

GAO  
Accountability • Integrity • Reliability

# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-84](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

In creating the Valles Caldera National Preserve from a unique parcel of land in north-central New Mexico, and by creating the Valles Caldera Trust as a wholly owned government corporation to manage the preserve, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2000 established a 20-year public-private experiment to operate the preserve without continued federal funding. The Trust is charged with achieving a number of goals, including becoming financially self-sustaining by the end of fiscal year 2015.

This report, GAO's second and last mandated by the Preservation Act, examines (1) the Trust's progress since 2000; (2) the extent to which the Trust has fulfilled certain of its obligations as a government corporation; and (3) the challenges the Trust faces to achieve the Preservation Act's goals. GAO analyzed documents, financial records, and other Trust information and interviewed current and former members of the Trust's Board and staff, as well as representatives of local interest groups and stakeholders.

## What GAO Recommends

To further the Trust's efforts to become financially self-sustaining, GAO recommends that the Trust work with relevant congressional committees to seek legislative remedies, as appropriate, for the legal challenges it faces. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Trust generally agreed with GAO's findings and conclusions but did not comment on the recommendation.

View [GAO-10-84](#) or [key components](#).  
For more information, contact Robin M. Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841 or [nazzaror@gao.gov](mailto:nazzaror@gao.gov).

## VALLES CALDERA

### The Trust Has Made Progress but Faces Significant Challenges to Achieve Goals of the Preservation Act

#### What GAO Found

The Trust has taken steps to establish and implement a number of programs and activities to achieve the goals of the Preservation Act. It has rehabilitated roads, buildings, fences, and other infrastructure; created a science program; experimented with a variety of grazing options; taken steps to manage its forests; expanded recreational opportunities; and taken its first steps toward becoming financially self-sustaining. Nevertheless, it is at least 5 years behind the schedule it set for itself in 2004. According to Trust officials, a number of factors—including high turnover among Board members and key staff and cultural and natural resources and infrastructure that were not as healthy or robust as originally believed—have delayed its progress.

Through fiscal year 2009, the Trust had yet to develop and put in place several key elements of an effective management control program for a government corporation. Specifically, the Trust lacked a strategic plan and annual performance plans, and it had not systematically monitored or reported on its progress—elements called for by the Government Performance and Results Act and recommended by GAO in its first report in 2005. The Trust's financial management has also been weak. Consequently, it has been difficult for Congress and the public to understand the Trust's goals and objectives, annual plans and performance, or progress.

According to current Trust officials, becoming financially self-sustaining, particularly by the end of fiscal year 2015 when federal appropriations are due to expire, is the Trust's biggest challenge. Most of the Trust's other challenges follow from this one, including identifying, developing, or expanding revenue-generating activities that would enable the Trust to raise sufficient funds; obtaining funds for major capital investments; and addressing a number of legal constraints—such as its authority to enter into long-term leases or acquire property—which potentially limit its ability to attract long-term businesses that could generate revenues. Nevertheless, the Trust is continuing to explore opportunities for becoming financially self-sustaining.

Valle Grande from Redondo Peak, the Highest Point in Valles Caldera National Preserve



Source: GAO.