



ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

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Chairman:

Joey Sanchez

Vice Chairman:

Governor Mark Mitchell

Secretary:

Lt. Governor Cordelia Hooee

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Media: Photos available here. [Link](#)

All Pueblo Council of Governors Endorses Federal Legislation to Protect Caja del Rio

The All Pueblo Council of Governors today announced its endorsement of federal legislation to permanently protect the Caja del Rio, a culturally and ecologically significant landscape located south of Santa Fe.

The legislation, currently being drafted by Senator Martin Heinrich, is intended to conserve and permanently protect the region’s cultural, ecological, and spiritual values.

The Caja del Rio has drawn increased public attention in recent years due to ongoing challenges, including persistent illegal dumping, unauthorized off-road vehicle use, and the Trump Administration’s attempts to sell public lands for development. The plateau is also home to numerous significant cultural and historical sites, including La Cieneguilla Petroglyph Site, one of the largest concentrations of petroglyphs in New Mexico.

In response to these pressures, a broad and growing coalition—including Pueblos, traditional Hispano and land grant communities, historians, elected officials, and conservation organizations—has worked collaboratively to address these issues while advocating for long-term reforms in land management.

Following the Council’s vote, **APCG Chairman Joey Sanchez** stated:

“The Pueblos are working with our neighbors in the Hispano and land grant communities because we all agree the Caja needs to be protected. The proposed legislation represents a significant step toward ensuring the long-term protection of the Caja del Rio while honoring its deep cultural and historical significance to Indigenous and local communities.”

APCG Vice Chairman Mark Mitchell, Governor of Tesuque Pueblo and a long-time advocate for protecting the Caja del Rio, added:

Acoma

Cochiti

Isleta

Jemez

Laguna

Nambe

Ohkay Owingeh

Picuris

Pojoaque

San Felipe

San Ildefonso

Sandia

Santa Ana

Santa Clara

Santo Domingo

Taos

Tesuque

Ysleta del Sur

Zia

Zuni



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“Pueblo people have lived on this landscape from time immemorial. Each pueblo has its own connection to sacred places like Caja del Rio, Chaco Canyon, and many others. Our bond to these places reflects the teachings passed down from our ancestors. We have an inherent responsibility to steward this land—not only for ourselves, but for future generations.”

Governor Phillip Quintana of Cochiti Pueblo, who played a critical leadership role in shaping the legislation, emphasized the cultural importance of the area:

“The Caja instills our identity in this world. This area is sacred. It is a place where we uphold and preserve its spiritual and traditional values. We do all we can to protect it, and this effort is about ensuring it is safeguarded for future generations.”

Governor Raymond Aguilar Jr. of Kewa Pueblo, who has been one of the most outspoken tribal leaders on the need to protect traditional cultural properties, stated:

“This bill is an important step in the co-management of this sacred place by both federal and Pueblo governments. We applaud Senator Heinrich for this landmark piece of legislation and look forward to supporting it through the legislative process.”

Fmr. Governor Pete Herrera of Cochiti Pueblo, who has worked to advance the efforts to protect the Caja del Rio since his administration, added:

“Protecting the Caja del Rio has always been about responsibility. Responsibility to our ancestors, to our neighboring communities, and to those who will come after us. This effort did not come from one voice alone. It reflects years of work across Pueblos and partners who understand what is at stake. The legislation honors that shared commitment and gives us a real path forward to ensure this place is protected with the care and respect it deserves.”

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