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**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

1 Canyon and the Rio Grande corridor from Buckman to Cochiti Lake - and both watersheds have  
2 critical cultural, hydrological, ecological, agricultural, and economic significance; and

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

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

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

12 **WHEREAS**, preserving the Caja del Rio is critical for sustaining the City's rich and  
13 diverse cultures, traditions, heritage, and the vibrant community we are blessed to collectively  
14 share; and

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

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

20 **WHEREAS**, the Caja del Rio contains a dense concentration of thousands of sacred sites,  
21 structures, petroglyphs, irrigation systems, and other significant cultural artifacts; and

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

25 **WHEREAS**, the Caja del Rio also is the key landscape demarcation between what the

1 Spanish colonial world termed the “Rio Abajo” and “Rio Arriba” regions of New Mexico, where  
2 the people of Santa Fe’s traditional Hispano villages maintain deep ties and living roots as “Ejido”  
3 (communal) through perpetuation and practice of traditional uses of flora and fauna and by  
4 pilgrimage and prayer; and

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

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

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

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

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

24 **WHEREAS**, residents and spiritual leaders throughout the Santa Fe and the United States  
25 recognize the sacred value of the Caja del Rio and utilize the area as a place of prayer, silence,

1 solitude, worship and sacred pilgrimage; and

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

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

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

11       **WHEREAS**, there are many significant threats to the Caja del Rio’s land, water, wildlife  
12 and cultural and archeological antiquities including, but not limited to the following: petroglyph  
13 defacement, vandalism, and theft; illegal shooting and poaching of wildlife and livestock; illegal  
14 dumping; theft of stock tanks; unlawful off-highway vehicle usage; habitat fragmentation from  
15 illegal roads; unmanaged/unlawful recreation; and recent sales of federal lands by the BLM for  
16 other public purposes; and

17       **WHEREAS**, according to New Mexico Wild, the Caja del Rio’s cultural and wildlife  
18 resources remain under significant threat from the Los Alamos National Labs proposals<sup>1</sup> to run a  
19 major transmission line and fiber optic line cutting across the Caja del Rio landscape as well as the  
20 proposal for the development of a major highway to be created through the area; and

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

24       **WHEREAS**, Pueblo Nations with a deep connection to the Caja del Rio would like for the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lanl.gov/environment/epcu/index.shtml>

1 federal government to provide the protections needed to preserve and protect traditional Native  
2 sacred sites as well as maintain Pueblo access and co-stewardship of these sites; and

3 **WHEREAS**, in furtherance of this desire, the All Pueblo Council of Governors adopted a  
4 Resolution on November 29, 2021 urging the USFS to “fully analyze environmental and cultural  
5 impacts of the proposed [transmission line] by conducting a full environmental impact statement”  
6 and to comply with statutory obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act and the  
7 National Historic Preservation Act; and

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

12 **WHEREAS**, portions of the Caja del Rio have tremendous potential for sustainable  
13 outdoor recreation to create jobs and enhance local economies, so long as these regulated activities  
14 do not adversely impact the cultural, hydrological, and ecological resources of the landscape; and

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

19 **WHEREAS**, the permanent protection of the Caja del Rio will help New Mexico reach  
20 the 30 by 30 goals of the America the Beautiful initiative and New Mexico’s 30 by 30 Executive  
21 Order No. 2021-52, focused on protecting biodiversity and conserving 30% of lands and waters by  
22 2030; and

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

25 **WHEREAS**, the America the Beautiful initiative encourages locally led and voluntary

1 efforts to conserve, connect, and restore lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend; and

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

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

9           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governing Body supports the collaboration, co-  
10 management, and co-stewardship of the Caja del Rio among responsible federal agencies, the local  
11 governments of traditional Hispano communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations for the permanent  
12 protection and preservation of this precious natural and cultural landscape.

13           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governing Body supports all efforts to empower  
14 Pueblo Nations and traditional Hispano communities in performing meaningful cultural  
15 interpretation, environmental education, and historical preservation of this treasured landscape.

16           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governing Body supports co-stewardship and  
17 responsible management of wildlife and the wild environs of the Caja del Rio Plateau, for the  
18 benefit of the public today, and for future generations.


19           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governing Body supports the continuation and  
20 sustainment of traditional uses of the Caja del Rio including the following: hunting, fishing,  
21 grazing, wood gathering, piñon harvesting, herb and plant gathering, sacred pilgrimage, and the  
22 historic community use of the land in other traditional ways.

23           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that while the City opposes additional development in  
24 the Caja del Rio, particularly in roadless areas, the existing utility corridor and wellfield near the  
25 Buckman Road are critical to City and County resilience, and the City does not intend with this

1 resolution to limit future City and County near- and long-term utility infrastructure development.

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

6 PASSED, APPROVED, and ADOPTED this 29<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2022.

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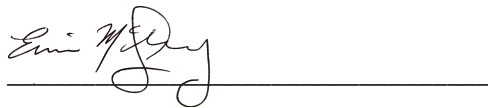
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10 ALAN WEBBER, MAYOR

11 ATTEST:

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14 KRISTINE MIHELIC, CITY CLERK

15 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

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18 ERIN K. McSHERRY, CITY ATTORNEY

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25 *Legislation/2022/Resolutions/2022-34 Supporting Caja del Rio Preservation*