



KARL MOFFATT/FOR THE JOURNAL

An angler works San Antonio Creek in Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Ready & waiting

Valles Caldera backcountry open again after road repairs

BY KARL MOFFATT
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The Valles Caldera National Preserve's backcountry is again open to motorists this summer, providing free access to prime fishing, hiking and other outdoor activities.

"The public enjoys the convenience of driving into the preserve," says Kimberly DeVall, chief of interpretation and education for the National Park Service's preserve in the Jemez Mountains. "And we're happy to be able to provide them that opportunity so they can enjoy all the preserve has to offer."

The backcountry normally opens by mid-May, but that was delayed until just recently this season due to road repairs, DeVall says.

The preserve issues up to 35 backcountry motor vehicle permits daily to motorists visiting the 89,000-acre preserve. The permits are issued first come, first served at no cost. The preserve is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. No permits will be issued after 3:30 p.m., and all motorists must check out by 5:30 p.m. No camping is available on the preserve.

DeVall says the preserve rarely runs out of permits during the week, but on the weekends they tend to go quickly.

Visitors will find 26 miles of dirt and gravel roads to travel within the vast backcountry, which features plenty of hiking and biking trails, and great fishing on San Antonio and Jaramillo Creeks. No pets are allowed in the backcountry.

A recent visit to the preserve during the week revealed only a few vehicles in the backcountry, and most of them belonged to anglers. Motorists must remain on established roads and park only in designated areas. Portable toilets are provided.

The two backcountry creeks flow through meadows and are noted for their deep undercut banks where trout can hide. A two-fish bag limit is in effect on the preserve, a valid state



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The San Antonio Creek runs through the meadow in front of the San Antonio Cabin in a scenic spot where visitors will find picnic tables and fishing opportunities.

license is required, and only artificial flies and lures with single, barbless hooks are permitted. Waders are not needed, but a good hat, long sleeves, and plenty of sunscreen and bug repellent is recommended. Fishing supplies and groceries can be purchased in nearby La Cueva.

Some visitors to the preserve may enjoy just driving into the backcountry for some sightseeing and a picnic. San Antonio Cabin is a scenic spot with picnic tables available for use; visitors are reminded to clean up after themselves.

The preserve also is home to many wildlife species, including elk, bears, coyotes, eagles and turkeys, and the best viewing opportunities are in the mornings and evenings.

The preserve is off N.M. 4 between Jemez Springs and Los Alamos. For more information about Valles Caldera National Preserve, visit nps.gov/vall or call 575-829-4100.

Karl Moffatt is a longtime New Mexico journalist and avid outdoorsman who posts regularly on his blog at www.outdoorsnm.com.