

Justin S. Greene
Commissioner, District 1

Anna Hansen
Commissioner, District 2

Camilla Bustamante
Commissioner, District 3



Anna T. Hamilton
Commissioner, District 4

Hank Hughes
Commissioner, District 5

Gregory S. Shaffer
County Manager

December 9, 2024

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary,
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C, 20240

Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary,
U. S. Department of Agriculture
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington D.C. 20240

Subject: Requesting Designation of the Caja Del Rio as a National Monument

Dear President Biden, Honorable Secretary Haaland, and Honorable Secretary Vilsack,

The Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners is proud to join Tribal, traditional Hispano communities, non-profit organizations, and local governments to urgently request that you use the Antiquities Act to designate roughly 106,000 acres, currently managed by the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service), as the Caja del Rio National Monument (National Monument). On multiple occasions, the Board of County Commissioners have passed resolutions supporting the preservation and protection of the Caja del Rio (e.g., Resolution No. 2005-76, Resolution No. 2019-144, and Resolution No. 2022-030). The City of Santa Fe, San Miguel County, the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, and the All-Pueblo Council of Governors have adopted resolutions declaring the Caja del Rio as a cultural, historical, archeological, and ecological landscape in need of protection.

U. S. House Resolution 8262 / U.S Senate Bill 4271 introduced in May 2024, have yet to reach the floor for congressional action to protect traditional uses of these public lands. Implementation and enforcement of other existing legislation has been ineffective to date.

The purpose of this National Monument would be to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, through cooperative and collaborative management with surrounding cities and counties, Traditional Historic Communities, culturally affiliated Tribes, federal agencies, and their existing permittees; the ecological, scenic, wildlife, recreational, cultural, historical, natural, and educational resources of the Monument. The Caja del Rio has been the backbone of life in northern New Mexico for time immemorial, supporting Tribal and traditional Hispano communities, nurturing vibrant wildlife and biodiversity. The time is now to protect this valuable and stunning landscape.

For the reasons stated below, the Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners urge you to use your power under the Antiquities Act to designate the Caja del Rio as a National Monument.

1. Protecting and Preserving the Caja del Rio's Ecological Uniqueness

The proposed Caja del Rio National Monument would protect a unique ecosystem, which plays an important role in our nation's larger goals to address the climate and biodiversity crisis. The diverse habitats in the Caja del Rio range from upper Sonoran to alpine environment, making it an exceptional home for many different plants and animals.

Ponderosa, piñon and junipers trees serve as the canopy while the Caja del Rio's bosques are filled with cottonwoods. Scenic canyons plunge into the Rio Grande and the Santa Fe River. The land is marked with cinder cones and basalt escarpments abundant with petroglyphs and petrographs.

The Caja del Rio is one of the most ecologically diverse wildlife corridors in New Mexico. Animals living in the area include mountain lions, mule deer, burrowing owls, bobcats, black bears, elk, jackrabbits, porcupines, and the Gunnison's prairie dog, which conservation groups are advocating to be listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. The area is also home to golden and bald eagles as well as several species of lizards and snakes, such as the desert kingsnake, and a herd of wild mustangs (which have caused the area to be federally designated as a Wild Horse Territory).



From <https://www.protectcajadelrio.com/>

2. The Rich Culture and History of the Caja del Rio

The Caja del Rio is home to ancestral Native American and Hispano sites, and its sacred landscape is known for its countless petroglyphs, petrographs, and artifacts. Prehistoric Pueblos built dozens of village sites across the Caja del Rio. It remains a place of spiritual significance for the residents of many of New Mexico's traditional communities which include nearby pueblos, such as Cochiti, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, San Felipe, Kewa (Santo Domingo), and Jemez Pueblos, and the traditional villages of La Bajada, Cañón, La Cienega, La Cieneguilla, Agua Fria and Jacona. Even today, Pueblos and Traditional Communities use this area for religious activities, ceremonies, and gatherings. The proposed Caja del Rio National Monument will protect the homelands of Tribal and Traditional Hispano communities, and important cultural features, such as trail systems, sacred sites, petroglyphs,

and petroglyphs. The All-Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG), on November 29, 2021, passed a resolution recognizing the Caja del Rio Plateau as a traditional Puebloan landscape, and supporting its long-term preservation. The resolution also addresses the history of inadequate consultation between the federal government and tribes and commits APCG to working with the Department of the Interior and other key stakeholders to ensure the landscape's conservation.

