Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Thank you for your Administration's incredible work to protect public lands and sacred places across the country. Your Administration owns a historic legacy in recognizing and protecting sacred sites, designating national monuments, and delivering historic funding to Tribal communities. Consistent with this historic legacy, we request that you designate the Caja del Rio Plateau as a national monument through your authority under the Antiquities Act. This extraordinary landscape is as ecologically diverse as it is historically and culturally significant to New Mexico. We appreciate that members of your Administration met with community members and visited the land with us to listen to their stories. It is imperative that we act swiftly to safeguard the Caja's future.

From the stunning vistas of Diablo Canyon to the ancient La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs, the Caja del Rio has long been a vital cultural and spiritual site for the Native American peoples. Since time immemorial, it has served as a place for ceremonial practices, hunting, and herb gathering. Extensive petroglyphs mark the historical use of the Caja over millennia.

Additionally, Spanish communities have used the Caja del Rio for over two centuries for religious ceremonies, grazing, firewood, and hunting. It is a living historical time capsule. The Caja fostered significant trade beginning with Indigenous Tribes. This continued as it hosted the Camino Real that linked Mexico City and New Mexico. The impressive switchback road of La Bajada brought mercantilists, artists, and visitors up to Santa Fe.

The 106,000-acre plateau is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life, including ponderosa pine, piñon, and sabina trees. These ecosystems provide essential habitats for wildlife, while also supporting vital ecological processes that sustain our land and water resources.

The Caja del Rio needs federal protection. The absence of adequate stewardship has led to environmental degradation, vandalism, and excessive trash. This threatens the very fabric of this sacred and biodiverse landscape. On November 4, 2024, Tesuque Pueblo entered into a stewardship agreement with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to try and

address these challenges. However, without a formal national monument designation, the area will remain vulnerable to further damage.

We ask you to begin the process of designating the Caja del Rio as a national monument as soon as possible. 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 ask you to work with the Tribes and Hispano villages, local and county governments, and people who care for the protection of our public lands who have come together in a broad coalition to support this designation. These are the people closest to the land and who know best what local communities need to protect these sensitive areas. We ask you to honor the hard work of negotiation and collaboration that has led to this request for a monument designation.

This coalition of diverse stakeholders is ready and willing to work with your Administration to expedite this process and make sure that it reflects the unique needs of the existing uses. This action will not only protect this culturally significant landscape for future generations but also make sure that it receives the necessary resources for its preservation and management.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to continuing the discussion on how we can work together to protect the Caja del Rio.

Sincerely,

Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress

Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress