

# Noticias de las Acequias

New Mexico *Acequia* Association • Winter 2019



NMAA staff, Sembradores apprentices, and family celebrated the completion of the program by Corilia Ortega and Alejandro Mondragon, both of whom are planning to plant gardens on their acequia-irrigated land in 2020.



Top: Emily Arasim shares knowledge about seedsaving at the Albuquerque Youth Climate March. Below: Donne Gonzales talks with students in Mora about the importance of acequias at the Mora Ag Day sponsored by Mora County Cooperative Extension. Photos: NMAA Staff

## New Farmers are Born: Congratulations Sembradores Graduates

by NMAA Staff

NMAA celebrates the graduation of our third group of farm apprentices from our Los Sembradores Program! Corilia Ortega of Arroyo Hondo and Alejandro Mondragon of Llano de San Juan spent 10 months of 2019 immersed at Chicoyole Farm learning site under the guidance of Donne Gonzales, NMAA Farmer Trainer and Edward Gonzales, Farmer Mentor.

They learned traditional acequia agriculture along with modern techniques, establishing their confidence as young farmers and community leaders. They gained skills in irrigation, season extension, farm planning, and marketing. In addition, they were immersed in local land-based culture with lessons on remedios, food preservation, and leadership. Corilia and Ale implemented what they learned by starting farms on their ancestral land, producing enough to share with family and neighbors.

NMAA recognizes the urgency and value in cultivating the next generation of land stewards to protect our acequias, pass on traditions, and advocate for our future. The NMAA Team wishes Alejandro and Corilia the best of luck in their future farming endeavors. 💧

## Acequia Youth Education a Success in 2019

Starting in 2019, NMAA has been more involved in youth education and outreach through schools, county fairs, special events, and outdoor activities. Our youth team includes Emily Arasim, Donne Gonzales, Chavela Trujillo, Lorenzo Candelaria and Miguel Santistevan. Youth from elementary to high school had the opportunity to learn about acequias through presentations and hands-on activities. In the past year, the NMAA team did 81 presentations to youth. Plans for the coming year are to expand to more schools, to compile and create educational materials, and to create a curriculum on acequias, agriculture, seedsaving, and water. 💧

**NEW MEXICO  
ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION**

**Concilio (Board of Directors):**

**Harold Trujillo**

*La Asociacion de las Acequias  
del Valle de Mora*

**Antonio Medina**

*La Asociacion de las Acequias  
del Valle de Mora*

**Don Bustos**

*Rio Quemado, Rio en Medio,  
Rio Frijoles, Rio Santa Cruz  
Acequia Association*

**Alfredo Montoya**

*Las Nueve Acequias del Rio Grande*

**Santiago Maestas**

*South Valley Regional  
Association of Acequias*

**Jackie Powell**

*Upper Hondo  
Water Users Association*

**Gilbert Sandoval**

*Jemez River Basin  
Coalition of Acequias*

**Stephen Trujillo**

*Taos Valley Acequia Association*

**Medardo Sanchez**

*La Asociacion de las Acequias  
Nortenas del Rio Arriba*

**Yolanda Jaramillo**

*Embudo Valley Acequia Association*

**Martha Trujillo**

*Las Comadres Caucus*

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**Toribio Garcia**

*Acequia Education Coordinator*

**Chavela Trujillo**

*Acequia Program Assistant*

**Emily Arasim**

*Acequia Program Assistant*

**Donne Gonzales**

*Farmer Trainer and  
Youth Education Coordinator*

**Enrique Romero**

*Staff Attorney*

**Corilia Ortega**

*Acequia Education Coordinator*

# Support the NM Acequia Association!

*Join as a member or supporter, make a donation, volunteer, take action!*

Dear friends and supporters,

In New Mexico, hundreds of acequias are the stewards of irrigation water that flows from our beloved rivers into fields and gardens that support thousands of families who continue farming and ranching traditions. Acequia agriculture is the key to sustaining deep roots as land-based people and to building strong local food systems. In their embodiment of community, food, and culture, acequias are vital to a viable and resilient future.

