

# INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

*How we will communicate with people  
interested in the VCNP*

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT**

Maintaining a constructive public dialogue about the goals and programs of the VCNP is a core responsibility of the Valles Caldera Trust and vital for successful management of the preserve. Without the active involvement of members of the public in its decision making, the trust will fail to honor its management principles, and its comprehensive management program will lack the vitality and responsiveness that Congress intended it to have.

The goal of the trust is to develop a dialogue with the public that

- Genuinely involves two-way communication,
- Makes relevant data and information easily and freely available, and
- Is characterized by openness and transparency (i.e., communications and decisions are direct, honest, and open to examination).

A key challenge for the trust is to provide ample opportunity for public involvement, especially in the early stages of its decision making, without asking the public for input so frequently that it wears of participation. It is equally important that public involvement events and opportunities not be so frequent that they become merely repetitive. Striking the right balance will be key to keeping the public involvement process both inclusive and meaningful. This is what the trust has tried to do in compiling the table shown on page 76. The table details the kinds of opportunities in the course of a given decision-making process when members of the public will be best able to contribute their thoughts and perspectives. Some of these opportunities are guaranteed: the trust will always provide them. Others are noted as optional: the trust will provide them if the general level of public



interest and concern warrants them. As a rule, the greater the potential impact of a project or activity or the higher the level of public interest, the more extensive the opportunities for public involvement will be. The principal exception to this rule occurs in the case of an emergency. Under the trust's NEPA procedures, the comment period associated with an environmental analysis may be shortened or eliminated if

emergency conditions requiring urgent action exist. A similar exemption, but one that requires a higher burden of proof, may also be granted with regard to the comment period for an environmental impact statement (VCT NEPA Procedures 101.7[f]).

Opportunities for comment and participation will vary. Soon after the trust formally initiates planning for a program, project, or activity, a "stewardship register" will be created for the proposed action and posted on the trust's Web site at [www.vallescaldera.gov](http://www.vallescaldera.gov). These stewardship registers will detail the purpose, need, goals, and objectives for the proposed project, and they will also solicit comments and suggestions. The trust will send out notice of the availability of each new stewardship register via an e-mail Listserv. This procedure will allow members of the public to share their thoughts concerning a proposed program, project, or activity at the earliest stage of its development. As the project continues to develop, additional material will gradually be added to the stewardship register, which will function as a repository for all significant information about the undertaking. If and when a project is implemented, the stewardship register will also be the primary location where monitoring data about the project become available.

Tracking a project by consulting its stewardship register will be most readily achieved via Internet access, but the trust acknowledges that not all members of the public who are interested in the preserve may have, or even want, such access. Bearing this in mind, we hasten to add that we are also committed to providing opportunities for public involvement through more traditional means. These opportunities will consistently include comment periods at the trust's public board meetings, informal contact and conversation with preserve staff, and direct communication via letter and telephone. Depending on the significance of the undertaking being considered, these opportunities may be expanded to include public meetings, special outreach to interested groups, and formal comment periods associated with the review of environmental documents.

We acknowledge, however, that these alternatives may not be sufficient and that we may need to do more to inform—and be informed by—the broadest possible circle of people interested in the preserve. Should we develop a newsletter about the preserve? Should we have a toll-free number for people to use in relaying to us their questions and ideas? What other options should we consider? In the course of public review of

this framework, the trust hopes to hear from the public about the methods of communication that work best for them. This information will help us develop a communications program that fully supports public participation in the stewardship, use, and administration of the preserve. We want to ensure that all of the people who are interested in the preserve have ample opportunity to voice their views—and to do so at times and in contexts that allow for the trust to give them genuinely meaningful consideration. We hope the comments and concerns we receive from people will provide thoughtful, detailed, and qualitative information about why they feel the way they do and how they think a proposed action might be improved or reconfigured. The trust will weigh such comments in making decisions that are both responsive to the public and consistent with its mission and principles.

The Valles Caldera Trust envisions many programs and activities it may undertake in the years ahead. The list on the left of the chart on page 76 captures the areas of focus in which the trust is currently engaged in its planning process. This comprehensive management framework document must be revisited in five years, and the areas of focus noted here can be expected to change over time.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

	Comment Periods	Project-Specific Meetings	Review and Comment on VCT Documents	Targeted Outreach	Comment at Board of Trustee Meetings	Visitor and Volunteer Comments and Surveys	Personal Communications
General Public Programs							
Public Outreach/Education							
Preserve Administration & Maintenance							
Office Administration & Personnel							
Policy & Governance							
Infrastructure Development							
Research, Inventory & Monitoring							
Special Uses							

A hawk indicates a guaranteed opportunity for public involvement.

