



# Acequia Technical Assistance:

Overview of Services Provided by the  
New Mexico Acequia Association and  
Collaboration with State Agencies

By  
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Land Grant Legislative Interim Committee  
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## Acequias: Community-based governance

- Cultural worldview of water as a community resource
- Historical context and centuries of self-governance based on customary practices
- Water sharing and repartimiento guide the allocation of water by acequias at the local level

Any work with acequias has to be informed by:

- understanding of history and culture
- appreciation of traditional knowledge and customs
- nuanced understanding of water law and the laws that govern small political subdivisions





## Over 25 Years of Experience with Acequias

- NMAA started doing outreach and **community-based education** in acequia communities in 1989.
- In 1999, NMAA started the **Acequia Governance Project** to support acequias with bylaws and infrastructure.
- In 2003, after the State Legislature passed legislation authorizing acequias to make decisions about water transfers, NMAA produced the **Acequia Governance Handbook**.
- NMAA has worked with over **600 acequias** since 2003, most of which have adopted bylaws with language required to exercise their authority over water transfers.
- For many of the acequias, NMAA builds **long-term relationships** over several years working on multiple projects.

*Example (right): **Acequia del Alto al Norte** has spent two years on their bylaws, ten years on an infrastructure project (design and construction), and three years on disaster recovery.*





*Above: Rose petals flow in an acequia during a water blessing for Día de San Isidro*

## **NMAA Bylaws Template PREAMBLE:**

Water is the lifeblood of our communities.

The parcientes of Acequia de la Comunidad believe that water should be protected as a community resource so that future generations can grow food and can have a healthy and secure source of water for needs within the community.

We seek to promote agriculture by keeping water rights on historically irrigated land.

If changes in historic uses of water become necessary, those decisions should be made through a cultural and spiritual connection to our community and through our own process of self-governance so that those decisions can be made for the common good.

We honor the ancient customs and traditions embodied in our acequia and seek to govern our acequia to continue the connection between our land, water, and culture in perpetuity.



## NMAA Technical Assistance

- **Water:** This area of work includes water rights, water management, irrigation practices, and water sharing.
- **Governance:** Bylaws, Open Meetings Act, Inspection of Public Records Act, enforcement, easements, elections, liability, general compliance with state law. Also includes acequia involvement in land use planning and navigating issues related to historic preservation.
- **Financial Management:** Audits, financial reporting under the OSA tiered reporting system, assessments and delinquencies, and general financial management.
- **Infrastructure & Disaster Recovery:** Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plans, Capital Outlay, applications for the Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund (ACDIF) and other state programs, applications for federal and state disaster programs, including FEMA, DHSEM, and NRCS EWP.



## Partnerships

NMAA has a 17 member team that works on acequia education, outreach, technical assistance, and youth education.

Our work complements and supports the work of state agencies and NGOs that serve acequias in their role as local governments:

- Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) for infrastructure funding, Capital Outlay and ACDIF
- NMDOJ Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Division, overall support for acequias as local governments, complex cases.
- Office of the State Auditor (OSA) for financial compliance
- Dept. of Finance and Admin. & Legislative Counsel Service for Capital Outlay
- NM Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) to leverage federal funding through NRCS
- Referrals from NM Acequia Commission, Congressional delegation, legislators, and other government officials.
- Regional projects: WRRRI Acequia Drought Resiliency Project with Rio Chama and Santa Cruz, Disaster Recovery, Rio Santa Barbara mapping

In addition, NMAA has key partners/contractors including:

- New Mexico Legal Aid for legal assistance to acequias
- Mustafa Chudnoff Associates for hydrology consultation
- High Water Mark on emergency management and disaster recovery