Historically, European travelers also relied on the plateau's pathways as an important transportation and trade route. The Viceroyalty of New Spain founded Santa Fe in 1610. It is likely that use of the Caja del Rio for the grazing of domesticated livestock began during the Coronado Expeditions, approximately 70 years prior. Traditional Historic Communities like La Bajada, Agua Fria, Jacona, Tesuque, Cañón, La Cienega, La Cieneguilla, and many more have relied on these common lands (Ejido) for hunting, grazing, foraging, firewood collection, religious pilgrimage and spiritual sustenance.

Permanently protecting these sacred lands will not only honor long-standing efforts to protect these lands from industrial development, but also will ensure current and future generations can continue practicing time honored traditions of subsistence and stewardship in harmony with the landscape.



From <https://www.protectcajadelrio.com/>

3. Protecting and Preserving the Caja del Rio as a National Resource

In addition to its cultural and ecological importance, the Caja del Rio provides numerous opportunities for residents and visitors alike. National monument designations can help local communities preserve traditional ways of life, sustain local employment opportunities, and diversify their economy to meet continued growth in New Mexico.

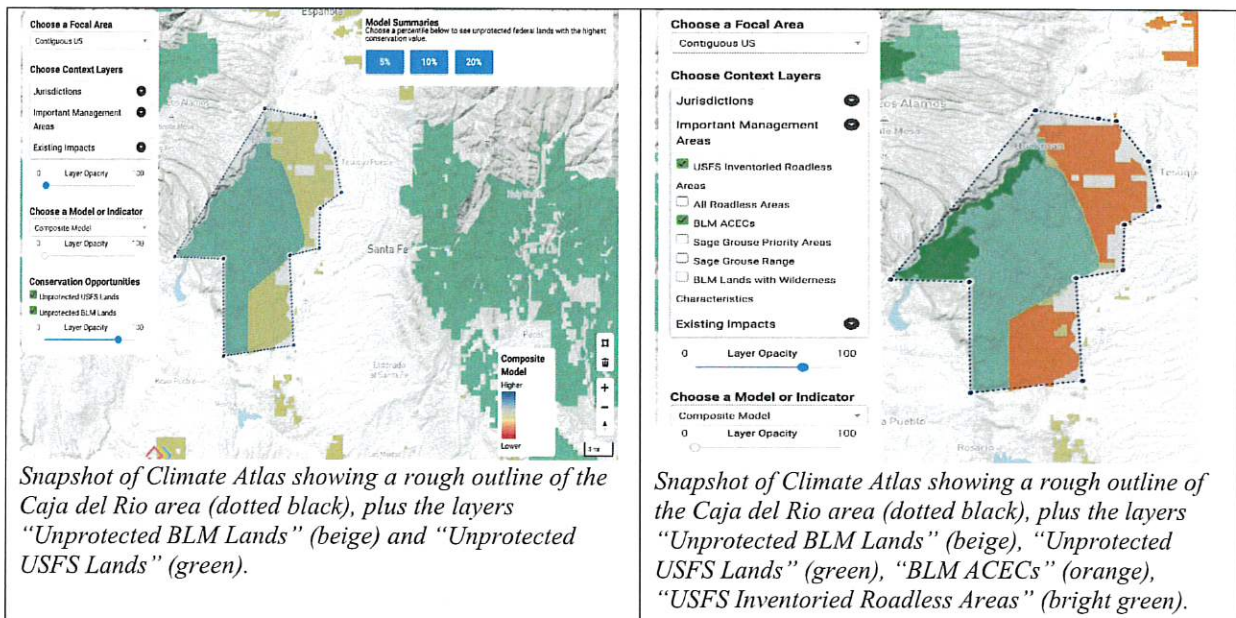
From hiking and wildlife viewing to spiritual and cultural experiences, this area offers a unique and irreplaceable natural landscape that deserves to be protected. Today, the area's trails are used recreationally by mountain bikers and horse riders, and Caja del Rio Canyon (known locally as Diablo Canyon) is a popular rock-climbing area. According to the book *Caja del Rio, Santa Fe, New Mexico: Equestrian, Riding and Hiking Trails, Santa Fe National Forest* by Deirdre C. Monroe (2006), the

Caja has around 100 miles of mapped trails. Some of the more notable trails include Chino Mesa Trail, Montoso Peak Trail, Frijoles Canyon Overlook, Sagebrush Flats Trail, Soda Springs Trail, Caja del Rio/Diablo Canyon Trail, Twin Hills Loop, Soda Springs Loop. The proposed Rio Grande Trail could also extend north of Bernalillo and pass along the base of the Caja del Rio. The proposed Caja del Rio National Monument could ensure equitable access to nature for local communities. Permanently protecting these areas would ensure that the public has access to these resources in a responsible manner.

