

**Land Grant Committee - Fire, Flood and Drought Response and Recovery Status of
Acequias 1:15 PM August 25, 2026**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Harold Trujillo, President of La Asociacion de las Acequias del Valle de Mora. I am also President of the New Mexico Acequia Association and a Registered Professional Engineer. Today, I would like to explain the challenges we have faced in protecting the Mora Valley acequias, especially Morphy Lake Dam, after the fire, flooding, and debris buildup. These cascading impacts continue. Every few months, we must clear debris from our diversions. Some acequias have been filled with debris, while others have suffered washed-out banks or severe erosion.

Morphy Lake Dam was first built in the mid-1800s by the parciantes of Acequia de La Isla and Acequia de San Jose. The acequias own the dam, which is currently leased to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the State Parks Division. Morphy Lake State Park contributes significantly to the local economies of Mora and San Miguel Counties. I am one of the dam operators.

We experienced the following difficulties in protecting Morphy Lake Dam after the Fire.

*** State agencies are not prepared to help.**

After the fire, we found that most of the forest around the lake had burned. We requested backhoe equipment to divert water away from the dam and asked the Department of Game and Fish for water testing support. We determined that water needed to be diverted near the dam to prevent ash and debris from entering the lake. When ash mixes with water, it can increase acidity and harm fish. However, both requests were denied. We found a retired fish hatchery manager to assess the water's acidity. The agencies appeared concerned about a negative response from the Army Corps of Engineers. We ultimately hired a backhoe to divert water away from the dam. The intake diversion from the river to the canal is two miles upstream from the lake, and the canal runs through the most severely burned scar area, so diverting water at the river would not have helped.

*** The Army Corp of Engineers does not seem to have procedures.**

We created a temporary diversion near the dam and redirected one arroyo, or ephemeral stream, away from the dam. The Army Corps of Engineers later inspected the site and reprimanded us for diverting the arroyo away from the lake. They ordered us to redirect it back to the lake, even though the arroyo carried ash and debris from a nearby burn scar.

*** FEMA has not yet recognized damage to the Dam or the intake canal.**

Four years after the fire, FEMA still appears uncertain and has not made a final determination on assistance. We have submitted several requests to remove debris from the canal, but they have been denied. FEMA has also imposed new requirements for potential future disaster funding on Acequia de La Isla and Acequia de San Jose. The main challenge is that we must prove we are a local government of the State of New Mexico, and FEMA does not appear to understand our status as a quasi-governmental entity:

- A. We must now Register with Sam.Gov;
- B. The name of our acequia needs to match exactly with bylaws and bank account;
- C. The EIN information must be up to date with current physical address and contact person;
- D. Our bylaws need to be recorded page by page at the County Clerk's Office; and
- E. Meeting minutes must be provided to show who and when the commissioners were elected.

*** No responsibility for rivers above the acequia diversions.**

Debris has accumulated above our diversion and will wash into our acequias during the next flood. Some of this debris is on private property, and some are in the national forest. We have not seen private property owners or the U.S. Forest Service address the problem.

*** Currently, we are facing a severe drought because of extremely low snowfall this winter and an extremely poor and late monsoon.**

We are facing the worst disaster in my lifetime. At this point pastures have not grown for winter grazing and hay production is extremely low. I do not see how cattle herds will make it through the winter. The farmers will need to buy hay or sell their cattle.