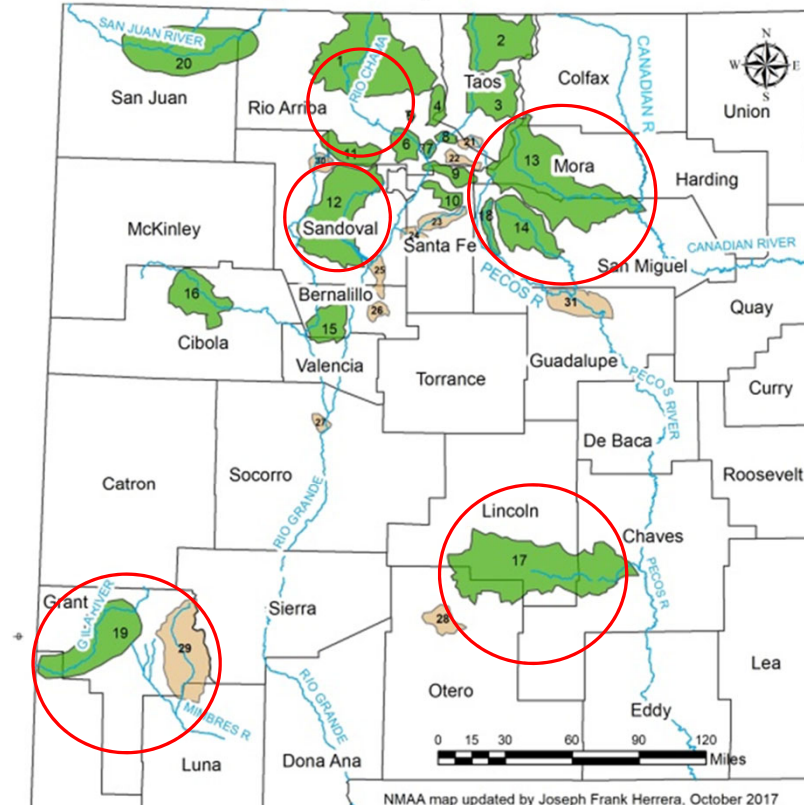
*High Water Mark has been vital to disaster response and recovery for acequias. Above: Matt Smith, Senior Program Manager.*



# ~700 Acequias in New Mexico

County	Number of Acequias
Bernalillo	16
Catron	7
Cibola	11
Colfax	1
Eddy	1
Grant	19
Guadalupe	10
Hidalgo	2
Lincoln	27
McKinley	1
Mora	60
Otero	5
Rio Arriba	175
San Juan	39
San Miguel	49
Sandoval	36
Santa Fe	72
Sierra	3
Socorro	2
Taos	107
Torrance	4
Valencia	1
22 Counties	649

Congreso de las Acequias  
Regional Acequia Associations



NMAA map updated by Joseph Frank Herrera, October 2017

Source: New Mexico Acequia Association  
Website: <http://www.lasacequias.org/raa/>  
Credits: ESRI Databases, NM RGIS/UNM;  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**NM Acequia Regions**

- Type 1 Region
- Type 2 Region



## Acequia and Community Ditch Education Program (ACDEP)

- Since 2007, this has been a line item in DFA Local Government Division. Through an RFP process, this funding is used to provide technical assistance to acequias. NMAA works under contract with DFA to provide technical assistance through our Acequia Governance Project.
- The line item in DFA is \$498,000 per year and it supports a Professional Services Contract (through rigorous RFP process). NMAA uses funds for staff and contractors. Some years, NMAA has received junior funds to supplement recurring funds. FY24 was GroFunds to NCNMEDD and contracted to NMAA through RFP process.
- NMAA provides a written report and presents to the New Mexico Acequia Commission monthly.

	# Acequias	DFA Funding	Junior Funding
FY 23	356	\$498k	\$140k
FY 24	450	\$498k	\$200k*
FY 25	279	\$498k	\$0

	FY23-FY25 Acequias Served
ICIP	91
Capital Outlay	38
ACDIF Applications	76
Bylaws	20
Disaster Recovery	~150



## Resources for Acequia Technical Assistance

- ACDEP at DFA Local Government Division. Outreach, education, and technical assistance on governance, infrastructure, and disaster recovery. Recommendation: Institutionalize and/or codify to ensure long-term availability of support services for acequias.
- NMDOJ Treaty Division. Supports acequias and land grants on more complex cases involving water, governance, easements, voting/elections, etc.
- ISC Acequia Bureau. Administration of Capital Outlay, ACDIF, and Special appropriations.
- OSA Small Political Subdivision Assistance. Resources for OSA to procure IPAs for compliance with Tiered Reporting System and resources for staff who assist acequias navigate the process.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Capacity building to serve as sponsors for federal disaster funding from NRCS, assistance generally with infrastructure.
- New Mexico Acequia Commission (NMAC). Monthly meetings, referrals to NMAA for technical assistance. With more capacity, NMAC has potential to serve as liaison to agencies and assist with communications and outreach.



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