



April 30, 2009

Tim Haarmann
ATTN: 2009 Livestock Program
Valles Caldera National Preserve
18161 Hwy. 4
Jemez Springs, NM 87025

thaarmann@vallescaldera.gov

RE: 2009 LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS PROPOSAL AND ASSOCIATED BID

Dear Mr. Haarmann,

Thank you for your consideration of WildEarth Guardians' 2009 Valles Caldera Livestock Operations Proposal and Associated Bid, which is hereby submitted in response to 09-RFP-002. By this proposal, WildEarth Guardians formally bids \$50,000 for the privilege to graze three (3) to five (5) AUMs on the Preserve between May 30 and September 30 of this year. Because the VCNP has no statutory right to set minimum numbers of AUMs for bid eligibility, we find this proposal properly within the guidelines set by the Preserve for the 2009 grazing season. For your convenience, we have drafted our proposal in accordance with the suggested outline format. We are confident that upon your review, our plan to minimally graze the Valles Caldera 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 Preserve at this time.

I. Livestock Management Plan

WildEarth Guardians proposes to graze 3-5 animals on the Valles Caldera in 2009. We therefore have no need to construct additional fences or to bring motorized vehicles, supplements, or dogs onto the Preserve. We can thus guarantee little 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 Preserve 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 Preserve. We will have minimal need for the Preserve's range riders if any, the impacts of 3-5 animals on the Preserve's riparian

habitats will be minimal if not negligible. However, we pledge to monitor those affect throughout the season using our ecological scientists and seasoned volunteers to assure no unacceptable impacts are resulting. 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. Economic Return to the Trust

WildEarth Guardians guarantees an upfront payment to the Valles Caldera Preserve of \$50,000 in exchange for placing 3-5 AUMs on the Valles Caldera for the 2009 grazing season. This payment will be made at such time the Preserve accepts this bid and contracts with WildEarth Guardians in manifestation of the terms of this proposal. Because WildEarth Guardians requires nearly nothing from the Preserve other than the minimal use by domestic livestock of the subject property as consideration of its payment, the entire \$50,000 will be largely profit to the Preserve.

III. Resource Protection Strategy

WildEarth Guardians plans to protect the streams and riparian areas of the Preserve by keeping them free of livestock simply by nature of the low numbers of livestock. Having so few 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. Minimal use by domestic livestock of the Preserve in the 2009 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 Preserve's streams and riparian areas if such restoration is authorized and/or desired.

IV. Experience of the Proposed Organization and Key Personnel

WildEarth Guardians and one of its predecessor organizations (Forest Guardians) have more than a decade of experience in leasing state school trust lands for non-domestic 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 organizations have 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. We have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, river restoration projects valued at more than \$1 million. If authorized by the Trust to do so, we would be delighted to bring these skills and resources to bear in restoring the streams and watersheds of the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

V. Benefits to Local Communities and Enhancement of Objectives on Surrounding National Forest System Land

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.” Minimally grazing the Preserve in 2009 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 specifically, granting WildEarth Guardians’ proposal may benefit species such as the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Gunnison’s prairie dogs, and Mexican spotted owl. By focusing on native species instead of domestic livestock, the Preserve can foster biodiversity and ecosystem balance, which in turn encourages tourism.

The Valles Caldera is one of New Mexico’s most beloved gems. By keeping the Preserve nearly 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 in its natural state enhances the historic and cultural values of the Preserve, which will be forever lost if the natural integrity of the Valles Caldera is not maintained.

Another potentially significant local benefit to communities is that – on the Preserve, 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 Valles Caldera is geographically located in the center of the Jemez Mountains.

We believe that the greatest public benefit of minimal domestic livestock grazing pressure is to increase the resilience of the ecosystems on the Preserve. With no extractive or industry imperatives to influence management and little vegetative or water resources being taken off the Preserve by domestic livestock, we believe that the ecosystems on the Preserve will be considerably more resilient in the face of climate change. We believe this resilience will be especially beneficial to the Preserve'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 Preserve 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 minimize or eliminate impacts from domestic livestock to the Preserve in 2009 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 Preserve should accept WildEarth Guardians' bid of \$50,000 dollars if it is the highest and best bid submitted.

VI. 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 Valles Caldera in 2009. We look forward to working with the Preserve 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 extending to the right.

Bryan Bird
Wild Places Program Director
WildEarth Guardians