

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF SANTA FE COUNTY**

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-830

Introduced by:
Commissioner Anna Hansen and Commissioner Rudy Garcia

**A RESOLUTION
SUPPORTING THE PERMANENT PRESERVATION OF THE CAJA DEL RIO
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE AREA**

WHEREAS, Santa Fe County has an incredible array of public lands that encompass a stunning wealth of landscapes that are enjoyed by residents and non-residents alike. The national public lands model is a remarkable asset for both Santa Fe County and New Mexico; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is located on 106,883 acres of the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) and U.S. Forest Service (“USFS”) public lands in north-central New Mexico and is considered one of America’s most iconic landscapes and an area of profound cultural, historical, archeological, and ecological significance; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is a landscape of dramatic topography whose geological processes stem from the Rio Grande rift and whose boundaries stretch from Santa Fe County’s northwestern boundary of the Rio Grande to the southern and western boundaries of the La Bajada Escarpment, Santa Fe River, and Cañada Ancha; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio contains two dynamic watersheds – the Santa Fe River Canyon and the Rio Grande corridor from Buckman to Cochiti Lake – and both watersheds have critical cultural, hydrological, ecological, agricultural, and economic significance; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is one of the most remarkable natural landscapes in the American Southwest with cactus forests, birds ranging from burrowing owls to bald eagles, herds of deer and elk, and black bears and cougars; and

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WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio has been a critical habitat to wildlife for millennia and a wide variety of bird and animal species continue to use the area as a migratory corridor, breeding grounds and an area of relocation during wildfires and changing climates; and

WHEREAS, in connecting various mountain ranges and wildlife habitats, the Caja del Rio acts as a lynchpin of wildlife connectivity and is essential for maintaining wildlife movement throughout the Upper Rio Grande; and

WHEREAS, preserving the Caja del Rio's historic and cultural context is critical for sustaining Santa Fe County's rich and diverse cultures, traditions, heritage, and the vibrant community we are blessed to collectively share; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio plateau has been inhabited by Native and Indigenous communities since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is recognized by various Pueblos' traditional leadership as a significant region of cultural properties where Pueblo ancestors built housing structures, ceremonial kivas, roads, irrigation infrastructure, petroglyphs, and other cultural resources; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio contains a dense concentration of thousands of sacred sites, structures, petroglyphs, irrigation systems, and other cultural resources; and

WHEREAS, the Pueblos maintain an ongoing connection and use of the Caja del Rio landscape and its cultural resources, and sacred sites through story, song, pilgrimage, and prayer, and preserving the landscape's historic and cultural context is critical for ongoing cultural religious access and use; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio landscape has a revelatory, sacred, and communal Pueblo connection. This communal connection brings memory back to be a conduit of self-understanding that we are all one earth people who with the four legged, winged, finned, pollinators and aquatic micro invertebrates are together connected as one in the sacred web of

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life. This communal connection then also extends to the traditional local Hispanic community and the broader Santa Fe community who also see the landscape as spiritual and sacred; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio also represents the key landscape demarcation between what the Spanish colonial world termed the Rio Abajo and Rio Arriba regions of New Mexico and where the people of Santa Fe County's Traditional Hispano villages maintain deep ties and living roots in the Caja del Rio cultural landscape as "Ejido" (communal) through perpetuation and practice of traditional uses of flora and fauna and by pilgrimage and prayer; and

WHEREAS, Santa Fe County's Caja del Rio Hispano communities, including Jacona, Agua Fria, La Cieneguilla, La Cienega, and La Bajada, remain deeply connected to the Caja del Rio and act as living repositories of traditional ecological and cultural knowledge of the area; and

WHEREAS, Santa Fe County recognizes the importance of traditional livestock production on the Caja del Rio plateau and supports continued responsible range management as has been conducted through the cooperation of cattle growers and livestock permittees, traditional merced and acequia communities as political subdivisions of New Mexico, and federal agencies; and

WHEREAS, portions of the Caja del Rio have tremendous potential for sustainable outdoor recreation and to create jobs and enhance local economies so long as these regulated activities do not adversely impact the cultural, hydrological, and ecological resources of the landscape. Santa Fe County recognizes the importance of multi-use recreational access and has designated Santa Fe County as a regional and international equestrian destination that has a substantial economic impact to the County (Resolution 2015-38); and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is still used by the Pueblo Nations and traditional Hispano communities to exercise traditional land use values including: hunting, fishing, grazing, wood gathering, piñon harvesting, herb and plant gathering, sacred pilgrimage, and the historic community use of the land in other traditional ways; and

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WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio also contains a major and historically significant travel corridor along the National Historic Trail of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, an important trade route that ran from Mexico City to the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico, from 1598 to 1881; and

WHEREAS, various petroglyphs and archeological sites found along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and throughout the Caja del Rio speak to the arrival, presence, history, culture and influence of the Spanish in the area; and

