

2023
Annual Report

East Fork Jemez River flowing through the southern part of the park. Cover: Black bear NPS/C. Lycopolus





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This report highlights the efforts of the entire Valles Caldera team of employees, volunteers, and partners. A special thanks to each of you for your hard work, dedication, and passion.



Cloud obscuring Valle Grande and Cerro La Jara | NPS/D. Krueger

Leadership Team Message

We are pleased to present the 2023 annual report of Valles Caldera National Preserve. This has been an amazing year of achievement as we continue to work toward making Valles Caldera the premier national park unit within New Mexico.

Everything we do starts with the team. In 2023, we made great strides in bringing new employees into the fold, developing a comprehensive recognition program, and working on securing employee housing.

This was the first year of sharing the initial concepts of the long-range General Management Plan (GMP) with the public. We continued expanding our community involvement by participating in parades in both Jemez Springs and Los Alamos.

The removal of non-historic structures and debris from Sulphur Springs and the demolition of the Union Building were visible efforts to remove destructive human imprints from the landscape.

Near the end of 2023, the park even saw the brief return of a long-extirpated species when Asha, a Mexican gray wolf, made her way to Valles Caldera in November.

We are proud of the efforts everyone has put in this year to make this park a great place to work and a memorable place to experience.

Ever onward together!

—Valles Caldera Leadership Team

Jorge Silva-Bañuelos, Superintendent

Lisa Ford, Administrative Officer

Nate Plants, Chief Ranger

Jonathan Allbach, Acting Chief of Facilities

Bob Parmenter, Chief of Science and Resource Stewardship

Dave Krueger, Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers

Jason Thivener, Fire Management Officer

CORE VALUES: OUR ENDURING PRINCIPLES



Cultural Continuity

We honor human diversity, history, and beliefs unique to this important cultural landscape.



Perseverance

We continually move forward, together, when facing the challenges of developing a new park.



Moving Forward Together

In 2022, park employees came together to set a five-year vision for Valles Caldera—the desired future that we are working toward.

In 2027, Valles Caldera National Preserve is a national model for sustainability, restoration, and tribal partnerships that offers a welcoming and engaging landscape for all.

To help us achieve this vision, we developed the following goal to reach by the end of 2027.

Visitors to Valles Caldera National Preserve have a national park experience in the frontcountry.



Sustainable Operations

Maximize carbon-neutral operations and strive to reduce the carbon footprint of visitors.



Visitor Experience: Infrastructure & Interpretation

Improve access and services for better understanding and appreciation.



Tribal Partnerships

Invite tribes into the decision-making process to broaden and strengthen our relationships.



Team Cohesion

Create a trusting and communicative environment where all staff feel respected, are working together towards realistic and clearly defined goals, and successes are celebrated park-wide.



Planning & Community Engagement

Involve partners in the development of a shared vision that drives the General Management Plan and Valle Grande Development Concept Plan processes.



Restoring Resources & Values in the Front-country

Work together to benefit ecosystems, mitigate existing and emerging impacts, restore cultural connections to the landscape, and promote recreational opportunities.



Renewal

We protect, study, and restore a dynamic landscape to foster sustainability, biodiversity, ecosystem recovery, and human connection.



Inspiration

We promote deeper understanding and stewardship of Valles Caldera through discovery, service, and immersive experiences.

This Is Valles Caldera



National VIP award winner



4 miles of pipeline access road reclaimed



Recreation.gov passes



One of the top safety programs in the region



Welcomed 76,090 visitors



Headquarters acquired



Shared administrative services with Bandelier



Clean-up of Sulphur Springs



Structural fire inspections and agreements



More than 3,000 volunteer hours



100% of electric vehicle fleet ordered



9 public events



Wildflowers in bloom | NPS

Going Carbon Neutral

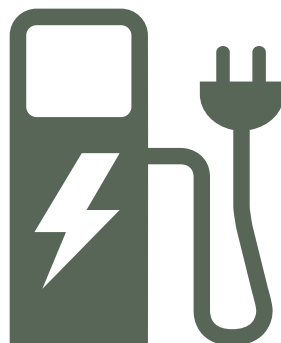
Valles Caldera continues to migrate its fleet to electric vehicles in an effort to become carbon neutral, lead by example, and reduce the overall cost of the fleet program.

The Strategic Action Plan called for 50% of the park’s transition to electric vehicles (EVs) to have been ordered by this year. By the end of 2023, the park had 5 EVs in the park, 3 EVs enroute to the dealership for delivery, and 9 EVs ordered. This progress puts us at 100%—a full two years ahead of schedule! As a result of the change-over to EVs, gasoline consumption was reduced by nearly 2,249 gallons.

To support the EV fleet, the park used base funding to purchase and install four Level 2 charging stations at park headquarters and three Level 2 chargers within the park.

In addition, the park secured \$175,000 from the Inflation Reduction Act to install additional EV chargers. With this funding, the park is working to purchase two [Beam EV charging stations](#). These solar-powered stations are portable, off-grid, and provide the ability for public charging stations in the park. The park is also piloting a police-package EV, to see whether EVs will work for NPS law enforcement programs.

The current solar arrays powering the park’s Entrance Station and headquarters generate 11 MW and 39 MW per year, respectively.



Washing a Lightning | NPS/M. McAlnois

VALLES CALDERA EVs		
In Park	Enroute	Ordered
4 Lightnings	3 Lightnings	6 Silverados
1 Bolt		1 ID.4
1 Outlander PHEV		1 Ioniq 6
2 Zenith Shuttles		1 Blazer (VRP)

Headquarters

After several years of effort, the National Park Service, through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, was successful in acquiring a residential complex in the northern part of Jemez Springs, New Mexico, from the Servants of the Paraclete. This complex serves as the park's headquarters.

