



Acequia Technical Assistance:

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

By

Paula Garcia, Executive Director
New Mexico Acequia Association

Water and Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
September 12, 2025



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
- NMDOT 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

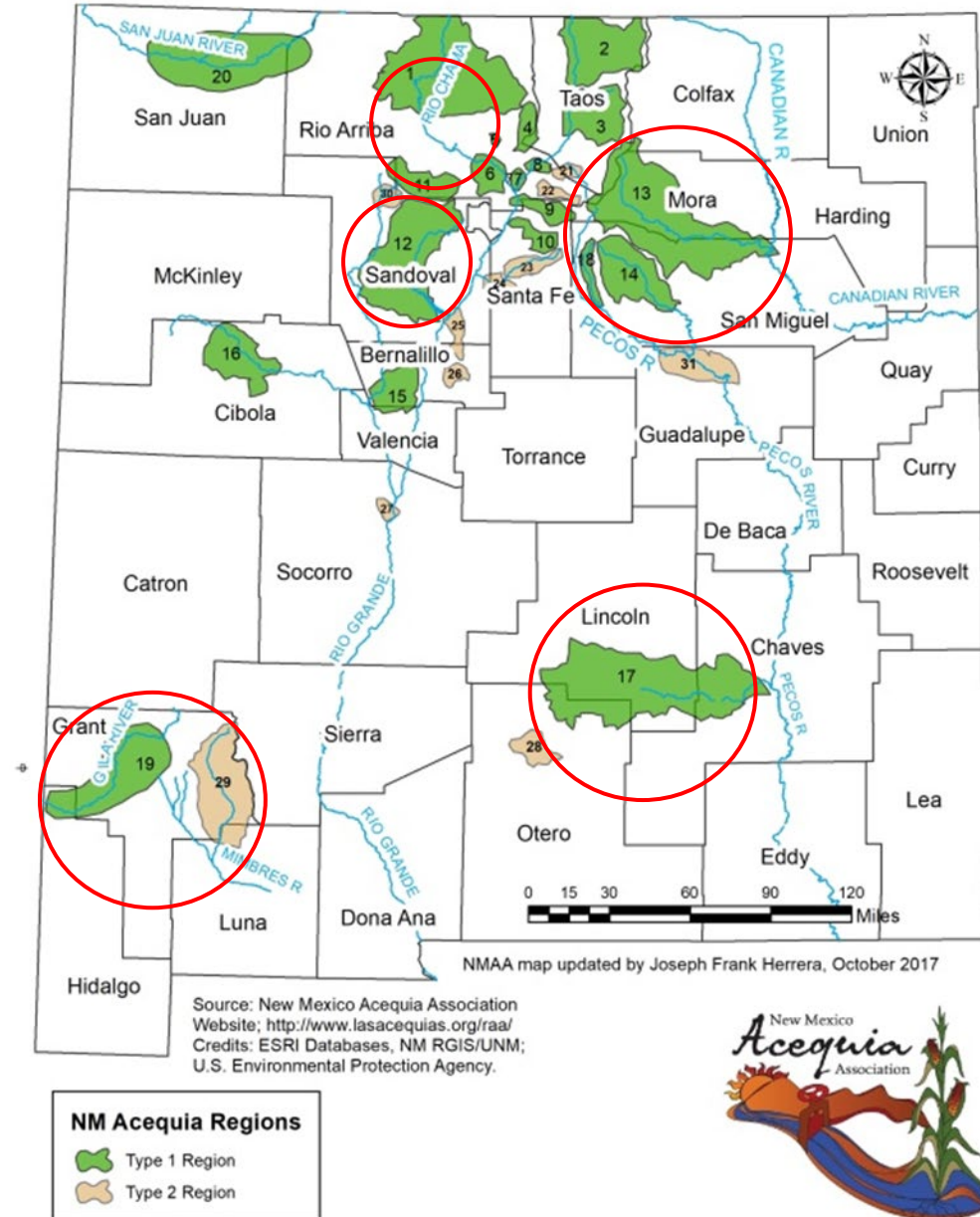


High Water Mark has been vital to disaster response and recovery for acequias. Above: Matt Smith, Senior Program Manager.

~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



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	76
ACDIF Applications	38
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. (Note: NMAA does this work under a professional services contract via an RFP process.)
- NMDOJ Treaty Division. Supports acequias and land grants on complex cases involving water, governance, easements, 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.

NMAA is the primary technical assistance provider for acequias and community ditches for overall governance, infrastructure, and disaster recovery. Works closely with NMAC.

