CITY OF SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-34

INTRODUCED BY:

Councilwoman Renee Villarreal
Councilor Chris Rivera  Councilor Amanda Chavez
Councilor Michael J. Garcia  Councilor Jamie Cassutt

A RESOLUTION

SUPPORTING THE PERMANENT PRESERVATION OF THE CAJA DEL RIO
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE AREA.

WHEREAS, the City of Santa Fe (“City”) has an incredible array of public lands that encompass a stunning wealth of landscapes that are enjoyed by residents and non-residents alike; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is located on 106,883 of Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service public lands in north-central New Mexico and it is considered one of the United States’ most iconic landscapes, an area of profound cultural, historical, archeological, and ecological significance; and

WHEREAS, the Caja del Rio is a landscape of dramatic topography with geological processes that stem from the Rio Grande rift and that has boundaries stretching from the 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, black bears, and cougars; and

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.

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

WHEREAS, preserving the Caja del Rio is critical for sustaining the City’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 significant cultural artifacts; 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 is critical for ongoing cultural religious access and use; and

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

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

WHEREAS, the City 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, the Caja del Rio is still used by the Pueblo Nations and traditional Hispano communities to exercise traditional land use values including the following: 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

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, according to the National Park Service, 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 the Santa Fe 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 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 the following: petroglyph defacement, vandalism, and theft; illegal shooting and poaching of wildlife and livestock; illegal dumping; theft of stock tanks; unlawful off-highway vehicle usage; habitat fragmentation from illegal roads; unmanaged/unlawful recreation; and recent sales of federal lands by the BLM for other public purposes; and

WHEREAS, according to New Mexico Wild, the Caja del Rio’s cultural and wildlife resources remain under significant threat from the Los Alamos National Labs proposals¹ 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, Pueblo Nations with a deep connection to the Caja del Rio would like for the

¹https://www.lanl.gov/environment/epcu/index.shtml
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, in furtherance of this desire, the All Pueblo Council of Governors adopted a Resolution on November 29, 2021 urging the USFS to “fully analyze environmental and cultural impacts of the proposed [transmission line] by conducting a full environmental impact statement” and to comply with statutory obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body believes that 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, portions of the Caja del Rio have tremendous potential for sustainable outdoor recreation 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; and

WHEREAS, on the northeast edge of the Caja del Rio there is a heavily used City and County utility corridor along and in the vicinity of the Buckman Road that includes, among other critical infrastructure, thirteen deep water wells, a river diversion, two large water transmission pipelines, and a natural gas pipeline; and

WHEREAS, the permanent protection of the Caja del Rio will help New Mexico reach the 30 by 30 goals of the America the Beautiful initiative and New Mexico’s 30 by 30 Executive Order No. 2021-52, focused on protecting biodiversity and conserving 30% of lands and waters by 2030; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body unanimously adopted Resolution No. 2021-7 that supports the 30 by 30 campaign in January, 2021; 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; and

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

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE CITY OF SANTA FE, that the Governing Body supports the permanent protection, long-term preservation, and responsible stewardship of the Caja del Rio landscape through an appropriate federal land use designation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Body 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Body 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Body 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Body supports the continuation and sustainment of traditional uses of the Caja del Rio including the following: 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.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that while the City opposes additional development in the Caja del Rio, particularly in roadless areas, the existing utility corridor and wellfield near the Buckman Road are critical to City and County resilience, and the City does not intend with this
resolution to limit future City and County near- and long-term utility infrastructure development.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Body directs the City Clerk upon adoption of this resolution, to deliver this resolution to the City of Santa Fe State legislative delegation, New Mexico’s congressional delegation, the leadership of the United States Senate and United States House, and the President of the United States.

PASSED, APPROVED, and ADOPTED this 29th day of June, 2022.

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ALAN WEBBER, MAYOR

ATTEST:

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KRISTINE MIHELCIC, CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

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ERIN K. McSHERRY, CITY ATTORNEY