

Caldera Action

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Board of Trustees
Valles Caldera National Preserve
Jemez Springs, NM

We have been watching the 2008 livestock grazing program with interest. We are generally encouraged by the terms of the grazing contract the VCNP has entered into with Mr. Morton but we do have some concerns.

We are particularly concerned about cattle impacts to streams in the VCNP and to the fishing program that depends on clean streams with improving stream bank structure. Given that the fishing program at the VCNP is a money maker for the Preserve and is popular with the public, we hope that enhancing the fishing experience will be an important focus focus of VCNP managers.

Protecting streams from cattle, particularly at night and if cows are spread over a large area, may prove difficult. From a public interest perspective, we need assurances that an effective and persistent plan for doing this is in place with Mr. Morton and his staff. We hope Mr. Morton understands the intense public interest in water quality and stream structure at the VCNP. Mr. Morton states that his crew will "protect riparian areas as well as possible." After some of the mishaps of the 2007 Grazing program, we would like to know specifically what actions will be taken to keep cows out of the streams 24 hours a day.

Second we note that Mr. Morton mentions "very limited ATV use" as part of his cattle management work. We feel strongly that ATVs should not be used on the VCNP except on established roads and even then sparingly. The VCNP's grasslands are too delicate to sustain ATV travel and the noise and tracks these machines make will be disturbing to the fishing and hiking public and to wildlife. Given that horses can be used to tend cattle, we encourage the VCNP staff to prohibit Mr. Morton from using ATVs on the VCNP.

Third, we are concerned about the economics of grazing at the VCNP. We noticed that past grazing programs at the VCNP have not broken even. Given the current legislative mandate that the VCNP become financially self sufficient, we are concerned that the grazing programs should be financially positive for the VCNP, taking into account all administrative and other expenses. We are hopeful that this year's program breaks even and does not require volunteer time on the part of the VCNP staff.

The highest value of the VCNP is as a watershed for people and wildlife in the western Jemez Mountains and as a large protected area in an urbanizing nation. Outside of Bandelier National Monument, it is virtually impossible to find streams without impacts from cattle locally, even in the San Pedro Parks Wilderness area. This reality makes the VCNP all the more valuable as a place where streams are in a genuinely improving condition and we hope this year's grazing program will continue the progress the VCNP has seen in stream health.

Caldera Action is a 501c3 membership organization advocating for appropriate public access to the VCNP, for the financial and management stability of the VCNP, and for the protection of its natural and cultural resources.

Thank you for considering our comments when implementing the program this year.

Sincerely,

Tom Ribe
President

Cc: Congressman Tom Udall
Senator Jeff Bingaman
Jeff Cross, Executive Director, VCNP