


Proposal Cover/Signature Page

Valles Caldera National Preserve

Response to FY12-RFP-00X

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Signature12/15/11
Date

Scan signed copy and include with electronic submittal or mail to the Valles Caldera Trust, P.O.
Box 359, Jemez Springs, NM 87025



December 15, 2011

Tim Haarmann
ATTN: 2012 Livestock Program
Valles Caldera National Preserve
P.O. Box 359
Jemez Springs, NM 87025

thaarmann@vallescaldera.gov

RE: 2012 LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS PROPOSAL AND ASSOCIATED BID

Dear Mr. Haarmann,

Thank you for your consideration of WildEarth Guardians' 2012 Valles Caldera Livestock Operations Proposal and Associated Bid, which is hereby submitted in response to 11-VCT-001. By this proposal, WildEarth Guardians formally bids \$35,000 for the privilege to graze zero (0) AUs on the Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP) between May 30, 2012 and September 30, 2012. Because the VCNP has no statutory basis or regulatory authority to set minimum numbers of animal units for bid eligibility, we find this proposal properly within the guidelines set by the Preserve for the 2012 grazing season.

Nearly 30,000 acres of the Valles Caldera National Preserve burned this past summer in the Las Conchas Fire. Twenty-five percent of that was in the grasslands. Grazing domestic livestock places additional stress on already strained hydrological systems, rivers and streams. The Preserve is recovering well by all indications, but returning domestic livestock to the valleys could inhibit recovery.

According to most climate models, the Southwest has become, and will continue to become, a drier and warmer place. As the headwaters and source of much municipal, domestic, agricultural and recreational water, the Valles Caldera National Preserve should be treated with the utmost care. Domestic livestock grazing can only harm this fragile watershed, polluting water, diminishing wildlife habitat, and increasing the potential for uncharacteristic wildfires like the 2011 Las Conchas Fire.

We are confident that upon your review, our plan to not graze the VCNP will, in comparison with all other proposals submitted, prove to be not only the most ecologically sound of options, but also the most financially prudent of options for the VCNP at this time.

I. Livestock Management Plan

WildEarth Guardians proposes to not graze any animals on the Valles Caldera National Preserve in 2012. We therefore have no need to construct additional fences or to bring motorized vehicles, supplements, or dogs onto the VCNP. We can thus guarantee no risk for disease or invasive weed introduction onto this fragile landscape from our proposed action. We plan to conduct monitoring of the vegetation, soils, and riparian zones of the area designated as suitable for grazing within the context of this RFP in order to serve as a baseline for future studies should the VCNP consent to continued low or non-use in years to come. This monitoring will not necessitate WildEarth Guardians' use of any living quarters or working space on the VCNP. We suggest that all unused resources, which would otherwise be devoted to livestock operations, be wholly devoted to restoration, recreation, education, or aesthetic purposes that serve the public interest.

II. Resource Protection Strategy

WildEarth Guardians plans to protect the streams and riparian areas of the VCNP by keeping them free of livestock. Having no cattle will significantly minimize or eliminate negative impacts on water quality and seasonal quantity, stream channel morphology, hydrology, riparian zone soils, instream and stream bank vegetation, and aquatic and riparian fish and wildlife. Eliminating use by domestic livestock of the VCNP in the 2012 grazing season presents little opportunity for the transport of weeds and will unquestionably yield greater improvements to the health of its streams and riparian areas than would any domestic livestock grazing management strategy represented by other proposals submitted. Beyond this guarantee of improvement, WildEarth Guardians is willing to devote its own resources to active restoration of the VCNP's streams and riparian areas if such restoration is authorized and/or desired.

The year 2011 saw quite possibly the largest single fire in New Mexico's recent history: the Las Conchas Fire. This fire burned approximately 30,000 acres of the Preserve with 25% in the grasslands of the great valleys. Returning cattle to these ecosystems would only retard their recovery. Further, cattle grazing in dry forest types have been demonstrated to significantly alter fire behavior. Allowing domestic livestock use in these forests will continue the detrimental cycle of uncharacteristic wildfire behavior that has been exacerbated by climate change.

Trespass cattle from National Forest lands surrounding the VCNP have become a significant resource management and protection problem. WildEarth Guardians has documented cattle in the VCNP for several years. These trespass cows have been documents inside of vegetation exclosures and in unprotected riparian zones across the VCNP and threaten investments by the Preserve as well as non-governmental organizations working to restore ecosystems. Having no cows on the VCNP will allow managers to better identify and manage trespass cattle.

