

# CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

DELEGATION OFFICE  
STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 7, 2025

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

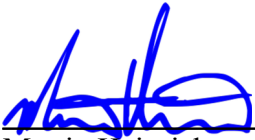
We write to urge you to protect the Caja del Rio plateau by recommending designation of the area as a national monument under the Antiquities Act. Of this 107,000-acre expanse between the city of Santa Fe and the Rio Grande, approximately 67,600 acres are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, and the remaining public lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Caja del Rio is one of the Southwest's most culturally significant landscapes.

The Caja del Rio is a living testament to centuries of New Mexico's complicated and under-told history. The area is important for traditional Spanish land grants, acequia communities and livestock permittees. The area has been vital to Indigenous communities since time immemorial and remains part of the traditions and culture of the surrounding Pueblos today. The plateau includes one of the most historically intact sections of the El Camino Real, a vital artery that linked New Mexico to the wider world during the Spanish colonial era. Ecologically, the Caja del Rio provides a critical wildlife corridor, connecting essential habitats for a variety of species.

Multiple threats have united local governments, tribes, ranchers, and community organizations to preserve the divergent heritage of the region. These threats include the desecration of petroglyphs, unregulated shooting, irresponsible off-roading, and urban sprawl. We must address these dangers to maintain the cultural, historic, and ecological values of the Caja del Rio for future generations. We also ask, like previous national monument designations, that existing and proposed uses, such as grazing and power transmission, be included in the designation process.

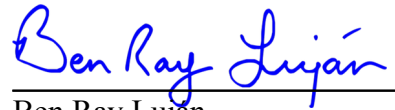
We have a unique opportunity to address a longstanding priority for New Mexicans. We urge you to recommend that President Biden designate the Caja del Rio National Monument while there is still time to preserve the landscape and cultural relevance of the Caja.

Sincerely,



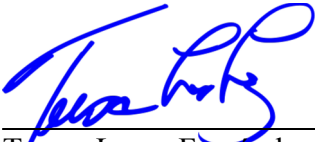
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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Teresa Leger Fernandez  
Member of Congress