With the purchase, the park acquired:

- 13,800 square feet of office space
- 1,600 square feet of lab space
- 1,600 square feet for meeting space
- ~2.8 acres
- ~3/4-mile of Jemez River riverfront
- 80 parking spots
- Storage space for outbuildings and storage boxes
- Space for 20 solar carports
- Access to adjacent Santa Fe National Forest trail

The park continues to work with the regional office to acquire the parcel adjacent and to the south, which would provide 27 employee housing units.



Headquarters building in Jemez Springs | NPS/D. Krueger

Recycling

The park continues to divert the majority of disposed material from the landfill with 75% by weight sent to recycling. Of that amount, 90% was steel (some 49,640 pounds), which generated revenue for the park's recycling program. A further 9% was mixed recycling (cardboard and plastic). The final 1% was glass.



The park has recycling bins at the Entrance Station and Cabin District to promote visitor participation. To improve collection and transportation of recycling, the park has a dedicated recycling trailer. In addition, the park encourages employees who do not have recycling at home to make deposits in the park's bins.



The park's recycling trailer | NPS/D. Krueger

DID YOU KNOW?

An additional 50,128 pounds of steel from the demolition projects were recycled by a contractor. That's the average weight of a humpback whale!





Ranger Hayley leading a guided hike around Cerro La Jara | NPS/L. Ray

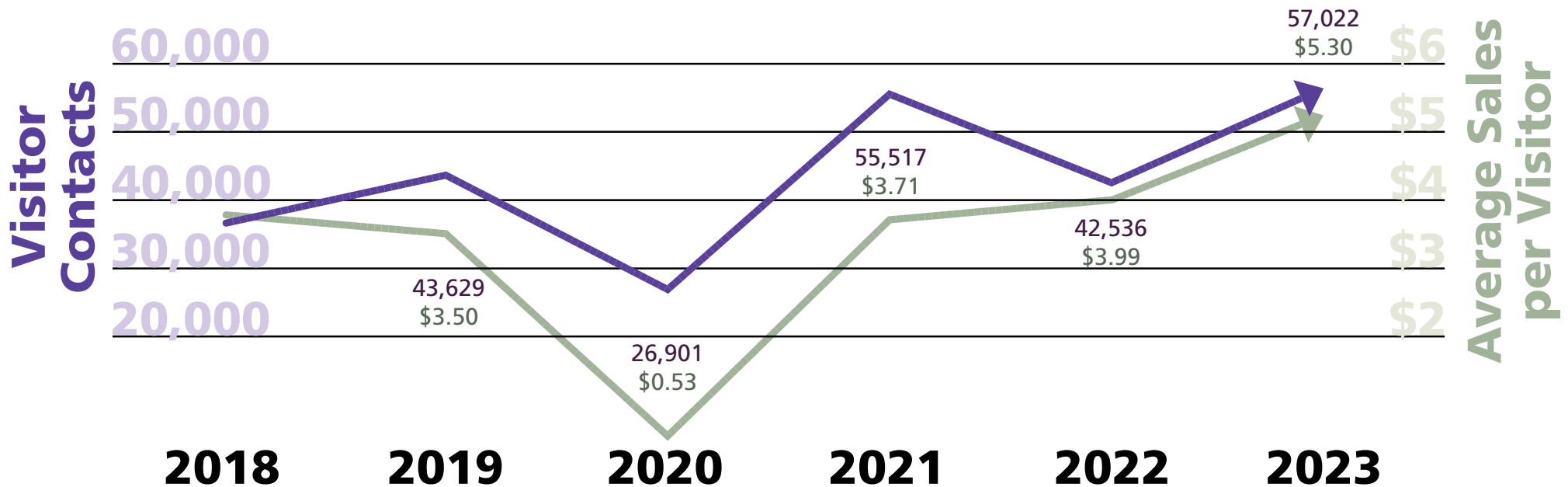
Visitation

This year the park reached a new high in visitation: 57,022 people stopped in either the park’s Entrance Station or Ranger Station and talked with a ranger or volunteer. This was a 34% increase from 2022 and a 3% increase from 2021, the previous highest year of visitor contacts. This number is even more impressive when considering that 2023 was the first year when backcountry passes could be reserved ahead of time, rather than requiring visitors to stop by a visitor facility twice—once to get a pass and once to return it.

The increase in visitation was accompanied by an increase in the average money spent per visitor at the park’s two bookstores. Whereas the average amount spent in prior years* was \$3.74, the 2023 average jumped to \$5.30 spent per visitor.

*-Removed 2020 from the calculations due to impacts from COVID-19

Annual Contacts and Per Visitor Spending





Programs

This year’s focus was on providing high-quality, ranger-guided programs at Cerro La Jara and in the Cabin District. The team succeeded in guiding 1,068 visitors on 168 of these programs, or an average of 6.4 visitors per program.

The night sky programs—full-moon hikes and new-moon star-gazing talks—ran ten times this year with 152 visitors in attendance. This line-up included a new night-sky photography workshop during the Valles Caldera Fall Fiesta.

The team also provided 66 unscheduled “pop-up” programs to an additional 331 visitors.



Ranger Sierra giving a guided tour | NPS/L. Ray

Education programs have gotten off to a fantastic start for the 2023-24 school year. Rangers have gone into 44 classrooms and reached 967 students. Meanwhile, 22 classes have come out to Valles Caldera with 520 students.

Media

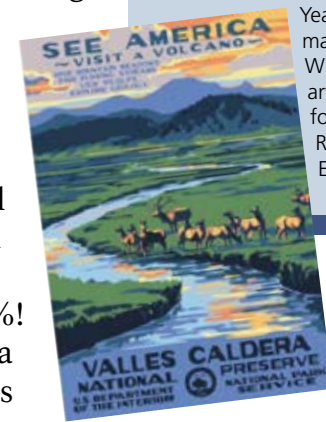
Many media projects were developed in 2023. Designs are wrapping up on new orientation panels, the Junior Ranger program, and Caldera Chat videos. Work also started on interpretive panels for the Cabin District. In addition, the team completed a statement of work for the upcoming core exhibit for the Ranger Station.

A map refresh of the Official Map & Guide was completed, and a new badge for the upcoming Junior Ranger program was designed.

In the digital space, the park’s website was revamped, with more than 10 pages of additional content added. This contributed to 106,384 people visiting the website—an all-time high by 23%! The app garnered 81,773 views, a significant increase over previous years.



Cover art for the upcoming Junior Ranger booklet.



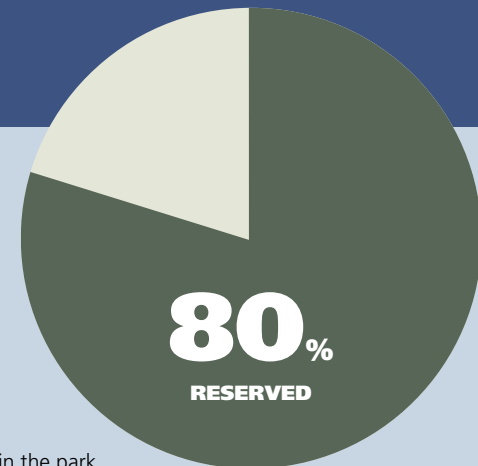
Years in the making, WPA-inspired artwork is now for sale from Ranger Doug Enterprises.

Backcountry Vehicle Passes



This was the first year the backcountry vehicle passes were issued through Recreation.gov. This system allowed visitors to reserve passes up to three months ahead of a visit. In addition, the start of the backcountry vehicle route was moved to the Cabin District.

Accounting for this change, a total of 9,954 passes were issued to drive beyond the Entrance Station. This was a 19% increase in vehicles traveling beyond the Entrance Station compared to 2022. 5,701 passes were issued through the Recreation.gov system for people wishing to drive beyond the Cabin District.



80% of passes were reserved ahead of time and 20% were issued day-of in the park.

Improving the Frontcountry

After several years of development and planning, the park successfully completed the Environmental Assessment and programmatic agreement for the long-awaited Frontcountry Infrastructure Improvements Project. This is the park's first major infrastructure project aimed at improving the visitor experience.

The purpose of the project is to provide visitors to Valles Caldera increased access into the Cabin District and to allow the park to reinitiate the park's entrance fee collection program. The project is needed because the park is interested in providing a high-quality visitor experience in the Cabin District but lacks the infrastructure there to support the increase without compromising the natural and cultural resource values of the area. The Ranger Station currently has limited parking, which is inadequate. The building is not retrofitted with accessibility improvements, which presents a barrier to visitors with disabilities who wish to visit the area. Currently, vehicles park along roads and driveways throughout the Cabin District, which has led to resource-impact concerns.

The first phase of the project is the installation of an automated backcountry vehicle gate in the Cabin District near the crossing of La Jara Creek. Planning and supply ordering was completed in 2023, and construction is slated for spring 2024.

The second phase of the project is to construct two parking areas southwest of the Ranger Station by adding fill to the area. This improvement will provide additional parking and reduce vehicle traffic around the cabins. There will also be the construction of an accessible trail through the Cabin District and the installation of interpretive signs.

Accessibility improvements to the Ranger Station and Entrance Station will be done to improve access to both buildings.

The final phase will be the rerouting of the entrance road at the Entrance Station, along with the addition of a fee booth window to the Entrance Station.



Concept map of the interim improvements in the Cabin District | NPS/B. Smith and M. Shelley

Roads & Trails

The park made significant progress in improving trails and the backcountry road. During the spring grading of the backcountry road, a large sinkhole opened up where the backcountry road crosses San Antonio Creek in the northwest corner of the park. The facilities team worked hard at the start of the summer to repair the road. At the same time, the road segment near the Garita trailhead washed out in segments, so the facilities team was able to bridge the washout by placing river cobble in the gap.

With the aid of a seasonal equipment operator and Santa Clara Pueblo's road crew, 19 miles of backcountry road were improved and maintained.

In terms of trails, the work was equally impressive. The park welcomed the first-ever seasonal trail crew onto the team. More than 1,500 trees were cleared from 14 trails by the small and mighty trail team. This equals 125 miles of trails that were cleared and improved for visitor use.

This winter, the park brought ski trail grooming back after being on hiatus for 7 years. This season, we are grooming 6 miles of cross-country skiing trails and 6 miles of snowshoeing trails. In addition, our contracted plow operator worked hard all winter to keep the roads open between snowstorms and high-wind events.

19 miles of backcountry road maintained
125 miles of trails cleared
25 miles of trail surveyed
3 emergency road repairs completed
2,000,000 pounds of road material



Park road grader working a section of the backcountry route near Cerro Piñon | NPS/L. Ray



L to R: Clearing snow from parking area, backcountry road washout, trail crew, and clearing downed tree from a trail | NPS/J. Allbach

Hunting & Fishing

The fall 2023 elk-hunting season saw a 32% increase in total elk tags available, moving from 265 to 350 tags. More elk were harvested this year than in 2022, with 329 hunters taking 164 elk from the park—a success rate of 50%.

The spring 2023 turkey-hunting season saw 18 hunters, though there were no reports of turkey being taken from the park.

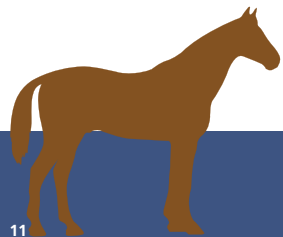
Fishing had another active season. The new permit system saw 1,939 people apply for either annual or seven-day fishing permits. Out of that number, 1,435 permits were successfully processed. The park also ran five monthly fishing clinics during the summer with the help of New Mexico Trout and a grant from the National Park Foundation. All 77 clinic participants were issued a free permit and learned how to fly-fish using equipment purchased through the grant.



