

STATEMENT OF
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CHAIRMAN, THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
VALLES CALDERA TRUST

Before the

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
JUNE 30, 2010

Concerning

S. 3452 -- VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE MANAGEMENT ACT

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Stephen Henry, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Valles Caldera Trust, and I am here on behalf of the Presidentially appointed members of the Board of Trustees to express our views about S. 3452. The Trust supports the protection of the nationally significant natural and cultural resources found at the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

I will not belabor the wonderful scenic and natural values of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Everyone here knows it is a national treasure. We at the Trust value that treasure, and we have devoted our best efforts to its preservation and protection. But, unfortunately, we inherited an abused treasure. The former Baca Ranch had been over grazed and over logged for decades. Hundreds of miles of roads cover the area. Geothermal developers were threatening to develop private mineral rights. Major roads and improvements were in need of repair and rehabilitation. Infrastructure necessary to accommodate public access and use was almost non-existent and prerequisite environmental compliances had never been addressed. At the same time, the public clamored to use and enjoy this land for which the Federal taxpayer paid \$101 million.

Today, I am here to report that the Preserve is well on the way to a comeback. With the assistance of our partners in the Forest Service, the universities and the public, significant strides have been made at landscape restoration. The mandates of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000 are steadily and successfully being accomplished with regard to wildlife management,

forest and range management, public recreation, Native American religious and cultural uses, research, science and many others. Despite these successes, S. 3452 would terminate the Valles Caldera Trust. We are disappointed and concerned, particularly about the future of our employees and the many successful ongoing programs.

We note that the Valles Caldera Preservation Act provides for the assessment of the future viability of the Trust. In section 110, the Act calls for providing recommendations to Congress after 18 years as to whether the Trust should continue. In that context, we believe that S. 3452, which assumes Park Service management is best for the Preserve, could benefit from further analysis of the possible viable options for long term management of the Preserve. However, the relative merits of administration by the Forest Service, Park Service and the Trust have never been analyzed.

When viewed objectively, we believe the Trust's accomplishments will be evident. The Trust started at ground zero when it was established in 2000. We had a brand new organization implementing an untested management regime on a huge property. The Preserve has not been financially self-sustaining; however, the challenge of that goal was recognized by many at the time of the original enactment. The Preserve has limited revenue generating capacity. Further, back in 2000, neither the Congress nor the Executive Branch anticipated the costs and complications of setting up a government corporation or the costs of making necessary capital repairs and rehabilitation, and simply the costs of operations – all of which are debits in the accounting on self sustainability. Parts of the problem were inherent challenges in the enabling legislation. One simple example concerns tort liability. Instead of treating the Trust like any other self insured federal agency, we were compelled to spend considerable sums buying private liability insurance. The point is that the Trust is being held to a unique standard of financial self sustainability. The Board believes that terminating the Trust fails to recognize much of the progress and investments in time and money made by the Trust in the past eight years.

Turning the discussion to the future, the issue is what management is needed and who can best provide it. It may be that management by the Forest Service or the Park Service will enable some administrative functions to be assumed within a larger organization, but many activities and operations will have to be done anyway and at probably much the same cost.

Forest restoration is now the major management focus. It involves putting roads to bed, erosion control, reforestation, and dealing with the challenges posed by insects and climate change.

Range management is another challenge and includes restoration of riparian areas. We are currently undertaking extensive research in grassland improvement in cooperation with New Mexico State University. Public recreation, including hunting and fishing, is always a major challenge, but we have been getting high marks on these issues from our visitors.

In conclusion, we understand there will be a need to assess the long term management of the Preserve and want to play our part in that effort. We believe any changes should be considered with full public transparency and with input from resource management experts. This exquisite landscape and the American public deserve no less.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee would have.