State agencies have built more capacity in recent years to better serve acequias:

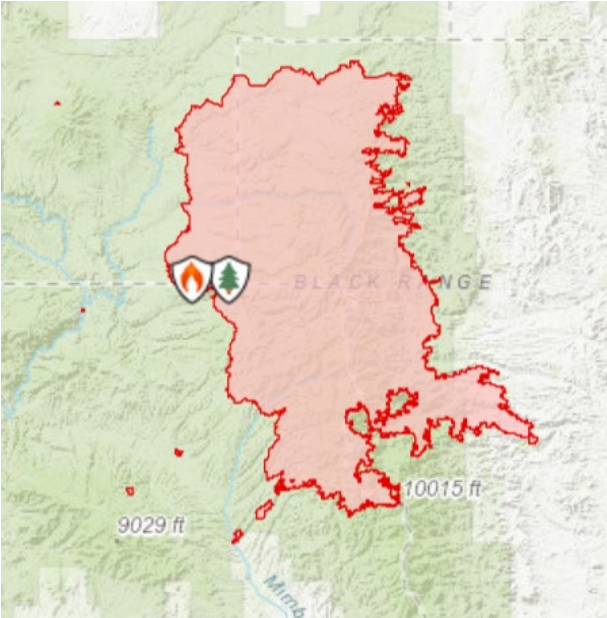
- ISC
- NMDOJ
- OSA

For specific needs, such as the HPCC EWP program, NMACD provided assistance on damage assessments.

Update on Acequia Disaster Recovery Technical Assistance

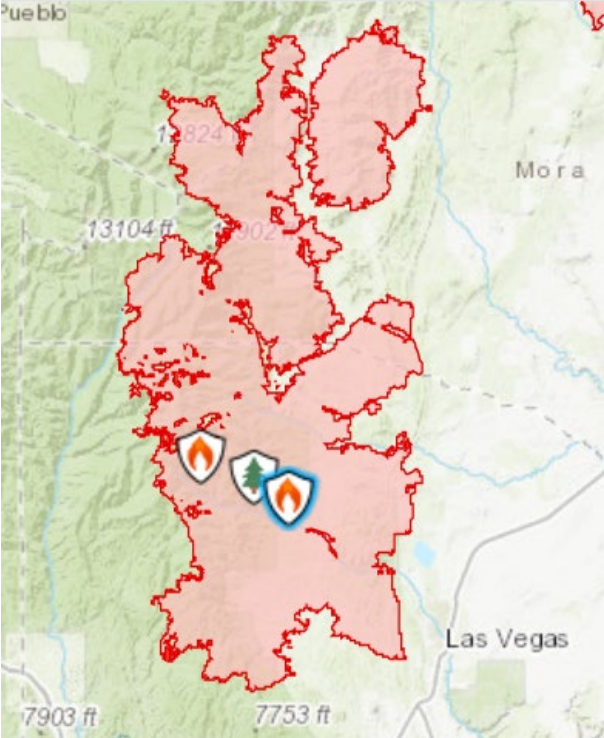
2022 Black Fire

325,136 Acres
25+ Damaged Acequias



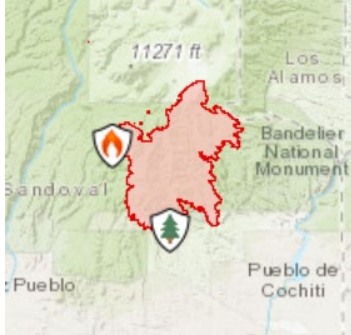
2022 Hermits Peak Calf Canyon

341,735 Acres
90+ Damaged Acequias



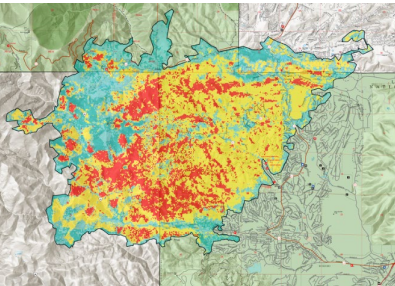
2022 Cerro Pelado

45,605 Acres
1 damaged Acequia



2024 Salt/South Fork

24,754 Acres
20+ Damaged Acequias



Estimated number of damaged acequias: ~200

2025: 50 new acequias damaged in Santa Cruz, Ojo Caliente, Pojoaque, plus cascading events in HPCC and Ruidoso.

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%. **Not currently available.**

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. **Uncertain if available for acequias since 2024.**

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.

UPDATE September 2025:
NMDOT debris removal is currently not available for new flooding. NRCS EWP did not approve funding for acequias in the 2024 Rio Chama flooding.

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)
2025 Flooding Cascading events (HPCC and Salt/South Form) NEW: Ojo Caliente, Santa Cruz, Pojoaque	N/A	None Requests pending HPCC for cascading events.	None	County declarations pending Rio Arriba and Santa Fe -- Ojo Caliente 9 -- Santa Cruz 18+ -- Pojoaque 20+
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 *may include some private	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.	N/A	3 acequias in Dixon in 2022, 100% funded by state		~10 Applications in various communities



New Mexico Acequia Association
505 Don Gaspar Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505-995-9644

For more information, contact NMAA:
Paula Garcia – paula@lasacequias.org