4. The Caja del Rio Needs More Protection.

The Caja del Rio contains several important federal management areas, including two BLM ACECs (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern): La Cienega and Santa Fe Ranch. ACECs are areas that require special management attention to protect important natural, scenic, or cultural resources. Significant portions of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail as described in Public Law 106-307 are located here. The region also includes a Forest Service Inventoried Roadless Area: Arroyo Montroso. Roadless areas are undeveloped areas that meet the qualifications of wilderness under the U.S. Wilderness Act. The traditional communities of the Caja del Rio have stewarded the rangelands of the plateau for local food production from the first introduction of livestock, through implementation of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, to present day. Protection of the Caja del Rio would be consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and current Forest Service and BLM policy. This local community stewardship should continue in perpetuity. Los Alamos National Laboratory borders this sacred landscape to the west. Any further degradation of the environment around LANL must be halted.

According to Climate Atlas, due to its high ecological stability and climate resilience, the Caja del Rio is among the top 20% of all unprotected BLM and Forest Service lands with the highest conservation value in the contiguous United States. The Caja del Rio deserves more protection.



5. Threats to the Caja del Rio

Planned development and mismanaged recreation have put the public lands within the Caja del Rio at risk. It is time to make sure this extraordinary high desert ecosystem has the resources necessary to provide present and future generations the opportunity to experience this spectacular landscape.

The Caja del Rio is under threat from plans for a new 14-mile transmission line Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) electrical line that will cut through the very center of the area, as well as a highly controversial proposed new highway leading to LANL, which could involve even more utility lines and a massive bridge, and that is opposed by many in the community. This expansive new infrastructure would permanently fragment habitats and drastically alter the natural, historical, and cultural landscape of this unprotected area. The Tesuque Pueblo consider this development significantly detrimental to their survival. The area also faces ongoing threats from illegal dumping, wildlife poaching, livestock rustling, unregulated shooting, off-road misuse, and vandalism of sacred sites.

6. Conclusion

In summary, we are asking that the President exercise executive power under the Antiquities Act to designate this treasured landscape as a National Monument, with all traditional uses perpetuated, and co-stewardship practiced by the traditional communities of the Caja del Rio (Tesuque Pueblo has already signed a contract for co-stewardship agreement). Designating the Caja del Rio as a National Monument will allow the American people to preserve Northern New Mexico's unique biodiversity; and honor the cultural, historical, natural, and spiritual connections residents have with these lands. There are many threats to this area, and it deserves your utmost protection.

We expect that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) process would go quickly and would move forward and result in a Finding of No Significant Impact. Your administration has 40+ days left; President Obama created several monuments during his transition time. We believe President Biden can do this also. Please protect our Mother Earth now.

We thank you for considering the designation of Caja del Rio National Monument and the chance to protect New Mexico's heritage for future generations. At a time when climate change and development threaten the country's remaining natural treasures, we must do more to protect and preserve the lands that connect so many Americans to our common heritage and help us mitigate the effects of climate change. Thank you for your attention to this urgent request to designate the Caja del Rio National Monument. We look forward to your positive response.

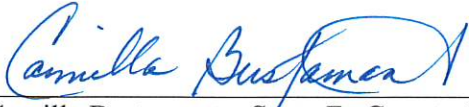
Respectfully,



Hank Hughes, Chair
Board of County Commissioners for Santa Fe County



Anna C. Hansen, Santa Fe County Commissioner, District 2



Camilla Bustamante, Santa Fe County Commissioner, District 3

This letter has been sent to:

Senator Martin Heinrich
Senator Ben Ray Lujan
Representatives Teresa Leger Fernandez, Melanie Stansbury, and Gabriel Vasquez
Governor Michele Lujan Grisham
Lt. Governor Howie Morales
Speaker of the House of Representatives of New Mexico Javier Martinez
Leader of the New Mexico Senate Peter Wirth
Chairman, All Pueblo Council of Governors
Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council
Governor of Acoma Pueblo
Governor of Cochiti Pueblo
Governor of Isleta Pueblo
Governor of Jemez Pueblo
Governor of Santo Domingo Pueblo
Governor of Laguna Pueblo
Governor of Nambe Pueblo
Governor of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo
Governor of Picuris Pueblo
Governor of Pojoaque Pueblo
Governor of San Felipe Pueblo
Governor of San Ildefonso Pueblo
Governor of Sandia Pueblo
Governor of Santa Ana Pueblo
Governor of Santa Clara Pueblo
Governor of Tesuque Pueblo
Governor of Taos Pueblo
Governor of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
Governor of Zia Pueblo
Governor of Zuni Pueblo
President of the Jicarilla Apache Nation
President of the Mescalero Apache
President of the Navajo Nation