The New Mexico Acequia Association has been at the forefront protecting our land and water, working with partners on infrastructure, and supporting future acequia leaders and growers. This is what we were able to accomplish in the past year:

- Through our **Acequia Governance Project**, our team served an average of 75 acequias per month. In the past year, we have worked with a total of 297 acequias on over a thousand requests for assistance with water, governance, and infrastructure issues.
- In our **Youth Education initiative**, we worked with over a thousand children and youth in classrooms, county fairs, and outdoor activities. Sembrando Semillas projects worked with families to mentor youth in five different communities and held our first ever Acequia Summer Youth Camp.
- Through our **policy advocacy**, we worked to enact new legislation that created an Acequia Infrastructure Fund, strengthened and clarified acequia authority over water leases, and improved due process and transparency in water rights applications before the State Engineer. The Community Governance Act, also pushed by the land grant community, creates a tuition waiver for law students interested in acequia and land grant law.
- Our **Los Sembradores Farmer Training project** has completed three cohorts of apprentices who spent a growing season on a working farm learning about acequia agriculture. This project has supported several new young farmers get started with their own gardens and farms.

**Our programs to protect water rights, provide services for acequias, and advocate for our family farms and ranches depend on the support of our members and supporters.** To continue and expand our work, we need your help! We have a big year ahead in 2020 and we rely on our acequia community to support this work. These are some of our campaigns and projects for the coming year:



The Acequia Day crowd prepared to enter the State Capitol to meet with their legislators. NMAA leaders succeeded in passing four pieces of legislation benefitting acequias. Photo: Emily Arasim, NMAA Staff.





Chavela Trujillo, Emily Arasim and other members of the NMAA team gave classroom presentations to children in several schools in the areas of Santa Fe, Española, Taos, Mora, and Peñasco. Photo: NMAA Staff.

## JOIN THE NEW MEXICO ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION!

*Be part of the movimiento en defensa del agua!*

Parciantes or Individual Supporter  
\$25 per year

Acequia or Community Ditch  
\$50 per year

Regional Acequia Association  
\$100 per year

**Make a donation and support our work!**

Amigo or Amiga de las Acequias  
up to \$250

Hermana or Hermano de las Acequias  
\$250-\$500

Padrino or Madrina de las Acequias  
\$500-\$1000



Corilia Ortega and Alejandro Mondragon, farm apprentices, completed a full growing season on Chicoyole Farm and learned about vegetable production, irrigation, farm planning, food preservation, and acequia culture. Photo: NMAA Staff.

- **Los Sembradores Farmer Training Project** will continue to have apprenticeships but also offer more hands-on workshops for growers. Workshops will demonstrate practices for efficient irrigation and building healthy soil as well as business planning for small farms.
- **Escuelita de las Acequias** will resume our popular education work with encuentros for leadership development and workshops for acequia officials, parciantes, and growers.
- Our team will continue to **support acequias with water rights, governance, and infrastructure** through our **Acequia Governance Project**. We are building our team with more staff to keep up with the demand for direct services.
- **Stop Terrero Mine** – We are part of a broad coalition of organizations opposing the proposed mine near Terrero in the Upper Pecos watershed because of the threat of leaching of toxins into the Pecos River, which is used by acequia farmers and ranchers to grow food and raise livestock.

This holiday season, we are asking you to make an investment in our future with a donation to the New Mexico Acequia Association. In 2020, give us the opportunity to support the people and communities who are working the land and keeping our acequias flowing.

**Thank you for your support. *Que Vivan las Acequias!!***

Amor y paz,

Paula Garcia, Executive Director

We appreciate the work everyone does on their own acequia and in their community. If you would also like to volunteer with NMAA events and educational activities, please call us at **505-995-9644**.