Fishing clinic volunteer and participant along the East Fork Jemez River | NPS/L. Ray

Other Activities

Beyond personal hunting and fishing activities, the park had 14 commercial user authorization (CUA) holders providing guide services. The park issued ten special-use permits, with two of the permits being for commercial filming. The equestrian use remained light, with 35 people receiving their free permit.

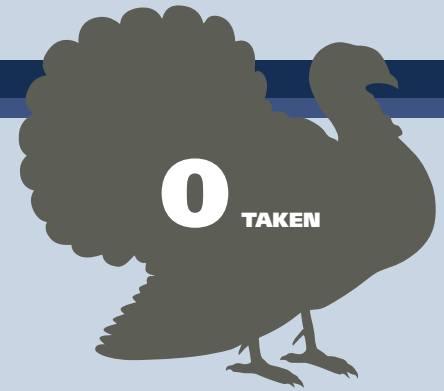


DID YOU KNOW?

2 of the 3 horse trailer parking areas do NOT require a backcountry vehicle pass.



By the Numbers



Economic Impact

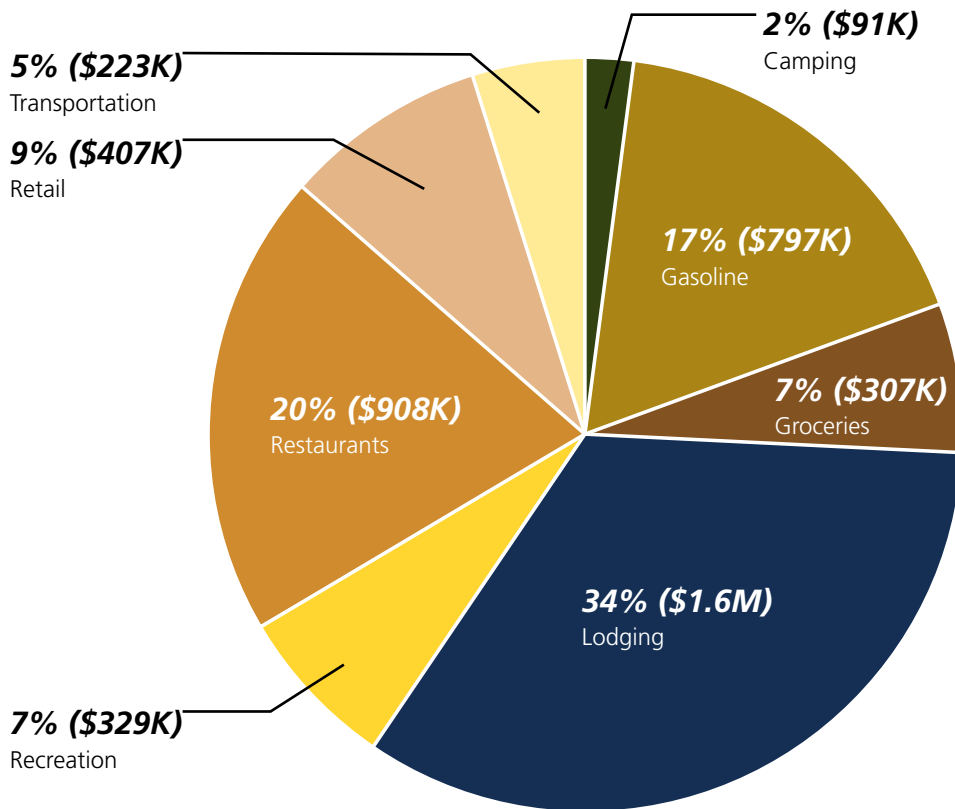
Valles Caldera continues to be of strong economic value to our local communities, according to the Visitor Spending Effects report published by the National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey.

In 2022, 63,700 park visitors spent an estimated \$4.6 million in local gateway regions while visiting Valles Caldera National Preserve. These expenditures supported a total of 61 jobs, \$1.9 million in labor income, \$3.3 million in value added, and \$6 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding the park.

