

Rio de Chama Acequia Association, Inc.

PO Box 1163
Española, New Mexico 87532

22 May 2020

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio, Chairman
The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

RE: Rio de Chama Acequia Association Comment in Support of the 2020 Water Resources Development Act

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

The Rio de Chama Acequia Association (RCAA) is a non-profit organization representing the interests of 18 community irrigation systems below Abiquiu Reservoir. We strongly support including modification of the US Army Corps of Engineers' operations authority in the 2020 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) to allow for storing "native" (Rio Grande watershed) water within the Abiquiu Reservoir, New Mexico.

Community irrigation systems, or acequias, are low-tech and small in scale but have made farming possible by maintaining water-sharing traditions introduced by the Spanish at Ohkay Owingeh in 1598. For most of four centuries, resilient local acequia associations have operated under the governments of Spain, Mexico, and the USA, sharing water among farmers in times of drought. The State of New Mexico in its Constitution, laws, and programs has recognized acequias as political subdivisions of the State for their critical role in local economies.

Over the last century, the Rio Chama has been developed to serve the water needs of the Middle Rio Grande Valley through three federal reservoir projects of the US Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation. These projects have reduced flood danger below Abiquiu Dam, but the on-demand delivery of water to downstream users has resulted in considerable fluctuation in the amount and timing of river flows throughout the year. The Corps is currently assisting RCAA acequias to rehabilitate acequia river diversions required to withstand the highest flows from the upstream reservoirs.

The RCAA has been working closely with these Federal Agencies, plus the NM Interstate Stream Commission, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Tribal governments, and other regional acequia associations to insure water deliveries downstream while mitigating native water shortages. Although RCAA acequias have the earliest non-indian water rights in New Mexico, none of the stored water flowing downstream is available for our use. This creates a situation where there is plenty of water flowing in the river, but native Rio Chama water is

insufficient to meet our water rights. Unfortunately, the State Engineer must then curtail acequia diversions to protect downstream deliveries.

Storing native water in Abiquiu Reservoir is essential to the long-term survival of our acequias, and in turn, our small farms and their contributions to the local food chain. Global climate changes have fostered a drier and hotter environment with less water and earlier runoff from the surrounding high country. The simple authorization of native-water storage in the Abiquiu Reservoir will allow RCAA to continue to work with water managers and farming communities to mitigate late-season water shortages.

In the last three years, RCAA has developed agreements allowing State-funded purchase and storage of San Juan Chama water in El Vado Reservoir to cover depletion of stored MRGCD water when native flows fall in late summer. Storage of native water will provide additional flexibility in managing drought. Further, that flexibility will extend to critical infrastructure upgrades taking place at El Vado Dam over the next 3 years, covering the temporary loss of reservoir storage capacity during construction.

Please contact me at 505-685-4871 or timseaman@windstream.net should you have any questions concerning our support of the 2020 Water Resources Development Act projects involving the Rio Chama.

Respectfully,



Timothy J Seaman
President, Rio de Chama Acequia Association, Inc.

Cc: Mike Hamman, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
Rolf Peterson-Schmidt, NM Interstate Stream Commission
John D' Antonio, NM Office of the State Engineer
John Stomp, Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
Lt. Colonel Caswell, Albuquerque District, US Army Corps of Engineers
NM Congressional Delegation