We have the following volunteer opportunities:

- Work a display table at a community event
- Give presentations to local youth about acequias
- Work a registration table at NMAA events and workshop... and many others.



**To continue receiving the NMAA newsletter, please join as a member or make a donation.** Your memberships and donations help us with printing, postage, and staff that are necessary to publish our newsletter. Please support this work and continue to receive the newsletter! Use the attached envelope to send dues or donations or send to NMAA, 805 Early Street, Suite 203B, Santa Fe, NM 87505.

# Hundreds Gather for Congreso de las Acequias in Taos



Sam García, a delegate representing the Rio Chama Acequia Association, participates in the Congreso de las Acequias roll call.

by Paula García, NMAA Executive Director

The coffee was ready by 7:30am. Farmers and ranchers, who are inclined to be early birds, started arriving before 8:00am for on-site registration for the Congreso de las Acequias, the annual membership meeting of the New Mexico Acequia Association. Soon after, the conference room started to come to life with *Las Mañanitas*, the traditional Mexican ballad that welcomes the day. On an early Saturday morning in Taos, nearly 400 acequia parcientes and supporters from across the state gathered for the Congreso de las Acequias, which was also the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the New Mexico Acequia Association. The previous day, Friday afternoon, the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District hosted a tour of local acequia projects that would contribute to the long-term viability of irrigated agriculture in the Taos Valley.

As is customary, the official start of the Congreso was *Canción de las Acequias*, a song written by David García, Roger Montoya, and Cipriano Vigil, which has become the anthem of the New Mexico Acequia Association. A collective of musicians, led by David García and Jeremías Martínez, and which included former Lt. Governor Roberto Mondragon, performed music throughout the day. In the *Bendición de las Aguas*, waters from acequias and rivers throughout the state were shared and mixed together with a prayer for the well-being of families and communities and for protection of waters that are believed to be a *don divino* or divine gift.

The Congreso de las Acequias is the gathering and governing

body of the New Mexico Acequia Association. As a federational body of regional delegations, one of the important moments in the annual convening is the roll call of regions which illustrates the statewide scope of the acequia community in New Mexico. While the gathering is infused with culture from the very beginning, the Congreso is very much a meeting of governance, where leaders come together and affirm their core values and to make collective decisions that form the basis for the policy positions and strategic directions.

The day included a moving tribute to the late Senator Carlos Cisneros including testimonials from important leaders in his district who spoke of his commitment, work ethic, and the wit that so many of his friends and colleagues had grown fond of over the years. Esther García, former mayor of Questa and former commissioner on Cabresto Lake Irrigation Community Ditch, and Mary Mascareñas, long-time school board member for the Peñasco Independent Schools and former commissioner on Acequia del Llano de San Juan Nepumoceno, shared their memories of the Senator as a friend and as an advocate for rural communities. Musicians ended the tribute with a *despedida*, a traditional farewell ballad.

Harold Trujillo, NMAA President, and Paula García, Executive Director, provided a retrospective of the NMAA's 30 years of advocacy and contributions to the acequia movement in New Mexico. Special thanks was given to the Taos Valley Acequia Association as the first regional association to help form the Congreso de las Acequias as a statewide governing body. A timeline included some of the major milestones in acequia advocacy



over the past thirty years, including important pieces of legislation and the founding dates of some of NMAA's education and youth programs. Attendees were invited to add to the timeline with important dates from their own acequias.

A highlight of the day was a segment entitled, "Sharing Querencia Across Generations." It was a time of recognition of both mentees and their mentors who have made a conscious effort to keep traditional knowledge alive across generations. The recognitions were an expression of gratitude by mentees for their mentors and an affirmation that the acequia tradition would continue for another generation. Chavela Trujillo of Abiquiu recognized her mom Isabel Trujillo, Juanita Revak from Jemez Springs recognized her father Gilbert Sandoval, Marcos Valdez recognized his mentor Kenny Salazar from La Mesilla, Zia Martinez recognized her mentor Lorenzo Candelaria, Nicanor Ortega recognized his mentor Miguel Santistevan, and Donne Gonzales recognized her mom Juliet Garcia-Gonzales. The heartfelt recognition illustrated the intergenerational nature of the acequia movement.

Other topics on the agenda included a youth mapping project with the Carson National Forest and presentations by participants in NMAA's Sembrando Semillas youth project and Los Sembradores Farmer Training project. For some of the youth participants, the Congreso is one of the most important public speaking experiences of their young lives. It is part of NMAA's leadership development work to include youth as speakers at the Congreso.

Another highlight of the day was a performance by renowned poet Olivia Romo, who shared a poem entitled "Fighting the Tragedy of the Commons" in which she critiques the privatization of communal waters of the acequias and pays homage to the elders who dedicate decades of their lives to defend water



Daniel and Fermin Manzanares, participants from Acequia Abeyta y Trujillo, share water from the Rio Chama for the Bendición de las Aguas.



Chavela Trujillo recognizes her mom Isabel Trujillo as her mentor as part of Sharing Querencia Across Generations while Juanita Revak honors her dad Gilbert Sandoval.

rights in the adjudication process. Her poem recognizes the work of the acequia leaders of the Rio de las Gallinas Acequia Association in the Las Vegas area who fought for fifty years to overturn a doctrine for the city to have an expanding water right and who continue to fight the fragmentation of their acequias.

Vibrant and spirited conversations took place during the lunch hour, which was followed by an awards ceremony honoring two individuals who have likely spend the most years of their life directly involved with NMAA's grassroots organizing and advocacy work. Harold Trujillo was honored as a co-founder of NMAA in 1989 and David Benavides was honored for his nearly 30 years of service as an attorney dedicated primarily to acequia water law. In the midst of the festivities, volunteers Martha Trujillo, Patrick Blumm, Olivia Romo, and Priscilla Romo worked the silent auction as an NMAA fundraiser.

The day concluded with the adoption of a series of resolutions that were proposed by NMAA's regional delegates, leadership caucuses, and policy working group. Generally, NMAA's resolutions express a policy statement or a proposal for a new programmatic direction. There were four policy resolutions addressing a range of issues including opposition to proposed exploratory mining in the upper Pecos watershed, support for expanding the use of a fund for acequia legal expenses, and details regarding the guidelines for the newly created Acequia Infrastructure Fund. Another resolution generated by caucuses involving youth and young adults urged NMAA to implement a project to document storytelling by community members and elders. All resolutions passed unanimously in large part due to the extensive participation in writing the resolutions well in advance of the Congreso.

The 30th Anniversary Celebration was a day to celebrate history and the passing of the torch to new generations. The event was a success with the teamwork of the NMAA staff and our much-appreciated volunteers. It will long live in the memories of those who were there. *Que Vivan las Acequias!* 💧

# Pre-2020 Legislative and Policy Update

by Paula Garcia, NMAA Executive Director

The primary purpose of the 30-day session is to develop a state budget and capital outlay legislation. Only legislation that is germane in terms of the budget or that has a call from the Governor will proceed through the legislative process. The NMAA will be carefully monitoring the budget process as well as any legislation relevant to acequias.

The NMAA has been working with the **NM Acequia Commission** on the need for acequias to have legal representation not only during the adjudication process but also after final decrees are in effect. Implementation of water rights settlements requires legal expertise and ongoing education and outreach to pariantes. We are working to ensure that the **Acequia and Community Ditch Fund (ACDF)**, created in 1988 to support acequias in the adjudication process, is also available to acequias that are required to adhere to provisions in complicated water rights settlements. Discussions with state agencies is ongoing but there may be a need for legislation to clarify the ACDF statute.

The NMAA will be working with acequias on **Capital Outlay** requests. It is anticipated that there will be a substantial amount of funding available for local legislators to appropriate in their respective districts. NMAA is encouraging acequias to request funding and to be mindful about good planning so that projects have good engineering designs with broad support in the acequia and that good project management is in place so that projects can be completed in a timely manner.

NMAA is involved in the following with other stakeholder groups:

- **Natural Resources Trust Fund.** Several organizations are working on legislation to create a trust fund that would serve as an endowment, the proceeds of which would help fund projects that improve soil and water conservation, agricultural practices, and wildlife habitat. Modeled after a similar fund in Wyoming, the fund would be governed by a commission that would give grants or cost-share funding to qualifying entities.
- **Healthy Soils Act.** In the 2019 session, legislators enacted the Healthy Soils Act to support on-the-ground demonstration projects that improve soil health and serve to educate other growers about best practices. The program, which is adminis-

tered by the NM Department of Agriculture, started with about \$150,000 of one-time funding. The funding allocation process is underway for the current year, but for the program to continue, more funding will need to be appropriated. 💧

**If your acequia is interested in requesting Capital Outlay funding and you would like assistance,** please contact the NMAA at 505-995-9644. You can also email our staff for more information: serafina@lasacequias.org or toribio@lasacequias.org.

We highly recommend the project be well-planned and that you communicate with your legislator(s) in advance of the legislative session about your needs. The forms are due February 2, 2020 but they should be submitted to your legislator before the deadline. More information is available at [https://nmlegis.gov/Legislation/BillFinder/Capital\\_Outlay](https://nmlegis.gov/Legislation/BillFinder/Capital_Outlay)

## Acequia News Bites

### Sonic withdraws application to develop acequia property.

On Tuesday, November 12, 2019, B&B Merritt Real Estate officially withdrew its application to build a new Sonic Drive-Thru at 814 South Riverside Drive in Espanola. The proposed development drew widespread concern from the public and from the two nearest acequias - the Ortega Ditch and the Garcia Ditch. The letter claims that the applicant "made substantial efforts to address the concerns expressed by the City and interested members of the public [and] recognizes that concerns related to the use cannot be adequately addressed in the current circumstances and timelines." Instead of pursuing development of a new Sonic, the applicant has been approved for a remodel of the current Sonic to allow for a drive-thru.



#### NEW MEXICO ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION

The New Mexico Acequia Association is a statewide, non-profit organization founded in 1990.

#### MISSION

Our mission is to protect water and our acequias, grow healthy food for our families and communities, and to honor our cultural heritage.

#### VISION STATEMENT

In our vision, acequias flow with clean water, people work together to grow food, and communities celebrate cultural and spiritual traditions. People honor acequias as part of our heritage and express querencia through a strong connection to land and community. Knowledge and experience about growing food, sharing water, and saving seed are passed on from generation to generation.

Guided by our core values, the New Mexico Acequia Association grows a movement of people of all ages and walks of life to defend and protect our precious water by resisting its commodification and contamination. Through involvement in NMAA, families and youth are inspired to cultivate the land, care for our acequias, and heal past injustices. Communities have an abundance of healthy, locally-grown food because we recognize agriculture as a respected and dignified livelihood and way of life.

The current application was originally filed many months ago and the Planning and Zoning Commission tabled making a decision twice. At each meeting on the application, members of the community expressed numerous concerns including traffic, noise and light pollution, and general nuisance issues related to a drive-thru in a mostly residential and agricultural setting. The Acequias were mostly concerned about contaminated runoff entering the lateral ditches that surround the property as well as continued access to their easements. The City Planning Staff, recognizing the unique quality of the property and the contributions acequias make to the community, recommended that the applicant enter into an agreement with the Acequias regarding maintenance. The Acequias soon realized that any agreement would have to go beyond maintenance and include specific protections.

Steve Jaramillo, President of the Garcia Ditch, says that he's happy with the result. "It was really a community effort. The whole community came out and voiced its concerns with the proposed development. We really appreciate NMAA's involvement and helping us and the Ortega Ditch work to ensure our acequias are protected."

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## Santa Fe Plans to Reuse Effluent would Reduce River Flows.