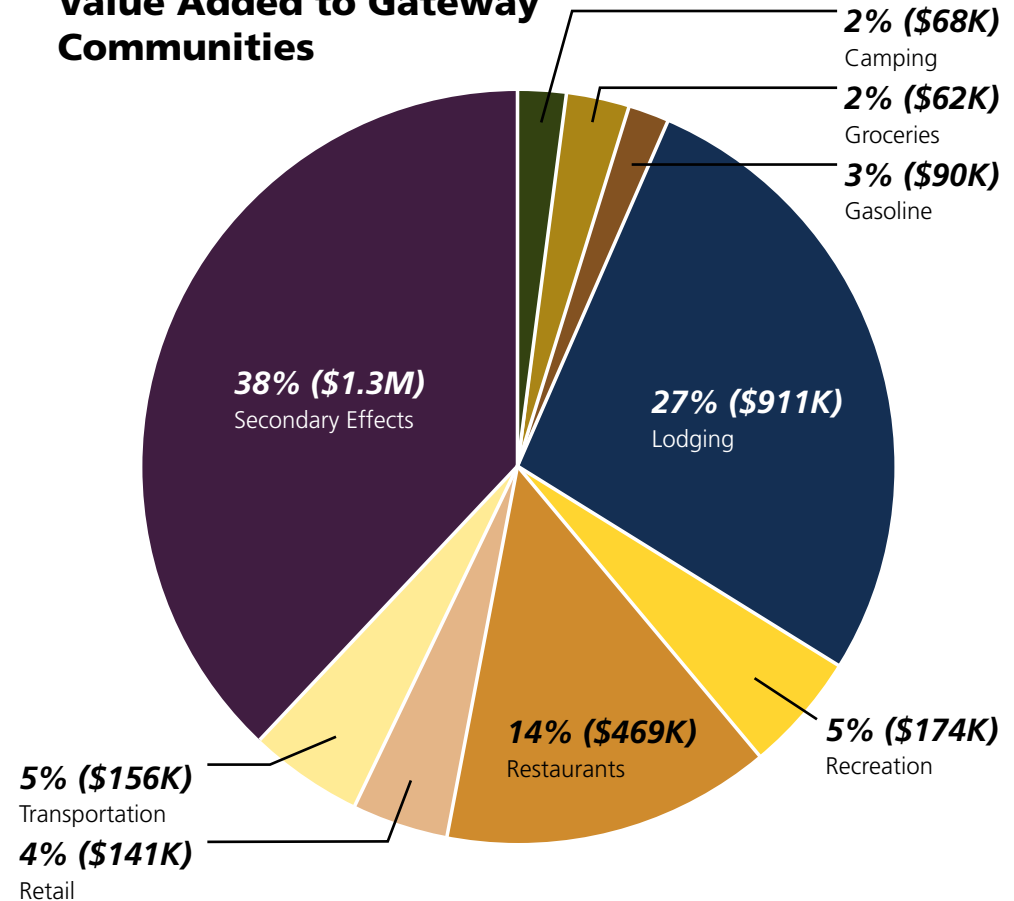


In October, the park hosted the annual site visit of the New Mexico Outdoor Economics Conference | NPS/D. Krueger

Visitor Spending in Gateway Communities



Value Added to Gateway Communities





Indigenous Peoples Burning Network in History Grove | NPS/D. Krueger

Working with Pueblo of Santa Clara

In 2023, Valles Caldera allocated more than \$750,000 to Pueblo of Santa Clara for project work in the park. These funds went toward commissioning the artwork of the park’s first Junior Ranger program booklet and starting the implementation of the Frontcountry Infrastructure Improvements Project. This project will see new gravel parking areas and an automatic backcountry vehicle route gate installed near the Ranger Station, modifications to the Entrance Station area for improved flow and safety, and ADA improvements.

\$768,000 allocated to Santa Clara Pueblo to replace the Entrance Station deck, produce artwork for the Junior Ranger booklet, and construct the Cabin District parking.

By partnering with Santa Clara Pueblo, we improved and maintained roads within the park to reduce road hazards and provide a better visitor experience. Santa Clara Pueblo also assisted with forest-thinning projects by reducing overall fuel loads and making the surrounding forests healthier.



Santa Clara road projects | NPS/J. Allbach

DID YOU KNOW?

Valles Caldera is only 1 of 4 parks that has a signed tribal compact in the entire National Park Service.





Knowledge Exchange

Following our core values of cultural continuity, we met with members from Pueblo of Jemez and Pueblo of San Ildefonso in an effort to learn from them, build relationships, and partner on educational initiatives. Interpretive rangers and volunteers went into the field with Tribal members on two occasions, visited Jemez Pueblo, discussed the history of the Pueblo of San Ildefonso, and discussed partnership opportunities with a former San Ildefonso governor. We began collaboration efforts on social media posts and a traditional stories audio tour.



Chris Toya talking at Sulphur Springs | NPS/C. Lycopulus

In August, Superintendent Jorge Silva-Bañuelos participated in a study tour in Victoria, Australia, to learn how Parks Victoria partners with traditional owners in the management of national parks. After meeting with traditional owners from the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Jorge is motivated to promote similar tribal partnerships at Valles Caldera.



Jorge participating in a ceremony | Parks Victoria

In November, The Nature Conservancy brought approximately 45 members of the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network to Valles Caldera. Park staff toured them around the park and shared with them resource concerns and efforts to mitigate those concerns.

Joint Efforts

Ancestral Lands Conversation Corps and Valles Caldera partnered up to place Kyla Magdalena, Pueblo of Jemez member, with the Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers team for the summer. During that time, she developed astronomy content for an upcoming night sky citizen-science program, helped coordinate the Tribal education field trips with Pueblo of Jemez, and supported visitor services.



Ancestral lands intern Kyla Magdalena | NPS/N. Plants

Resource protection work continued with the Pueblo of Jemez Forestry Division. Thinning operations on rocky slopes in

second-growth, high-density ponderosa pine stands around Banco Bonito reduces the risk of high-severity wildfires, increases ground-level grasses and wildflowers, and reduces inter-tree competition for water, light, and nutrients.



Before thinning and 10 years later | NPS/B. Parmenter



Ranger Nick talking about obsidian | NPS/D. Krueger



Employees at the summer staff appreciation gathering | NPS/L. Ray

Appreciation

Success of the park comes from its workforce, including permanent and seasonal employees and volunteers. The mission of building a new park makes these successes all the more important. This challenge also creates additional stress and issues to overcome. One of these issues is building a workplace culture.

To address this goal, the park’s Strategic Action Team developed a five-year team cohesion focus area within the strategic plan. Each year, the park is focusing on a specific area of team cohesion around which to build a strong culture. In 2022, we started by focusing on celebrating success. This year, we focused on communication. Upcoming years will see us exploring respect, working together, and trust.

The park started by establishing quarterly all-employee appreciation events and adopting the same system as Bandelier National Monument for performance awards. Next, it established recognition and tenure awards, which are announced at the appreciation events.

Building on this foundation, the team built a team cohesion survey to get feedback directly from every employee on a variety of topics. The aim of the survey is to provide an annual check on how the park is doing with building a strong team culture.

\$98k in awards
4 appreciation events
4 safety awards



Safety award winners | NPS/J. Allbach

Wellness

The park's wellness program consists of the annual Pick-a-Park Challenge, use of an Oura ring to monitor sleep and activity levels, an online reference library to stimulate the mind, and time-off incentives.

The Pick-a-Park challenge saw 14 people spend the months of April through October trying to walk, bike, run, or otherwise move a distance equal to or greater than the distance to the park they selected.

