SB 239 (Campos, Sanchez)
Acequia Fund for Disaster Response

New Mexico Acequia Association
February 5, 2023

Synopsis of SB 176:

SB 239 would create an Acequia Bureau within the Interstate Stream Commission and provide powers and duties for the bureau. In addition, SB 239 appropriates $300,000 for fiscal year 2024 and subsequent years to carry out the purposes of the Acequia Bureau. The goal of this bill is to ensure that the ISC has dedicated staffing and program support to serve the growing and unique needs of acequias and community ditches throughout the state to ensure timeline completion of acequia infrastructure projects.

Background:

Since the 1980s, the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) has operated an acequia program with the purpose of providing construction funds for acequia projects and providing cost-share funds for federal programs. The ISC Acequia Program administers acequia Capital Outlay projects, the number of which have increased in recent years. Since 2019, an estimated 200 acequias have received Capital Outlay. In 2019, Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund (ACDIF), with enactment in FY 2022, secured an annual $2.5 million appropriation from the Irrigation Works Construction Fund (IWCF) to be administered by the Interstate Stream Commission. The purpose of the ACDIF is for planning, design, and construction of irrigation works for the purposes of restoration, repair, improvement of irrigation efficiency, or protection from floods.

Why this Bill is Needed:

The need for acequia rehabilitation has steadily increased in recent years. SB 239 would increase capacity of the existing program with an appropriation of $300,000 to carry out the purposes of the Acequia Bureau. This would help to ensure that the ISC would have adequate resources for dedicated staffing to administer acequia infrastructure projects.

There are over 650 acequias in New Mexico. Since the 2019 legislative session, over 200 acequias have received Capital Outlay. In the 2022 fire and flood disasters, an estimated 80 acequias and community ditches have been impacted with debris, silt, sedimentation, and damaged or destroyed waterways and structures.

Acequias have unique needs with regard to infrastructure funding. The current ISC staff have worked with acequias for many years and have specialized knowledge about acequias and community ditches. However, the ISC acequia program has been understaffed in recent years, which has sometimes had the effect of longer timelines for completion of projects. With adequate dedicated staffing, acequias and community ditches will have a more appropriate level of staff support for projects, which will improve outcomes for timely completion of projects.