

2025 Report on Acequia Disaster Recovery

By Paula Garcia, Executive Director
New Mexico Acequia Association
Water and Natural Resources
Legislative Interim Committee
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Presentation Outline

Acequias Damaged by Major Disasters by County

- Mora & San Miguel
- Grant & Luna
- Lincoln
- Rio Arriba
- Sandoval

Overview of Disaster Programs

- FEMA/DHSEM
- NRCS EWP Emergency Watershed Program
- HPCC Claims*
- NMDOT Debris Removal**

Status of Disaster Recovery

- By Agency and Disaster

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Funding Needed for Cost Share
- Emergency Debris Removal Resources
- Technical Assistance and Capacity Building



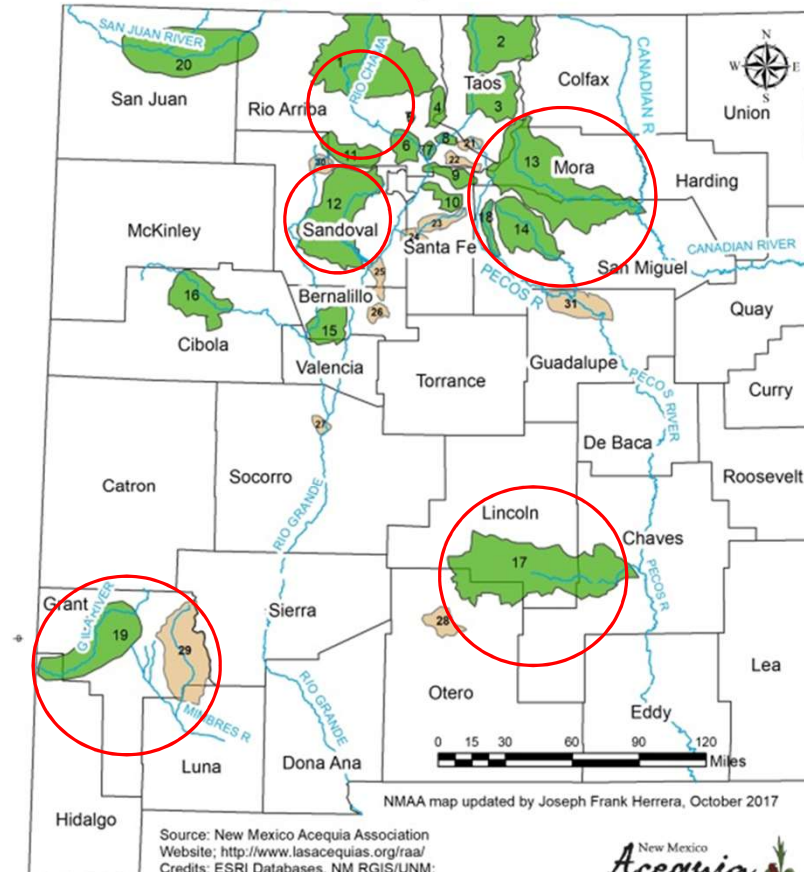
Heavy debris flows destroyed the diversion for Acequia del Sombrillo in Mora County after the HPCC fire and post-fire floods. This area is prone to recurring flooding (cascading events).

~700 Acequias in New Mexico


- Rio Grande and Tributaries
- San Juan River
- Rio Chama
- Nambe/Pojoaque/Tesuque
- Pecos River (Gallinas)
- Canadian (Mora)
- Rio Pueblo/Rio Embudo
- Jemez River
- Rio San Jose
- Hondo River
- Gila River
- Mimbres River

*impacted by post-fire flooding

Congreso de las Acequias
Regional Acequia Associations



NM Acequia Regions

-  Type 1 Region
-  Type 2 Region

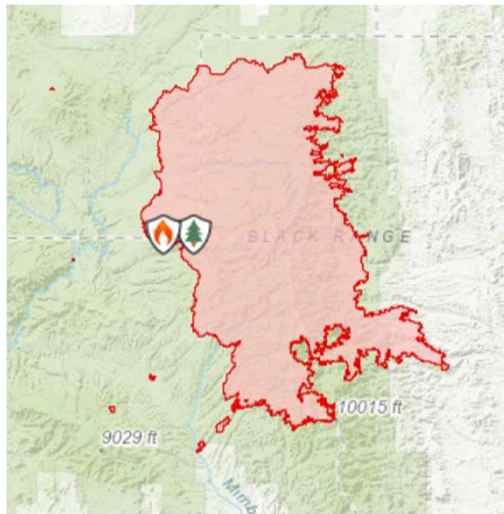


Catastrophic fires and floods from 2022 to present

2022 Black Fire

325,136 Acres

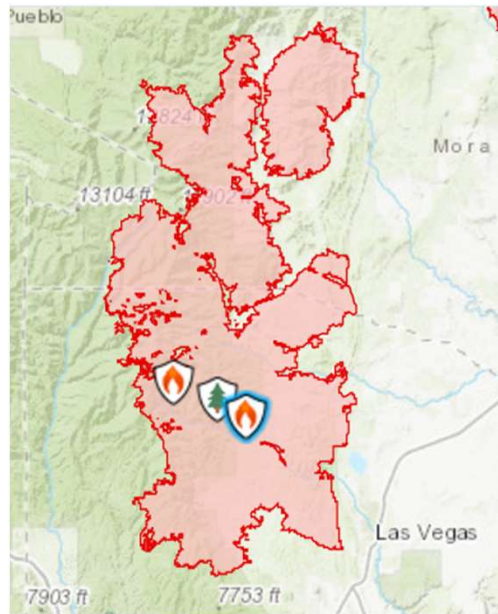
25+ Damaged Acequias



2022 Hermits Peak Calf Canyon

341,735 Acres

90+ Damaged Acequias



2022 Cerro Pelado

45,605 Acres

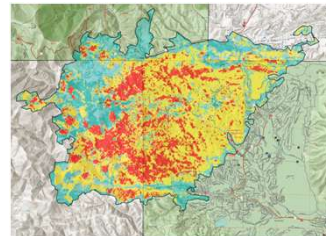
1 damaged Acequia



2024 Salt/South Fork

24,754 Acres

20+ Damaged Acequias



**Estimated number
of damaged
acequias:
~150**

2024 Rio Chama Flooding

8 Damaged Acequias

Other non-federal disasters:

- Dixon
- Rio en Medio (SF County)
- Santa Cruz (SF County)
- Sierra County – Monticello
- Plus others

Overview of Disaster Programs

FEMA Public Assistance (Federal Disasters). FEMA covers emergency debris removal and structural repairs. Reimbursement basis. 75/25 cost share. Acequia administers their own projects.



FEMA

DHSEM Disaster Assistance Program (State Disasters). DHSEM is similar to FEMA PA but for state disasters. 75/25 state/local cost share. Acequia administers their own projects.

NRCS Emergency Watershed Program (Declared by USDA-NRCS). NRCS through local sponsors (SWCD or County). Sponsors procure contractors for debris removal or structural repairs. Sponsors administer projects; acequia not burdened with managing funds/procurement. 75/25 cost share.



HPCC Claims Office. This process is unique to the HPCC disaster. Acequias are eligible for assistance through HPCC and are generally referred to HPCC from FEMA PA.



**Note: HPCC is federally funded 100%, not cost share required.*

Partnerships on Disaster Recovery

NMDOT Emergency Debris Removal (FEMA-DHSEM-DFA Partnership). NMDOT procures contractors to complete emergency debris removal and gets reimbursed by FEMA (or DHSEM for state disasters). NMDOT administers project; acequia not burdened with managing funds/procurement. 75/25 cost share, except for HPCC which covers 100%.

NRCS EWP Sponsors (Local SWCD, counties, NMACD, DFA*). EWP requires a sponsorship to implement the program, where the sponsor provides match, manages projects, and procures contractors. *For HPCC, sponsor is DFA and NMACD is on contract for assessments and design. DFA procures contractors.

ISC Acequia Bureau. ISC has an acequia fund that can be used for disaster recovery, particularly for cost share requirements. They can also fund assessment reports.

New Mexico Acequia Association/High Water Mark. NMAA conducts outreach and provides technical assistance on the initial application process for FEMA, NRCS, and NMDOT. NMAA contracts with High Water Mark to provide technical assistance to acequias through the application process for FEMA PA or DHSEM DAP, including damage inventories and hydrology & hydraulic (H&H) studies.

Acequia Task Force

DHSEM convenes a monthly Acequia Task Force meeting for all partners to give status reports, to identify problems and work collaboratively to solve problems. It includes representation from FEMA, HPCC Claims Office, DHSEM, NMAA, NMACD, NRCS, and other partners.