III. Best Value to the Trust

WildEarth Guardians guarantees an upfront payment to the Valles Caldera National Preserve of \$35,000 in exchange for placing no livestock on the Valles Caldera National Preserve for the 2012 grazing season. This payment will be made at such time the VCNP accepts this bid and contracts with WildEarth Guardians in manifestation of the terms of this proposal. Because WildEarth Guardians requires nothing from the VCNP the entire \$35,000 will be profit to the VCNP.

IV. Past Performance (Experience of the Proposed Organization and Key Personnel)

WildEarth Guardians has more than a decade of experience in leasing state school trust lands for non-livestock production purposes. In that role we have pioneered strategies to assert the financial and ecological wisdom of equitable consideration of and then acceptance of the value of authorizing “conservation use.” The organization currently holds leases to nearly 6,000 acres of land in Arizona and New Mexico whose land and water resources are no longer allocated to domestic livestock production, but are rather in “conservation use.” John Horning, the organization’s Executive Director, has led these efforts since 1995.

One critical and inextricably linked component of our “conservation use” management paradigm is active habitat restoration. Since 1996 WildEarth Guardians and its predecessor organization has worked to actively restore riparian/wetland habitats across the Southwest that have been degraded by domestic livestock production. WildEarth Guardians is currently implementing six different riparian/wetland restoration projects in New Mexico and Arizona in order to restore the hydrologic functioning, stream morphology, and vegetation of these streams, including four within the VCNP boundaries. We have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, river restoration projects valued at more than \$1 million.

The goal of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act is to “protect and preserve the scientific, scenic, geologic, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values of the Preserve, and to provide for multiple use and sustained yield of renewable resources within the Preserve.” Removing livestock entirely from the VCNP in 2012 promotes these goals. In the arid Southwest where livestock grazing is the leading cause of species endangerment, engaging in total non-use always benefits fish and wildlife. On the Valles Caldera National Preserve specifically, granting WildEarth Guardians’ proposal may benefit species such as the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Gunnison’s prairie dog, and beaver. By focusing on native species instead of domestic livestock, the VCNP can foster biodiversity and ecosystem balance, which in turn encourages tourism.

The Valles Caldera National Preserve is one of New Mexico’s most beloved gems. By keeping the Preserve free of livestock, you provide more meaningful opportunities for countless members of the general public to engage in recreation, scientific study, and aesthetic enjoyment. Moreover, maintaining the Valles Caldera National Preserve in its

natural state enhances the historic and cultural values of the VCNP, which will be forever lost if the natural integrity is not maintained.

Another potentially significant local benefit to communities is that – on the VCNP, at least – there will be no competition for forage or space between elk and domestic livestock. Though elk and domestic livestock do not have the same dietary requirements, they are similar enough that some displacement does occur. By allowing more vegetative resources to benefit native wildlife, local communities and the citizens of New Mexico will have a greater opportunity to see elk in one of the most aesthetically pleasing places in all of New Mexico.

According to nearly all the climate models, the Southwest has become, and will continue to become, a drier and warmer place. In the face of this climate crisis, most scientists believe that ecosystem resilience is going to increase in importance.

The Nature Conservancy in concert with the University of Washington and the Wildlife Conservation Society identified the Jemez Mountains as one of three sensitive species-rich watersheds in New Mexico that may be particularly vulnerable to ongoing climate change based on the magnitude of their moisture stress and noted that the Jemez in particular has already experienced climate change-linked ecological effects and significant declines in snowpack. The VCNP is geographically located in the center of the Jemez Mountains.

We believe that the greatest public benefit of the complete removal of livestock grazing pressure is to increase the resilience of the ecosystems on the VCNP. With no extractive or industry imperatives to influence management and little vegetative or water resources being taken off the VCNP by domestic livestock, we believe that the ecosystems on the VCNP will be considerably more resilient in the face of climate change. We believe this resilience will be especially beneficial to the VCNP's streams and water resources. According to a growing number of scientists, resilience is one of the greatest public benefits that ecosystems can provide to surrounding communities, and we believe our proposal not to graze the VCNP with domestic livestock will enhance the resilience of its ecosystems.

Finally, the Act created the Trust as a wholly owned government corporation, which must turn a profit so as to become financial independent. WildEarth Guardians' proposal to eliminate impacts from domestic livestock to the VCNP in 2012 is in complete accord with the letter and spirit of PL 106-248, and provides the greatest opportunity for economic return to the Trust under this RFP at this time. The VCNP should accept WildEarth Guardians' bid of \$35,000 dollars for maximum resource benefit.

V. Required References

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Thank you again for your consideration of WildEarth Guardians' Livestock Operations Proposal and Associated Bid not to graze domestic livestock on the VCNP in 2012. We look forward to working with the VCNP in the future in furtherance of the public interest.

Respectfully submitted,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bryan Bird", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Bryan Bird
Wild Places Program Director
WildEarth Guardians



Climate Laboratory: The Jemez Mountains

