



Caja del Rio Protection Act Section-by-Section Summary

Title I

Section 101 — Special Management Area Establishment

Creates a new Special Management Area (SMA) on 67,163 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land to conserve and protect the cultural, spiritual, scenic viewshed, ecological, wildlife habitat, natural, geological, historical, and traditional values of the Caja del Rio and to enhance opportunities for Tribal engagement in preservation and management of the area.

Section 102 — Special Management Area Management

Directs the U.S. Forest Service to create a detailed management plan to conserve, protect, and enhance the resources of the Special Management Area and to promote opportunities for religious, cultural, spiritual, medicinal, and traditional uses.

- Ensures coordination with local governments and traditional communities and ensures consultation with area Tribes.
- Requires coordination with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park service related to overlapping and congruent land management.
- Requires a travel management plan that maintains public access while limiting roads that cause damage to the ecosystem and cultural sites.

Title II

Section 201 — National Conservation Area Establishment

Creates a new National Conservation Area (NCA) on 17,837 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land to conserve and protect the cultural, spiritual, scenic viewshed, ecological, wildlife habitat, natural, geological, historical, and traditional

values of the Caja del Rio and to enhance opportunities for Tribal engagement in preservation and management of the area.

Section 202 — National Conservation Area Management

Directs the Bureau of Land Management to create a detailed management plan to conserve, protect, and enhance the resources of the National Conservation Area (NCA) and to promote opportunities for religious, cultural, spiritual, medicinal, and traditional uses.

- Ensures coordination with local governments and traditional communities and ensures consultation with area Tribes.
- Requires coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park service related to overlapping and congruent land management.
- Requires a travel management plan that maintains public access and motorized vehicle use on Old Route 66 while limiting roads that cause damage to the ecosystem and cultural sites.

Section 203 — Land Exchanges

Permits the BLM to conduct land exchanges with the New Mexico State Land Office for state land inholdings in the NCA and the withdrawal area.

- The State Land Office and the BLM are to jointly identify lands eligible for exchange and agree to the exchange.
- Land exchanges must be conducted at equal value determined by neutral appraisals.

Title III — General Provisions

Section 301 — Management of Covered Areas

This section sets overarching rules that apply to both the SMA and the NCA.

- New permanent road construction is not permitted. Roads that are not designated should be decommissioned within three years.
- Temporary roads are tightly restricted and only permitted for health and safety, control of fire, insects, or diseases, or to facilitate cultural uses.
- Motorized vehicle use is limited to designated routes, with exceptions for emergencies, administrative needs, grazing, and Tribal activities.
- Withdraws the land from mining, oil and gas development, and geothermal leasing.
- Prohibits new rights-of-way, preventing future electrical transmission lines, natural gas pipelines and highways.
- Livestock grazing is allowed to continue.

- Ecological restoration, such as reducing wildfire risk or improving habitat, is permitted where necessary.
- Calls for the public land agencies to provide adequate law enforcement and requires the posting of signs to inform the public of designated routes and penalties for violations.

Section 302 – Tribal Contracting and Protected Rights

- Fosters Tribal agreements and contracting with the USFS and BLM to co-steward the land.
- Agreements could include activities like road repair, law enforcement, or stewardship projects so Tribes can play a direct role in managing the landscape.
- Secures Tribal access for cultural and religious purposes. If necessary, certain areas can be temporarily closed to the public to protect sensitive activities or sacred sites.
- Tribal members are allowed to gather plants and minerals for traditional uses

Section 303 – Effect

- Water rights, treaty rights, and valid land claims are protected under this Act.
- Nothing in this Act affects the rights of the City of Santa Fe or the County of Santa Fe to conduct necessary repair, operations maintenance, replacement, or expansion of drinking water supply infrastructure. They are also permitted to expand within the SMA if it is within 1 mile of the Buckman Diversion.
- Hunting is permitted in accordance with State fish and wildlife laws.
- Indigenous Knowledge is protected from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Title IV – Withdrawal Area

Section 401 – Withdrawal

Adds protections to 20,623 acres of contiguous BLM lands, withdrawing them from mineral resource extraction and prohibiting public land sales or privatization.