Status of Acequia Disaster Recovery Efforts (estimates, pending verification with partners)

	FEMA PA	NMDOT Debris Removal	NRCS EWP	DHSEM (State Disasters)
HPCC DR 4652 (2022)	~70 RPAs 67 referred to HPCC Claims Office	54 MOAs 38 Completed 18 In Progress Reimbursed by FEMA	100+ EWP Applications* 14 Completed 47 Designs Completed 49 Designs in Progress <small>*may include some private acequias</small>	N/A
Black Fire (2022)	N/A	~10 acequias MOAs State covered 100%	~10 acequias EWP Applications	DHSEM DAP ~10 Applications
Salt Fire/South Fork DR 4795 (2024)	~20 RPAs	Not Available due to lack of cost share	~20 EWP Applications	N/A
Rio Chama Flooding DR 4795 (2024)	~8 RPAs	Not Available due to lack of cost share	Pending	N/A
Others: Santa Fe County, Dixon/Embudo, Sierra, etc.	N/A	3 acequias in Dixon in 2022, 100% funded by state		~10 Applications

CASE STUDY:

Acequia del Alto al Norte. Filled in with silt after HPCC disaster (DR 4652). Silt and debris accumulation after each rain event.

Programs:

1. Used their own funds to hire backhoe to clean 100 ft of ditch with recurring siltation (5x). Requested reimbursement from FEMA Public Assistance (Referred to HPCC Claims Office). Local Funds, 100% reimbursement Federal Funds.
2. NMDOT contractors did debris removal on the entire length of the ditch (3+ miles). 100% Federal Funds.
3. NRCS EWP Program did design and construction for a new headgate to mitigate effects of silt. 100% Federal funds.



CASE STUDY: Grijalva Ditch.

Damaged in post-fire flooding following the Black Fire. Not declared a federal disaster, only a state disaster.

Programs:

- Emergency Debris Removal was done by NMDOT contractors. Generally, state disasters have a 75/25 cost share. However, the state covered 100% for this disaster.



CASE STUDY: Acequia de la Plaza de Dixon.

One of three acequias damaged in very localized flash flooding in Spring of 2022.

Programs:

- This established the template for NMDOT to do acequia debris removal via contractors. State covered 100% of the cost.



Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

1. Cost Share Requirements. A long-term solution for 75/25 cost share requirements is needed.

Whether they are damaged in a state or federal disaster, **the acequias do not have the resources** to provide 25% match. Options are as follows:

- ISC Acequia Bureau. Additional recurring funding for the ACDIF from the Irrigation Works Construction Fund, Special Appropriations (short-term). Creation of new recurring funding sources such as HB 330 from the 2025 session.
- DFA Match Fund. Additional funding (and make recurring) for the Match Fund and ensure that disasters have access to funding by having an annual set aside for disasters.

2. Emergency Debris Removal. After a disaster, the most urgent need for acequias is to get water flowing again in a timely manner. For each disaster, the cost share is uncertain and the state is reinventing the wheel. Instead, the state should **institutionalize ACEQUIA DEBRIS REMOVAL** with agreements between agencies and reliable funding for cost share requirements.

3. Recurring Flooding (Cascading Events). The nature of post-fire flooding is that it is recurring for several years after the initial fire disaster. FEMA will cover the cost of cascading events but only up to the end of the disaster (with extensions). Some recurring flooding may be flash flooding that becomes the burden of the state through state emergency orders/state disasters. The state should look ahead and **prepare for an increase in costs from burn scar flooding for years to come.**

Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

4. Technical Assistance. Acequias are governed and managed by volunteers. Therefore, specialized technical assistance is vital to the recovery process. Expand resources for recovery officers and case managers at DHSEM and an increase in acequia technical assistance through NMAA and our partners.

5. Reliance on NRCS and Sponsors for EWP. Given a choice between FEMA and NRCS EWP, acequias have tended to choose EWP for their structural repairs. It is more user-friendly because the sponsor administers the funds, manages funds, and procures contractors. There are several issues to be considered:

- Local or state sponsors need more capacity to administer EWP.
- NRCS is undergoing a reduction in staff due to federal budget cuts.
- Recently, acequia eligibility has been subject to a decision by the NRCS Chief and this decision is often delayed by months. Acequia eligibility should be codified in policy, not a case-by-case decision.

The state should develop a program like EWP (agency administers projects) that is covered with FEMA reimbursements and/or state funds, modeled after the NMDOT debris removal program.