situation, with current appropriations at about \$4 million a year and deferred maintenance of about \$1 million, while generating only about \$700,000 in revenue

Tom Ribe, the executive director of Caldera Action raised a number of legal and technical questions about the validity of the current cattle-grazing activity on the preserve, not all of which were immediately answered during the meeting.

Preserve scientist Bob Parmenter's range-readiness report concluded that even if not another blade of grass was produced all summer, there was enough forage to support the 1,960 yearlings currently grazing for 88 of the 120 days they are expected to be rotating through the pastures of the preserve.

Betsy Barnett was one of several members of Caldera Action who expressed concerns about cattle grazing and business development plans on the preserve.

"I don't want to see negative impacts put on the preserve to try to catch up," she said.

The trust has contracted with Entrix Inc., an environmental and resource management consulting team to prepare a business plan, which is expected to provide a draft business plan in September.

Tinsley said some of the enterprises under consideration include lodging and hospitality, education and research, domestic livestock, hunting and fishing, movies, and a more effective foundation. Former trust chair Tracy Hephner has proposed a "green burial" enterprise.

Chairman Bill Kelleher said there was one thing he could not support.

"If they come up with an idea for a golf course, I will vote against that," he said. "I pledge that in open meeting, now."

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