The strategic action plan goal was to have 40% of employees participate in the wellness program in some form. In 2023, we had more than 60% participate.

VIPs

We are fortunate to have some amazing volunteers who support our work. This year, we gained seven visitor service volunteers, had three interpretive research volunteers, and saw the Big Tree, wetland restoration, and dendroglyph volunteer efforts continue. Twelve volunteers supported botanical surveys, invasive plant treatment, biomass collection, and forest surveys with 339 hours of service.

Adding to the appreciation goal, the interpretation team held a park field trip and a dinner for their volunteers.



Interpretation volunteers at the September appreciation field trip | NPS/D. Krueger

2023 Additions

Many talented folks joined our ranks, including people from other NPS units as well as people who have never worked for the federal government.

- Jennifer Armstrong Executive Assistant
- Joe Barbieri Seasonal Biological Science Technician
- Ana Casillas-Brownson Botany Crew Lead
- Caitlin Daly Seasonal Interpretive Park Ranger
- Adam Dean Education Technician
- Liam Gorman Seasonal Biological Science Technician
- Anna Grendys Seasonal Hydrology Technician
- Aaron Hernandez Seasonal Maintenance Worker
- Kai Hollenberg Seasonal Biological Science Technician
- Dave Jones Lead Recreation Fee Technician
- Lynda Jones Education Technician
- Corey Lycopulus Education Technician
- Kyla Magdalena Ancestral Lands Intern
- Dave McCray Archaeologist
- Tiphonie McCray Administrative Assistant
- Ron Morse Chief of Facilities
- Sierra Necessary Seasonal Interpretive Park Ranger
- Tyler Obermeit Wildlife Technician
- Hayley O'Keeffe Seasonal Interpretive Park Ranger
- Melanie Portillo Education Technician
- Mahika Rao Seasonal Botanist
- Chris Romo Seasonal Trails Worker
- Kearra Rozhon Structural Fire Intern
- Riley Scaff Seasonal Botanist
- Monte White Archaeologist
- Steve Zanoni Wildlife Biologist



Riley in the field | NPS/M. Wilder

DID YOU KNOW?

For the first team cohesion survey, 27 employees took time to provide valuable insight to make Valles Caldera an amazing place to work.



VIP of the Year

Dr. Bill Sayre received the 2022 National and Intermountain Region George and Helen Hartzog Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service for individual impact at Valles Caldera.

Bill is a superstar whose efforts and expertise have benefited multiple program areas. His many and varied contributions make him an exceptional recipient of the Hartzog awards.



Dr. Bill Sayre | NPS/L. Ray

As a retired educator and geologist, Bill has a profound gift for inspiring the hearts and minds of park visitors. He routinely volunteers ~20 hours per week with our interpretation team to greet and orient visitors, develop programs, and assist with community outreach. During a particularly challenging period of staff turnover this winter and spring, Bill voluntarily changed his schedule to come in on weekends to ensure that

visitors would receive the customer service they expect when visiting an NPS site.

Bill is a key member of the Interpretation, Education, & Volunteer program’s strategic planning team. His contributions, which included serving as the voice of the volunteers, helped chart a positive and inclusive course for interpretation over the next four years. He is an analytical thinker who represents a variety of park stakeholders. Bill is also an advocate for indigenous communities, offering thought-provoking questions and feedback about how we may better incorporate Tribal and Pueblo communities and traditional knowledge and management into our programmatic decisions.

Employees in Action



1 Ana with Girl Scouts, 2 Olivia by a park vehicle, 3 Dave giving a guided tour, 4 Brenda at her computer, 5 Nick with an arrowhead, 6 VIP Kirtan, 7 Mahika in the field, 8 Adam watching the eclipse, 9 Liam in the field, 10 Johnny operating heavy equipment, 11 Kai with a leopard frog, 12 Ben in the field, 13 VIP Gary, 14 VIP Bill, Meg, and Janet at a field education station, 15 Lance grooming ski trails



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Improving Safety Communication

The park has 12 Garmin InReach devices for use by staff traveling into the backcountry. These satellite-based communication devices give staff the ability to text Dispatch in the case of an emergency.





Visitors watching the annular eclipse | NPS/C. Lycopolus

Part of the Community

The goal for 2023 was to host one special event at the park and participate in two community events. We more than doubled that! We kicked off the event line-up in April at the Los Alamos Nature Center’s Earth Day celebration. July found us marching in the Independence Day parade in the Village of Jemez Springs and talking about the power of volcanoes at ScienceFest in Los Alamos. August was back to Los Alamos for Bear Fest.

National Public Lands Day in September brought volunteers to Valles Caldera to clean up our main road corridor along NM-4 and construct the park’s first set of resource-protecting bumper logs to delineate roadways and parking areas.

The park hosted Valles Caldera Fall Fiesta in October. The event achieved record visitation for that week, and visitors were drawn to cultural demonstrators from associated Tribes and Pueblos, learned about the natural and cultural history of the park, explored the park with rangers, and took in the beauty of the park in the fall. The fiesta also included a geology lecture by Dr. Kirt Kempter, an annular eclipse, and an astrophotography workshop. During the annular eclipse, visitors participated in a soundscape community science project while the park recorded changes in stream temperatures and wildlife sounds.

The year’s community events wrapped up in December with our inaugural participation in the highly competitive Parade of Lights in Los Alamos.

21 employees joined the 4th of July parade

789 visitors at the NPS ScienceFest booth

1,206 people celebrated Bear Fest

3,709 visitors enjoyed Fall Fiesta

526 people viewed annular eclipse here

DID YOU KNOW?

The park shared 373 ranger-crafted postings across two social media platforms, which reached 2.4 million content feeds and garnered more than 122,000 reactions.



Planning the Future

Planning continues to play a vital role in standing up Valles Caldera National Preserve as a unit of the National Park Service.

