



EARTHKEEPERS360



December 12, 2024

Dear President Biden, Secretary Haaland, Secretary Vilsack, Senator Heinrich, Senator Luján, Representative Leger-Fernandez, Representative Stansbury, and Representative Vasquez:

As spiritual leaders from diverse traditions across New Mexico, we are united in support of designation of the Caja del Rio as a national monument. We join with the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the New Mexico State Land Office, the Santa Fe County Commission, and the Mayor of Santa Fe in calling for permanent protection and responsible stewardship of the Caja del Rio.

The Caja del Rio is one of the most remarkable cultural, spiritual, and archeological landscapes in America. Spanning over 106,000 acres of public land, the Caja contains cacti forests, river canyons, and grasslands that provide important habitat for elk, deer, bear, cougar, bald and golden eagles, and desert songbirds. What originally started as wild game migration trails across the Caja became Pueblo footpaths. Thousands of years later, one of these paths became the famed El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the Spanish trade route that ran from Mexico City to Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. Centuries later, portions of this route were designated New Mexico Highway 1 running up La Bajada Hill. Considered one of the world's greatest engineering feats, this highway became part of New Mexico's vie for statehood. Decades later, portions of N.M. 1 crossing the Caja became part of Route 66, the "Mother Road" that brought forth western expansion and hope out of the Great Depression. For millennia, the Caja del Río has told the complex story of the confluence of New Mexico's cultures and speaks to the sacred connection between the people, land, water, and wildlife that makes us who we are today.

As spiritual leaders that deeply value the Caja's rich cultural, spiritual, and ecological values, we recognize that the Caja del Rio brings diverse groups and cultures together. The Caja del Rio continues to be a sacred area of prayer and pilgrimage for many of the Pueblos and local communities surrounding the Caja del Rio. The area has also acted as a sacred healing space for many who have experienced grief and trauma. In a society that desperately needs healing, the Caja del Rio has been an invaluable place for individuals and communities to come together in unity, prayer, healing, and wholeness.

Using the Antiquities Act, President Biden has the power to make the Caja del Rio a national monument. National monument status will give the Caja's land, water, wildlife, cultural, archeological, and sacred sites protection while ensuring that traditional New Mexican land uses can be protected for future generations. The call to protect the Caja has broad support from a diverse coalition of local Tribal and Hispanic leaders, veterans, faith and spiritual leaders, businesses, hunters and traditional land users, city and county governments as well as various wildlife organizations. National monument status will also ensure that this fragile landscape gets

dedicated federal resources for increased law enforcement, public education, and landscape-scale planning.

We are asking you to act now to protect the Caja del Rio for future generations of New Mexicans and Americans. While we recognize that time is short with this administration, to quote Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “the time is always right to do right.” The time is right for federal leaders to take a stand to permanently protect the Caja del Rio by making it a national monument.

Thank you for your consideration,

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