



Foundation Document Overview

Valles Caldera National Preserve

New Mexico



Contact Information

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Purpose



Located in the Jemez Mountains of north-central New Mexico, VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE protects, preserves, and restores ecosystems and cultural landscapes within an outstanding example of a volcanic caldera for the purpose of education, scientific research, public enjoyment and use, and cultural continuity.



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Significance

Significance statements express why Valles Caldera National Preserve resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Valles Caldera possesses exceptional value in illustrating and interpreting massive explosive volcanic eruptions, caldera formation, and the functioning of active geothermal systems. Valles Caldera is one of the world's best examples of an intact volcanic caldera and is considered the worldwide "type locality" for caldera resurgence.
- Valles Caldera is a place where one can directly experience pre-agricultural heritage and reflect on inconspicuous cultural landscapes where hunting and gathering were practiced successfully for more than 10,000 years. Past peoples across the continent were drawn to Valles Caldera to utilize its rich geologic deposits of high quality obsidian for tools and weapons, making this location one of the most significant cultural obsidian sources in North America. To this day, the caldera is used by local pueblo and tribal peoples and is cherished by more than two dozen American Indian groups.



arrowheads enlarged to show detail

Significance



- The land use history of Valles Caldera encapsulates the story of early Spanish and Mexican settlement across the present-day American Southwest and the socio-political shifts that occurred when the territory was annexed by the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. Previously known as Baca Location No. 1, Valles Caldera exemplifies the legacy of how the establishment, utilization, and changing ownership of Spanish and Mexican land grants transformed the Southwest.
- Valles Caldera's unusual setting—high elevation, caldera topography, unfragmented habitats, and key hydrologic role at the top of the watershed—presents a dynamic learning landscape for the scientific study and restoration of ecosystem processes that are recovering from three centuries of human disturbances and challenged by contemporary and future climate change.
- Valles Caldera's distinct topographic mosaic of expansive valley meadows, lush forested volcanic domes, meandering valley streams, and old growth Ponderosa pine groves are in striking contrast to the arid New Mexico landscapes at lower elevations. With caldera vistas from rim to rim, elk and other wildlife viewing, dark night skies, winter skiing, excellent hunting and fishing opportunities, and backcountry solitude, the landscape provides extraordinary year-round recreational opportunities and visitor experiences.
- Valles Caldera National Preserve was first established in 2000 as an unprecedented national experiment in public land management through which the U.S. Congress sought to evaluate the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of decentralized public land management. The 15-year experiment continues to contribute to the national dialogue on the role of protected areas for long-term economic and environmental sustainability and innovative approaches to place-based and science-based adaptive management.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Caldera**
- **Valle Grande and Volcanic Vistas**
- **Traditional Cultural Landscapes and Tribal Connections**
- **Prehistoric and Historic Legacy**
- **High Elevation Ecosystem**
- **A Landscape in Recovery**

Valles Caldera National Preserve contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Scientific Knowledge and Education**
- **History Grove**



Description

Valles Caldera is located in the center and at the top of the Jemez Mountains in north-central New Mexico. The 88,900-acre preserve encompasses almost all of the volcanic caldera created by a spectacular volcanic eruption about 1.25 million years ago. The caldera is dormant, but not extinct, and still displays signs of volcanic life with hot springs and boiling sulphuric acid fumaroles. The juxtaposition of large grassland meadows, or valles in Spanish, surrounded by rounded forest-covered volcanic domes provides the distinctive natural landscape that led to the name of Valles Caldera. These ecosystems, ranging from 8,000 to 11,254 feet high at the top of Redondo Peak, combine abundant rainfall, mixed-conifer forests, and deep rich soils to support a great diversity of animals, plants, fungi, and other organisms including several thousand elk and healthy populations of mountain lions, bears, and coyotes.

For thousands of years American Indians have used the caldera for hunting, fishing, and gathering various plants for food, medicine, and ceremonies. The signature resource for these indigenous peoples was obsidian, and tools found across the United States were made from obsidian gathered here. Numerous American Indian tribes and pueblos in the region have deep historic and cultural connections to the caldera. Valles Caldera also chronicles the history of New Mexico's enchantment and exploitation—from 19th century land use after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and sheep grazing under the partido system to subsequent cattle grazing, timber harvesting, and geothermal exploration. The preserve offers a landscape in which to explore the dynamics of high-elevation ecosystem stability and resilience in the context of changing climate conditions. Today's approach to ecological restoration builds on the lessons learned from this history and seeks to regain balance between human uses and natural processes. The preserve is an ecosystem in recovery.

