

Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I am here representing acequias in the **Ojo Caliente, Vallecitos, Ancones and surrounding region**, and I want to ask you to look beyond any one ditch or any one flood event.

Collectively, our regional acequias represent **more than 25 miles of irrigation systems serving farms, ranches and rural families**. These systems are not simply infrastructure. They sustain agriculture, water rights, rural economies and a way of life tied to this land through hundreds of years of family, ancestral and cultural tradition.

And today, that way of life needs your help.

1. First — recognize the disaster that is already in front of us.

In 2025, significant flooding affected Ojo Caliente, Vallecitos and other Northern New Mexico communities. Counties declared local emergencies, yet there was no state disaster declaration.

The absence of a declaration does not mean there was an absence of disaster.

We have photographs. We have GPS coordinates. We have documented damage. We have ditches filled with silt, blocked culverts, damaged headgates and presas, debris, eroded banks and river diversions that failed or were altered by floodwaters.

At Acequia de los Gallegos in Ojo Caliente, the flooding actually diverted the Rio Vallecitos/Ojo Caliente away from our headgate. Debris and silt accumulated at our diversion, and specialized equipment was required just to begin restoring water delivery.

And we are not alone.

We are seeing serious impacts across multiple acequias in this watershed. That tells us something important:

This is not one acequia's problem. This is a regional watershed problem.

We need a clearer and faster pathway from documented damage to disaster recognition, assistance and recovery.

2. Second — strengthen the technical assistance that is actually working.

I want to specifically recognize the **New Mexico Acequia Association**.

NMAA stepped in early and helped our acequias document damage, develop preliminary cost estimates, understand funding programs and application requirements, and coordinate with agencies.

For small rural acequias, that assistance is invaluable.

Our commissioners, mayordomos and parciantes know these waterways. Many families have worked this land for generations.

But knowing your land should not mean you must also become an engineer, hydrologist, emergency manager, procurement specialist and grant administrator just to recover from a flood.

NMAA has become the bridge between what we see on the ground and what government needs on paper.

Please strengthen that bridge.

We need the State to provide NMAA and its partners with recurring resources to create a standing technical-assistance capacity—not just after a disaster, but before one.

3. Third — we have to fix the funding and matching problem.

This may be one of the biggest barriers facing rural acequias.

Acequias do not have a tax base. We do not have a recurring governmental revenue stream.

Our budgets are extremely limited. Parciante dues may cover a mayordomo and basic annual operations, and, if we are fortunate, a small maintenance project.

Then a flood comes through and suddenly an acequia needs tens of thousands—or potentially hundreds of thousands—of dollars.

At Ojo Caliente, immediate stabilization was estimated at \$7,000 to \$10,000, yet our commission could authorize only \$2,500 because we could not responsibly exhaust the acequia's reserves.

Another nearby acequia documented approximately \$13,810 in recovery costs while possessing only \$2,386.20 in total financial resources.

So when a program requires a **10%, 20% or 25% match**, I ask you:

Where exactly is that money supposed to come from?

Ultimately, that requirement gets passed down to individual rural families—farmers, ranchers, retirees and landowners—or the acequia simply cannot pursue the funding.

A disaster program that technically offers assistance but financially prevents the affected community from accessing it is not accomplishing its purpose.

We need reduced matches, match waivers, state-funded matching assistance, or another mechanism designed specifically for the financial reality of rural acequias.

4. Finally — help us stop waiting for the next disaster.

We cannot continue repairing one ditch at a time while ignoring what is happening throughout the watershed.

If an arroyo repeatedly damages an acequia, rebuilding the ditch alone does not solve the problem.

We need to look at the **watershed, arroyo, river, presa, acequia and surrounding infrastructure as one interconnected system.**

And that means planning for **drought, wildfire and flood together.**

We need regional assessments of vulnerable headgates and presas, culverts, riverbanks, arroyo crossings, sediment problems and emergency access. We need engineering and project development completed **before** disaster strikes. And we need watershed-level planning that identifies the projects that will prevent the next emergency instead of simply paying to repair yesterday's damage.

That also means supporting our **ICIP and Capital Outlay requests now and on a recurring basis.**

Vallecitos East Ditch has already completed engineering for its failing main headgate and has submitted an ICIP request to move construction forward.

We need our Senator and Representatives advocating for projects like this.

Please do not forget about the North simply because these communities are small and geographically dispersed. Out of sight cannot mean out of mind.

Our ask is straightforward:

Recognize our disasters. Strengthen NMAA and technical assistance. Remove financial barriers that rural acequias cannot realistically meet. And prioritize our ICIP, Capital Outlay and regional watershed investments before the next disaster occurs.

Because when we invest in an acequia, we are not simply repairing a ditch.

We are protecting water. We are protecting agriculture. We are protecting rural economies. We are protecting families. And we are protecting hundreds of years of Northern New Mexico tradition so that there is something left for the generations that come after us.

We are asking you to help us act now—while we still have the opportunity to preserve it.

“A disaster program that technically offers assistance but financially prevents the affected community from accessing it is not accomplishing its purpose.”

And I would make **“This is not one acequia's problem. This is a regional watershed problem.”** Thank you.