Recent announcements by the City of Santa Fe to reuse treated wastewater are causing concerns among downstream communities and environmentalists. The city announced plans to build a pipeline from the wastewater treatment plant south of Santa Fe to the Buckman wellfield where the city draws water and treats it for municipal use. This would reduce flows in the Santa Fe River that makes its way to the Rio Grande. Downstream communities of La Cienega, La Bajada, as well as the Pueblo of Cochito would be affected by the reduced flows. Several environmental groups have expressed concerns about the health of the river from the proposed change by the city.

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## Concerns Expressed about LANL Radioactive Liquid Waste.

At a recent hearing in November held by the NM Environment Department, several individuals and organizations expressed concerns about a discharge permit under consideration for contaminated water from Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility (RLWTF) takes wastewater from different facilities at LANL and treats the waste using evaporative processes. The proposed permit is a discharge permit which is regulated under New Mexico's Water Quality Act. The NMAA, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), and Tewa Women United submitted comments with concerns about the need for more rigorous regulation of the facility and recommended that the permit for the facility should be governed by the Hazardous Waste Act, which is a more appropriated regulatory framework for radioactive waste. However, the private contractor was in favor of a less stringent permit.

## Terrero Mine Public Comments Due January 17th, 2020.

The Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) has opened the scoping period for the Comexico exploratory mining proposal in the Terrero area. The purpose of the scoping is to seek public input to help identify concerns and issues around the project. The Comexico proposal has been met with widespread community opposition because of the negative impacts a new mine will have to the downstream communities that rely on the land and clean water for their livelihoods, including many acequia communities. There are numerous acequias downstream that would be affected by any pollution from the exploration, which include growers in the villages of Pecos, Sena, Villanueva, Tecolote, Anton Chico, etc. Part of the area proposed for exploration is within critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl (a threatened species), Holy Ghost ipomopsis (an endangered plant), as well as habitat for the Rio Grande cut-throat trout.

Currently, the Forest Service is proposing a Categorical Exclusion for the project, the lowest level of review under the NEPA process. According to the SFNF scoping letter, "If the scoping period raises uncertainty over the degree of potential effects and their significance, the Forest Service will conduct additional NEPA analysis," which could include an Environmental Analysis or Environmental Impact Statement. At press time, The Forest Service is hosting a public meeting on Thursday, December 12, 2019 to present information about the proposal. Comments are due to the USFS on January 17, 2020. 💧



### TAKE ACTION!

### Speak Out to STOP the TERRERO MINE!

Written comments for the USFS scoping period are due January 17, 2020. You can submit comments using any of the following methods:

- Submit online comments on the Comment and Analysis Response Application (CARA). This is the preferred method to comment. To access CARA, go to the project webpage (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project?project=56733>).
- Send an email to [comments-southwestern-santafe-pecos-lasvegas@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-santafe-pecos-lasvegas@fs.fed.us) with "Comexico Proposal" in the subject line. If you are attaching a document, please use .doc, .txt, .pdf, or .rtf formats only.
- Send postal mail to: Santa Fe National Forest, Pecos/Las Vegas District P.O. Drawer 429 Pecos, NM 87552
- Hand-deliver comments to the Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger Station at 32 South Main Street in Pecos, NM, between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm.



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New Mexico Acequia Association  
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## Join acequias from around the state to rally to protect our water and invest in our future! 2020 Acequia Day at the State Capitol • Jan. 29, 2020



Photo Credit: John Denne

Bring your palas and join the march at the State Capitol. ***Pala Power!***

- 10:30am Legislative and Capital Outlay Workshop in the Capitol (Room TBA)
- 12:30pm March with our palas around the Roundhouse - Meet at East Entrance
- 1:00pm Enter the Rotunda - Presentations from Acequia Leaders and State Legislators
- 2:00pm Closing

For more information, go to [www.lasacequias.org](http://www.lasacequias.org) or call 505-995-9644.