WHEREAS, residents and spiritual leaders throughout Santa Fe County and the United States recognize the sacred value of the Caja del Rio and utilize the area as a place of prayer, silence, solitude, worship and sacred pilgrimage; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1900s the main travel corridor of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro along the Caja del Rio transformed to become famous for its iconic stretches of New Mexico Highway 1 and ultimately Route 66; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio also serves as a critical landscape in creating a historical, cultural, ecological, and eco-tourism corridor connecting to Bandelier National Monument and the adjacent sites of Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, El Rancho de los Golondrinas and the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve; and

WHEREAS, the New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance has listed the Caja del Rio as one of the “most endangered places” in New Mexico; and

WHEREAS, there are many significant threats to the Caja del Rio’s land, water, wildlife, and cultural and archeological antiquities including, but not limited to: petroglyph defacement, vandalism, and theft, illegal shooting and poaching of wildlife and livestock, illegal dumping, theft of stock tanks, unlawful OHV usage and habitat fragmentation from illegal roads,

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unmanaged/unlawful recreation, and recent sales of federal lands by the BLM for other public purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio’s cultural and wildlife resources remain under significant threat from the Los Alamos National Labs proposals to run a major transmission line and fiber optic line cutting across the Caja del Rio landscape as well as the proposal for the development of a major highway to be created through the area; and

WHEREAS, the federal agencies with jurisdiction over the area have provided insufficient management and resources to patrol, monitor, and protect the many antiquities within the Caja del Rio; and

WHEREAS, traditional land use permittees wish to work collaboratively with the federal agencies and ask these agencies to recognize the historical and cultural significance of traditional uses within New Mexico’s Hispano communities and honor such uses in perpetuity; and

WHEREAS, Pueblo Nations with a deep connection to the Caja del Rio would like for the federal government to provide the protections needed to preserve and protect traditional Native sacred sites as well as maintain Pueblo access and co-stewardship of these sites; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio should become an important experiential learning “classroom” for the area’s surrounding youth and a place to teach children the cultural, historical, ecological, geological, hydrological, and biological aspects of this remarkable landscape; and

WHEREAS, the permanent protection of the Caja del Rio will help New Mexico reach the 30x30 goals of “America the Beautiful” initiative and the State’s 30x30 Executive Order 2021-052 focused on protecting biodiversity and conserving 30% of lands and waters by 2030; and

WHEREAS, the America the Beautiful initiative encourages locally led and voluntary efforts to conserve, connect, and restore lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend,

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and the Caja del Rio protection efforts are locally driven and led, characterized by community collaboration, and support the priorities of Tribal Nations, while also engaging other local stakeholders.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County hereby:

1. Supports the permanent protection, long-term preservation, and responsible stewardship of the Caja del Rio landscape;
2. Supports the collaboration, co-management, and co-stewardship of the Caja del Rio among responsible federal agencies, the local governments of traditional Hispano communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations for the permanent protection and preservation of this precious natural and cultural landscape;
3. Supports all efforts to empower Pueblo Nations and traditional Hispano communities in performing meaningful cultural interpretation, environmental education, and historical preservation of this treasured landscape;
4. Supports co-stewardship and responsible management of wildlife and the wild environs of the Caja del Rio Plateau, for the benefit of the public today, and for future generations;
5. Supports the continuation and sustainment of traditional uses of the Caja del Rio including hunting, fishing, grazing, wood gathering, piñon harvesting, herb and plant gathering, sacred pilgrimage, and the historic community use of the land in other traditional ways; and
6. Opposes new development and construction of highways, power transmission lines, or other infrastructure encroachments on the landscape of the Caja del Rio.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County hereby requests that the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress initiate the process to bring permanent protections to the Caja del Rio.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County requests that the County Manager forward this Resolution to the U.S. Secretary of the

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Interior, the Bureau of Land Management Director, the U.S. Forest Service National Director, New Mexico's Senators and Representatives in Congress, the New Mexico Governor, State Senators and Representatives in the New Mexico Legislature representing Santa Fe County, New Mexico Counties' Executive Board of Directors, and other elected officials representing political subdivisions wholly or partially within the boundaries of Santa Fe County.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED ON THIS 10th DAY OF MAY, 2022.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF SANTA FE COUNTY**

By: Anna T. Hamilton
Anna T. Hamilton, Chair

ATTESTATION:
Katharine E. Clark
Katharine E. Clark
Santa Fe County Clerk



Date: 5/10/22

CLERK RECORDED 05/11/2022

Approved as to form:

Rachel A. Brown
Rachel A. Brown
Interim Santa Fe County Attorney

COUNTY OF SANTA FE)
STATE OF NEW MEXICO) ss
BCC RESOLUTIONS
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I Hereby Certify That This Instrument Was Filed for Record On The 11TH Day Of May, 2022 at 11:14:18 AM And Was Duly Recorded as Instrument # 1988246 Of The Records Of Santa Fe County

Witness My Hand And Seal Of Office
Katharine E. Clark
Deputy Destiny Romero County Clerk, Santa Fe, NM

