

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE  
THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 285, TO DESIGNATE THE  
VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK  
SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

**April 23, 2013**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 285, to designate the Valles Caldera National Preserve as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 285 with an amendment described later in this statement. The Valles Caldera National Preserve (Preserve) has been found to meet the National Park Service's criteria for inclusion in the National Park System, and this legislation would provide a feasible plan for transferring management responsibility for the Preserve from the Valles Caldera Trust (Trust) to the National Park Service.

S. 285 would designate the Valles Caldera National Preserve in New Mexico as a unit of the National Park System and would transfer administrative jurisdiction of the Preserve to the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) for administration by the National Park Service (NPS). The bill would terminate the Trust 180 days after enactment unless the Secretary determines that the termination date should be extended to facilitate the transitional management of the Preserve. All assets and liabilities of the Trust would be transferred to the Secretary. The bill would also authorize the Secretary to coordinate management and operations of the Preserve with Bandelier National Monument and produce a management plan no later than three fiscal years after funds are made available. If S. 285 is enacted, we look forward to working with the Trust, the Secretary of Agriculture, Indian Tribes and Pueblos, State and local governments, and the public to develop a management plan and capitalize on the proximity of Bandelier National Monument for efficiency of operations, while applying Service First principles of sharing resources as appropriate with the surrounding Santa Fe National Forest.

S. 285 would authorize grazing, hunting, and fishing to continue within the Preserve. It would also require the Secretary to ensure the protection of traditional cultural and religious sites, including providing tribal access to the sites and temporarily closing specific areas of the Preserve to protect traditional uses, in accordance with applicable law. The NPS has a long history of consultation with Native Americans in the preservation and continuation of traditional practices.

Finally, S. 285 would require that eligible Trust employees be retained for at least 180 days from the date of enactment. The Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture would be authorized to hire Trust employees on a noncompetitive basis for comparable positions at the Preserve or other areas or offices under the jurisdiction of the two Secretaries.

The Valles Caldera National Preserve is an 88,900 acre unit of the National Forest System located in the Jemez Mountains of north central New Mexico. The Preserve was established by Public Law 106-248, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000, and is managed by the Valles Caldera Trust, a wholly owned government corporation established under the Act. The Trust is charged with mixing elements of both private and public administration while working to achieve resource protection, public enjoyment, and financial self sufficiency goals.

The Valles Caldera is considered to be one of the world's best intact examples of a resurgent caldera (the remains of a huge and ancient volcano with a prominent uplift at its center, in this case present-day Redondo Peak) and is of sufficient size and configuration to allow for long-term sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment. The geologic features of the Preserve retain a high degree of integrity and the Preserve's unique setting of expansive grasslands and montane forests provides outstanding scenic values and an array of opportunities for public recreation, reflection, education, and scientific study. The Preserve also would expand and enhance the diversity of volcanic sites represented within the National Park System.

The national significance of the geological resources of the Valles Caldera was formally recognized in 1975 when the area was designated a National Natural Landmark. Moreover, Valles Caldera offers the opportunity to illustrate the connection of human history in the region that is showcased at Bandelier National Monument with the geologic history that shaped the surrounding mesa and canyon landscape.

As early as 1899, the area around Valles Caldera was studied for national park designation, and the resulting report proposed that 153,620 acres be set aside for "Pajarito National Park." A portion of this area later became Bandelier National Monument, established in 1906. Additionally, the Valles Caldera was the subject of site investigations and new area studies that were completed by the NPS in 1939, 1964, 1977, and 1979. *An Update Report on the NPS 1979 New Area Study* was completed by the NPS in December 2009, at the request of Senator Tom Udall and former Senator Jeff Bingaman. All of these studies found that the Valles Caldera was nationally significant, suitable and feasible for designation as a unit of the National Park System, and the 2009 Update Report reaffirmed the results of the prior studies.

Under S. 285, Valles Caldera would be managed in accordance with the 1916 Organic Act and other Acts that have guided the NPS for nearly one hundred years "to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations", with recognition that the bill allows for continued, sustainable grazing, hunting, and fishing. The NPS has experience with these activities in our other nineteen designated preserves.

Based on current expenses for Valles Caldera and the cost to operate park units comparable in size and assets, we anticipate the annual cost to operate and manage the park would be approximately \$22 million for developmental costs and \$4 million for annual operational costs, although more complete cost estimates would be developed through the general management plan. In addition, our 2009 Update Report identifies five parcels of private property within the proposed park boundaries, totaling 40 acres. Although appraisals have not been completed, the

expected costs to acquire this private property and any transfer costs are not expected to be great. Funds would be subject to the availability of appropriations and NPS priorities.

We recommend that the bill be amended to reference a map, which would provide certainty about the boundary and make the bill consistent with most other laws and pending bills designating new units of the National Park System. The NPS would be pleased to provide the committee with language for that amendment.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any other members of the Committee may have.