



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Reyes DeVore, Program Director, [reyes@puebloactionalliance.org](mailto:reyes@puebloactionalliance.org) (505) 382-2636

Julia Bernal, Executive Director, [julia@puebloactionalliance.org](mailto:julia@puebloactionalliance.org) (505) 220-0051

Gracie Aragon, Communications Manager, [gracie@puebloactionalliance.org](mailto:gracie@puebloactionalliance.org) (505) 414-4515

### **Caja del Rio Coalition Urges U.S. Forest Service to halt Los Alamos National Labs' 14-mile Transmission Line Project**

**SANTA FE, NM** – In July, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and Los Alamos National Labs (LANL) held a public town hall meeting at Buffalo Thunder Resort, Pojoaque Pueblo, to seek input from citizens regarding a 14-mile transmission line project through the culturally and ecologically significant Caja del Rio plateau. Plans include expanding the production of plutonium pits for the country's nuclear weapons arsenal and established missile silos. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) had prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade (EPCU) Project, which would result in the construction of a new transmission line across lands managed by the Santa Fe National Forest, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service on the Caja del Rio Plateau.

Today, [in a letter to the U.S. Forest Service \(USFS\) written by the Caja del Rio Coalition](#), a coalition of Tribal, Hispano, faith, veteran, elected officials, conservation and Indigenous climate justice leaders, members jointly expressed opposition to the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade Project. The harm at play is that the Caja del Rio is an ecologically rich and culturally significant plateau, therefore any projects with plans to disrupt the natural state of this land base would threaten precious ecosystems, sacred sites, wildlife corridors, and the cultural heritage of surrounding Pueblo communities. Many Pueblo tribal leaders have also expressed the encroachment of federal policies that help protect

culturally sensitive areas, as well as failure from NNSA to adequately engage or practice Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) with Tribes directly connected to the area.

***As a result of historically failed Tribal consultation, the Caja del Rio has already suffered fragmentation from the Norton and Reeves transmission lines, which run along the boundaries of the Caja del Rio and currently serve LANL***

Coalition members submitted a 52 page document stating numerous deficiencies in NNSA's analysis and challenging the NNSA's inadequate assessment of the cultural, historical, archaeological, geological, and ecological impacts that the proposed Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade (EPCU) project would have on this remarkable landscape. Additionally, coalition members made an apparent rebuttal to the NNSA's conclusion that, "the proposed transmission line will not cause significant adverse impacts to the human and natural environment."

***"What is the purpose of national security if it directly contradicts and negatively impacts our culture, heritage, and history, ancestral and familial ties to cherished landscapes, and the deep spiritual and cultural values our communities hold so dearly?" as questioned by the Caja del Rio Coalition***

Due to the obvious flaws in NNSA's environmental assessment process, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) offers two avenues for the Department of Energy (DOE) and the NNSA: to choose no action, or to conduct a complete Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Choosing to conduct an EIS would prompt the NNSA to identify reasonable alternatives that would still allow Los Alamos National Labs to accomplish its mission of national security without sacrificing the sensitive and ecological resources of the Caja del Rio. Further, coalition members state this alternative would steer the Forest Service away from exacerbating the lack of adequate resources and personnel to address similar issues.

With the Santa Fe National Forest's (SFNF) special designation of the Caja del Rio's management area in the 2022 Land Management Plan (Forest Plan), which consisted of dedicated advocacy and collaboration of community members, Tribes, and elected officials with the U.S. Forest Service, this plan strongly prohibits any new utility corridors. Therefore, coalition members argue the EPCU Project "cannot move forward without the Santa Fe National Forest approving both an amendment to the Forest Plan and issuing a special use permit allowing NNSA to construct and operate new transmission towers and lines across our federal public lands." Coalition members call on SFNF's Supervisor, Shaun Sanchez, to apply the laws and regulations that apply to the Forest Service such as denying NNSA's request or requiring a more comprehensive and thorough analysis.

Members of the Caja del Rio Coalition urge USDA leadership to support informed decisions by the Forest Supervisor that complies with NEPA, which includes rejecting a Forest Plan amendment or special use permit. Members also call on USDA leadership to, “respect the will of the larger community and honor our nation’s Tribal treaties and sovereignty.”

***What NNSA is proposing is nothing short of a desecration of the sacred grounds on which our communities rely***

For these reasons set forth, Pueblo Action Alliance strongly opposes the proposed 14-mile transmission line project through the Caja del Rio plateau as well as the extension of the production of plutonium pits as it will perpetuate and continue a legacy of harm on our communities, lands, water, and plant and animal beings. This is a direct threat to their cultural and sacred landscape and therefore a direct threat to our cultural and traditional lifeways.

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