

Carson National Forest - Valle Vidal Unit



The Valle Vidal (which is Spanish for "Valley of Life") is a 101,794 acre area on the Questa Ranger District of the Carson National Forest in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It used to be part of the Maxwell Land Grant until purchased by William Bartlett in 1902. Part of the Vermejo Park Ranch, Valle Vidal became a hunting and fishing preserve for wealthy people and celebrities. In 1973, the Vermejo Park Ranch was sold to the Vermejo Park Corporation, a subsidiary of the Pennzoil Company. In 1982, Pennzoil donated the Valle Vidal portion of the ranch to the American public and it became part of the Carson National Forest.

Valle Vidal boasts spectacular scenery plus timber, minerals, and grazing land. It is being managed to enhance its most important feature, wildlife, which includes a trophy elk herd of up to 2,000 head, mule deer, Merriam's turkey, black bear, mountain lion, and numerous varieties of birds and fish. Elevations in the Valle Vidal range from 7,700 to 12,554 feet. The land generally increases in elevation from east to west, culminating in Little Costilla Mountain which rises above timberline.

At the heart of Valle Vidal is the Big Valle. It is comprised of 3,800 acres of extensive rolling grass-covered meadows surrounded by conifer and quaking aspen at an elevation of about 9,500 feet.

The Forest Service and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish have implemented special hunting and fishing seasons and bag limits in the Valle Vidal. In addition to regular hunting and fishing licenses, Habitat Improvement Stamps are required.

Access:

Road access from the west is via the community of Costilla, NM. Follow State Highway 522 into Costilla and turn east onto State Highway 196. Continue east onto Forest Road 1950 which goes through the Valle Vidal. Road access from the east is from the town of Cimarron, NM. From Cimarron, travel 5 miles east on U.S. Highway 64 and turn onto the signed Valle Vidal gravel road. Travel north approximately 20 miles to the east entrance of the Valle Vidal.

Camping/Hiking in the Valle Vidal:



The Valle Vidal has two campgrounds and numerous parking areas for those heading into the backcountry. Cimarron Campground sits at 9,400 ft. and is 1 mile uphill on Forest Road 1910. It has 36 campsites for tents and trailers, tables, fire places, toilets, horse facilities, and drinking water. It can accommodate a trailer 32' and under.

The McCrystal Campground sits at 8,100 ft. and is 10 miles past Cimarron Campground on FR 1950. It has

60 campsites for tents and trailers, tables, fire places, toilets, and horse facilities. There is no drinking water at this site. It can also accommodate a trailer 32' and under.

Dispersed camping is allowed as long as you backpack at least a quarter mile off of a forest road. Please park in a designated parking area which are located throughout the Valle Vidal. We also ask to set your camp 200 feet away from any trail or stream.

There are no designated hiking trails in the Valle Vidal. There are user-made trails that you may use.

Fishing:



The headwaters of Ponil Creek and Comanche Creek are in Valle Vidal. There are trout streams throughout the unit that are open to fishing July 1-December 31 during daylight hours from 30 minutes before sunrise until sunset. There are also several fishing ponds, including one set aside solely for children. Use only artificial flies or lures with single barbless hooks.

Fishing is catch and release only. All trout must be returned immediately to the water where taken, except in the Shuree Ponds.

Shuree Ponds:

Special trout water. Open to fishing July 1-December 31 during daylight hours from 30 minutes before sunrise until sunset. One pond is reserved for anglers under 12 years of age. Boats must be non-motorized. You may keep the fish from these ponds.

Rio Costilla:

Special trout water. If you are fishing outside of the Valle Vidal boundaries on the west side of the unit, please keep in mind that camping is allowed in designated areas only with permission from the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association.

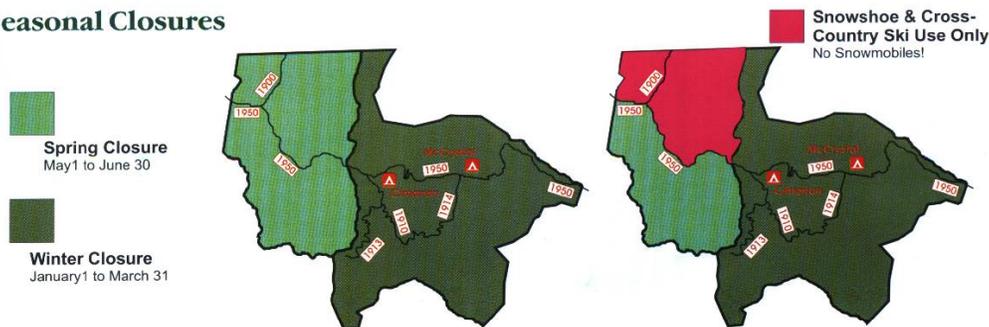
Seasonal Closures

Two seasonal closures, one winter and one spring, have been implemented on the Valle Vidal for the protection of wildlife populations.

Winter Closure: January 1 to March 31, East Side

Winter is the time when most species, including elk, suffer physical hardship. High amounts of energy are expended to maintain body heat at a time when forage is neither as abundant nor as nutritious as in other seasons. Protection from freezing wind and snow is also a key survival element. Elk spend the winter in areas where forage and cover available. Disturbances force them to flee to less desirable areas where the stressed animals are more vulnerable to disease, predation and exposure.

Seasonal Closures



Spring Closure: May 1 to June 30, West Side

When Calving time comes, usually in May and June, elk cows seek areas that have suitable cover and forage. The cow and calf will remain in an area for about 10 days after birth, or until the calf is strong enough to follow the cow to higher country. Disturbances could cause the cow to abort or to abandon her calf. Forcing a cow elk to a less than adequate site for birthing could result in a weakened calf with less chance for survival.



When there is a closure on either side of the unit, you may drive through the whole unit. You cannot get out and hike on the side where the closure is in effect.



Winter Attractions and Considerations

Each winter, from January 1 to March 31, the entire east side of the Valle Vidal is closed to all off road activities for the protection of wildlife populations. The entire west side of the Valle Vidal is open to cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. On the west side of the Valle Vidal, snowmobiles are only allowed south of Forest Road 1950. Snowmobile access is available from the southwest side via Mallette and Cabresto Canyons though the Midnight area to Chuck Wagon Canyon.

Forest roads are not plowed. During winter and early spring, difficult travel conditions on Forest Road 1950 may occur due to deep snow depths, wind, and cold temperatures. Always be prepared for poor weather conditions as there is extremely limited cell phone service in the Valle Vidal.

The Valle Vidal Unit offers a wide range of outstanding winter fun. A trip to the Valle Vidal takes all day. If you are snowmobiling bring extra gas. Due to the distance and remoteness, we recommend the Valle Vidal trip to those with experience or those having the assistance of a guide.