A bear indicates the possibility of an additional opportunity for public involvement, depending on the complexity of the activity or project the Valles Caldera Trust is considering.

In general, the greater the potential impact of a project or activity, the more extensive the opportunities for public involvement will be. Opportunities for public involvement may also be expanded for projects or activities that attract high levels of public interest or concern.

**HOW TO STAY INFORMED**

For those with access to the Internet, Web-based technologies make staying connected to the workings of the Valles Caldera Trust easy and efficient. Moreover, the trust intends to make good its commitment to openness and transparency in part by using the Web to make publicly available a broad range of information and data concerning the preserve. A visitor to [www.vallescaldera.gov](http://www.vallescaldera.gov) will be able to access schedule information about the trust's public meetings, minutes of past meetings, downloadable copies of reports on the ecology and management of the preserve, announcements concerning visitor activities, and information about how to participate, employment opportunities, and much else. As noted above, the preserve's Web site will also provide easy access to public parts of the trust's StARS database, where notices about the initiation of stewardship actions will regularly be posted. These notices will describe the process of public involvement relating to every stewardship planning and implementation activity. Visitors to the VCNP Web site will also have access, through the public part of the StARS database, to the accumulated monitoring information for virtually all features of the preserve. By making its monitoring data generally available, the trust looks forward to

an informed public dialogue about the impacts of its programs and about the continuing ecological dynamism of the preserve. This dialogue should be like none other concerning public lands, for it will be thoroughly founded on hard, verifiable information, not merely on anecdote and opinion.

Important new postings to [www.vallescaldera.gov](http://www.vallescaldera.gov) will be announced via an e-mail Listserv, in which we hope the vast majority of people interested in the VCNP will choose to be included. The Listserv will also provide a vehicle for announcement of public meetings of the trust and other time-dependent matters.

Once again, however, we acknowledge that not everyone interested in the preserve has equal access to the Internet. We will need to develop alternate means for communicating with stakeholders who obtain their information through more traditional means. We do not yet know how best to meet this need in a way that is cost- and time-efficient both for the trust and for the people with whom we need to communicate. Again, we hope that as public review and comment on this framework proceeds, people will let us know how they would like to hear from us. We hope to use the suggestions we receive to address this crucial and as yet incomplete component of our communications plan.



Additional vehicles for external communication will include the trust's annual report, its regular consultation with culturally affiliated tribes, and focused interaction with specific interest groups. The trust's public meetings, both regular board meetings to transact the business of the trust and meetings convened to share or solicit information on specific programs, will always provide a forum for citizen input to the board and staff.

#### **VOLUNTEERS, EDUCATION, AND INTERPRETATION**

For those who want to be truly involved as well as informed, the trust will offer a broad range of

opportunities for volunteer service to the preserve. Already the trust is relying on volunteers for assistance in its recreation programs and on some projects. These opportunities are sure to expand steadily over the months and years ahead. The same may be said of the trust's educational and interpretive programs, which are as yet largely undeveloped. The little that may be said with certainty at this time is that the trust is committed to building an educational component into all of its programs and activities and that it fully recognizes the richness of interpretive possibilities arising from the preserve's geology, ecology, wildlife diversity, cultural history,

and scenic beauty. All three of these areas—volunteerism, education, and interpretation—will become important vehicles for vigorous, two-way communication between the trust and the public.

**COMMUNICATIONS CONCERNING THIS FRAMEWORK**

Most important for present purposes, this draft framework will be the subject of a series of public meetings, organized by the trust both to present this framework for the comprehensive management program and to solicit reaction to it. We hope that many friends of the caldera will want to engage in this planning effort and provide the trust with the benefit of their

thinking. We especially urge careful consideration of the trust's management principles, which are presented on page 13, and we especially welcome comments that are focused within the parameters the principles establish.

Please communicate your comments, questions, and suggestions concerning this framework to the trust by any of the following means (although we confess it is hardest for us to take comments over the telephone):

E-mail: [info@vallescaldera.gov](mailto:info@vallescaldera.gov)

U.S. Postal Service:

The Valles Caldera Trust

2201 Trinity Drive, Suite C

Los Alamos, NM 87544

Telephone: (505) 661-3333