The park worked with Denver Service Center to host two General Management Plan workshops and the first round of open-house meetings based on the preliminary concepts developed for the long-range plan. The open-house meetings took place virtually and in three locations across the region: Española, Bernallilo, and Pueblo of Jemez. These locations were selected in an attempt to bring the park to local communities that are often overshadowed by the larger local communities of Los Alamos, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque.

In addition, the park also participated in being a pilot of the VC Futures project—a partnership project between the national teams of the Business Management Group and Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers. This project mainly explored regional visitor trends and market segments in an effort to better inform the general management planning process. This effort identified that while developed camping options are saturated in the region, a backcountry camping experience would be a unique offering. Work also started on journey maps of different market segments from learning about the park through the park experience to sharing their experience.

Planning was completed for the first major infrastructure of the Front-country Infrastructure Improvements Project: the installation of the automatic backcountry gate in the Cabin District. The park received concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office, worked with Santa Clara Pueblo and Jemez Mountain Electric to determine the electrical needs, and purchased the gate units. The project is slated to resume with installation in spring 2024 before the backcountry vehicle route opens.

Every Kid Outdoors

Fourth-grade students are at the perfect age to get them excited about science, history, and nature. Hence, the Every Kid Outdoors initiative. This nation-wide, multi-agency program was created so fourth graders and their families could discover the wildlife, resources, and history of public lands for free.

Between the spring semester of the 2022-23 school year and the fall semester of the 2023-24 school year, our education rangers have been getting into classrooms and inviting students to get out to their public lands.

The team traveled to 14 schools to share the wonders of Valles Caldera and other public lands and hand out annual Every Kid Outdoors passes to 1,080 students.



Corey talking to students | NPS/G. Farrell

GMP Meetings



Fall Fiesta Scenes



4th of July Parade

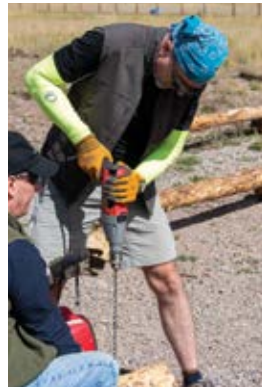


NPLD 2023





Bear Fest



Parade of Lights





Vegetation crew heading into the field | NPS/M. Wilder

Restoring the Ecosystem

The restoration of Valles Caldera's ecosystems continued in 2023 with projects all across the park and addressing different resource impacts.

A major effort to restore hydrologic processes and remove roads from the landscape was a collaboration with the New Mexico Gas Company. The first four miles (~33%) of the gas pipeline access road were reclaimed in 2023, and the remaining eight miles are scheduled for restoration in 2024.

To further protect wildlife, Valles Caldera employees, collaborators, and contractors finished removing 77 miles of old livestock fencing within the park. In 2023, the piles of old fence materials were removed by helicopter and UTV from the backcountry to roadside caches. These piles will be picked up and sent to metal recycling centers in 2024.

Looking to restore wetlands and reintroduce beavers to the park, Valles Caldera started planning several projects. Rio Puerco Alliance/Keystone Restoration Ecology will initiate wetland restoration projects in eastern Valle San Antonio, Valle Santa Rosa, and Valle Toledo. Rio Grande Return will do stream stabilization and willow planting along the western San Antonio Creek, including Beaver

Dam Analogs—small in-stream structures designed to raise water tables and enhance riparian wetlands. In addition, Rio Grande Return and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish are partnering to release beavers back into Jaramillo Creek in 2024.

Forests & Fire

Efforts to improve the ecological health of the park's forests continued in 2023. Thinning projects were undertaken with both Pueblo of Jemez and Pueblo of Santa Clara. Work continued in Banco Bonito by the Pueblo of Jemez Forestry Division. Meanwhile, on Cerro Piñon, the Pueblo of Santa Clara Forestry Division completed their thinning work. The cut-and-pile operations reduced understory density of young trees to reduce risk of stand-replacement wildfires.

To date, nearly 10,000 acres of forest have been thinned in the last 15 years, with about 1,000 acres left to thin. In 2024, the final year of funding, \$400,000 will go toward thinning operations, field monitoring of weather, stream flow, water quality, vegetation, fuel loads, and wildlife throughout the southwestern Jemez Mountains. In addition, LiDAR (Light Distance and Ranging) data and ground-based forest assessment will provide a post-program



Moving old fencing material out of the backcountry | NPS

assessment of forest and soil conditions and wildfire-risk analysis.

Meanwhile, fire remained relatively quiet in Valles Caldera. A lightning strike in the San Pedro Parks Wilderness caused the Black Feather Fire to burn 2,198 acres northwest of the park in August, but the fire never approached the park boundary. Within the park, there were 12 reported fires started by lightning strikes.

None of the fires spread beyond the initial strike area, which was typically a tree. Pueblo Parks Fire responded to each fire and monitored them.

In July, team members from Pueblo Parks Fire and Valles Caldera removed hazard trees from the Cabin District and along New Mexico State Route 4.



Clearing the downed tree on NM-4 | NPS

The winter post-thinning pile burning operations started in December. By the end of the month, 102 acres of piles had been burned on South Mountain.

Pueblo Parks Fire continued work on the park’s Fire Management Plan, with the goal of having the plan completed and approved in 2024.



Conducting winter pile burns | NPS

Planning also kicked off for thinning the forest in the “Triangle Unit” situated between Cerro Piñon and Cerro Del Medio and in Cajete Canyon. Both projects are expected to start in 2024.

Cultural

The Cultural Resources team developed a programmatic agreement with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for cultural resources compliance of upcoming infrastructure improvements in the Cabin District and around the Entrance Station. The team also assessed more than 30 park projects for potential cultural resource impacts.

