

Caja del Rio Wild Horse Territory

The Caja del Rio Wild Horse Territory (WHT) is administered by the Espanola Ranger District, Santa Fe National Forest.

Location/Habitat

The Caja WHT is located in New Mexico approximately 8 miles west of Santa Fe. The territory consists of 8728 acres of National Forest land in the Caja Plateau. The horse herd is confined to the Caja Plateau by the town of Santa Fe to the east and the Rio Grande River to the west.

The topography is composed of rolling hills and swales, dotted by cone like peaks. Elevations range from 5250 to 7315 feet. Temperatures range from 19° in the winter to 90°+ F in the summer. Average annual precipitation is 17 inches.

Vegetation is primarily steppe grasslands in swales and Pinyon-juniper woodlands on rocky ridges. The peaks are grass-shrub on south sides and Pinyon-juniper on north sides.

Wildlife present include mule deer and mountain lions.

Livestock grazing is permitted within the wild horse territory, but competition is limited due to different areas of use.

History

The herd history is not well known. The herd may be quite old since it is in close proximity to the earliest Spanish settlements and first source of horses. Wild horses have been known to frequent the Caja since at least 1934. After passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, the Caja Wild Horse Territory was officially recognized and listed. In 1975, 1978, and 1988, studies were conducted to obtain information on the herd. The 1975 study estimated a population of 55 horses; the 1978 study estimated a population of 37 horses; and the 1988 study estimated a population of 45 horses. From the date of herd designation, there have been neither herd reductions nor herd supplementation. There is only speculation to account for the relatively stable herd numbers: lion predation, illegal shooting and capture, or disease.

Herd origination may have come from early settlement in Santa Fe, La Cienega, Cieneguilla, and La Bajada. Blood lines from this source would have been of Spanish origin. Adjacent ranches and Pueblos could have been sources of quarter horse bloodlines. Rumors indicate that race track horses past prime have been released onto the territory for retirement. This may also be true of local recreational horses.

Herd Description

The appropriate management level has not yet been established.

The horses of the Caja are identical in appearance to the quarter horses of the nearby ranches. The majority of the horses are sorrel and bay in color.

For More Information

Contact the Espanola Ranger District at 505-753-7331.