In the field, the team oversaw 928 acres of archaeological survey by three contractors, surveyed 55 acres of the Sulphur Springs area for cultural



UNM’s Office of Contract Archaeology | NPS/N. Jarman

resources, and surveyed an additional 11.1 acres around the “Union Building.” The contracted survey work was completed for restoration and infrastructure projects. The Sulphur Springs survey facilitated the removal of late-20th-century trash: vehicles, tires, and even an entire doublewide trailer. This survey also was the first scientific documentation of 104 historic features. The “Union Building” survey allowed for the removal of the 1970s-era building, which was once used for geothermal exploration.



Cultural Resources team in the field | NPS/N. Jarman

Trespass Cattle

Livestock illegally entering the park continues to be a management issue. The park was threatened with litigation, and discussions were held at the national level and with the USDA Forest Service in an effort to address this issue.

Adding to the boundary fence work in previous years, the park performed these actions:

- Implemented a new trespass livestock plan
- Improved trespass livestock documenting and identification through use of all park employees' help, a Resource Protection volunteer, and a research permit issued to Western Watersheds Project
- Continued to report all trespass livestock to the USDA Forest Service and livestock owners
- Issued 5 certified letters notifying owners of the trespass
- Planned to implement a virtual fence around the park and requested \$140,000 of NPS funds
- Developed a contract for range rider services in 2024

These efforts produced these results:

497 *observed trespass cattle*

35% *reduction from 2022*

9 *different cattle owners notified*

7 *-day average from detection to removal*



Trespass cattle | NPS

Plants

The vegetation team was hard at work on a variety of projects. They conducting monitoring at 131 plots across the park and the adjacent Santa Fe National Forest of aspen and forest regeneration, wetland restoration, rangeland and range biomass, and Tribal plant gathering. They completed compliance surveys at Sulphur Springs, the “Union Building,” the upcoming interim parking in the Cabin District, and Garita Trail.

The team provided assistance to researchers looking for new species of aphids, ungulate browsing effects to large mammals, plants in various microclimates, pollinator host plants, and Mexican spotted owl habitats. We hosted SciGirls girl scouts in monitoring aspen dendroglphs in an effort to connect girls with women in STEM.

The team secured funding for the Southwest Seed Partnership to hire a seed collection crew from the Institute for Applied Ecology. The crew collected

seeds of five species for producing local native seeds.

Regarding invasive plants, treatments were conducted on 13.6 acres of mullein, ox-eye daisy, cheatgrass, musk thistle, bull thistle, Canada thistle, and white horehound.

The team worked on reports on hazard trees, wetland-restoration monitoring, burn-area rehabilitation, invasive plants, trail surveys, and range monitoring. The poster “Understory vegetation response to thinning and prescribed fire in a high elevation mixed-conifer forest, New Mexico USA” was presented at the Ecological Society of America conference in Portland, Oregon.



Collecting seed | NPS/S. Hall



Wildlife

The Wildlife team conducted surveys for Jemez Mountains salamander, frogs, Mexican spotted owls, native and nonnative fish species, and insects. Stream enclosures were inspected at ten sites. Back in the lab, insects from 1,500 pitfall trap jars were processed, with identification and pinning still ongoing.

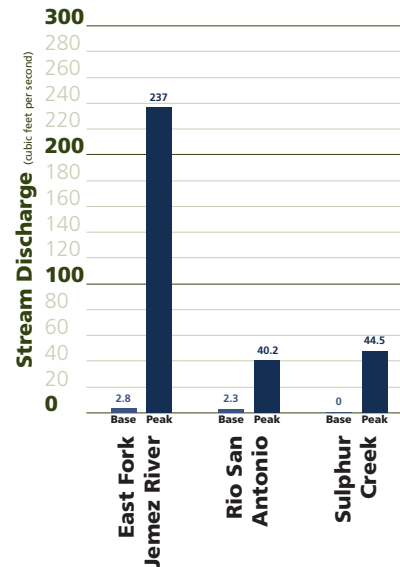
The team also provided assistance on research projects on large mammals and salamander prey base, helped with fence removal, and assisted at educational events at PEEC’s Bear Fest and the park’s Fall Fiesta. The team received support by HawksAloft for Mexican spotted owl surveys (one male detected) and Bandelier’s Scientists-in-Parks for New Mexico meadow jumping mouse surveys.

Water

The hydrology team monitored stream discharge at twelve sites in the park and water quality at four park sites and four USDA Forest Service sites. The team worked on stream cross-sections throughout Valles Caldera to better define geomorphological changes over the last 20 years and supported New Mexico Gas Company on reclaiming four miles of pipeline road.

The team initiated compliance and planning on two new wetland-restoration projects and initiated a grant with the USGS on a large-scale water chemistry study within the Sulphur Creek drainage. Both projects are scheduled for 2024. The team will continue to support New Mexico Gas Company as it reclaims an additional nine miles of pipeline road in 2024.

2023 Stream Flow



L to R: *P. parryi*, *M. odontoloma*, & *P. occidentale* | NPS/B. Stout



“Asha” | Courtesy B. Ramsay

Asha: A Brief Return

For 29 days, from November 11 to December 9, Valles Caldera was home to Mexican wolf F2754, known informally as Asha. She wandered up from the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area in west-central New Mexico and east-central Arizona.

Though the park welcomed Asha, the State of New Mexico recaptured her outside the park near Coyote, New Mexico.


The last documented Mexican wolf sighting in Valles Caldera was in 1932, when ranch hand John Davenport shot it as part of a larger predator extermination program being pushed by the Predatory Animal and Rodent Control Service.

To help people learn about and appreciate this endangered species, the park set up a [Mexican wolf web page](#).



DID YOU KNOW?

Three new plant species—*Pedicularis parryi* (Parry’s Alpine Lousewort), *Micranthes odontoloma* (Brook Saxifrage), and *Polemonium occidentale* (Western Jacob’s Ladder)—were identified in the park in 2023.



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 purposes of education, scientific research, public enjoyment and use, and cultural continuity.