



Acequias and Regional Water Planning

Presentation to the Water and Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
September 12, 2025

The New Mexico Acequia Association is a grassroots, membership based organization of acequias and community ditches in New Mexico. Since 1989, we have been working to protect acequias and agricultural water rights through community education, organizing, and advocacy.



Our vision is for acequias to flow with clean water, to work together to grow food, and to celebrate our cultural heritage.

Acequias play a major role in water governance and management

- In their basins, acequias **manage most of the non-Indian surface water rights**, which are dedicated to agriculture.
- Each acequia is unique and **governs the water rights** of the farmlands it serves through its bylaws and local customs.
- Acequias have centuries-old **customs of water sharing** between acequias on the same stream system, which is an ancient form of “water planning.”
- Acequias have the **authority to approve or deny water transfers/water lease applications**.



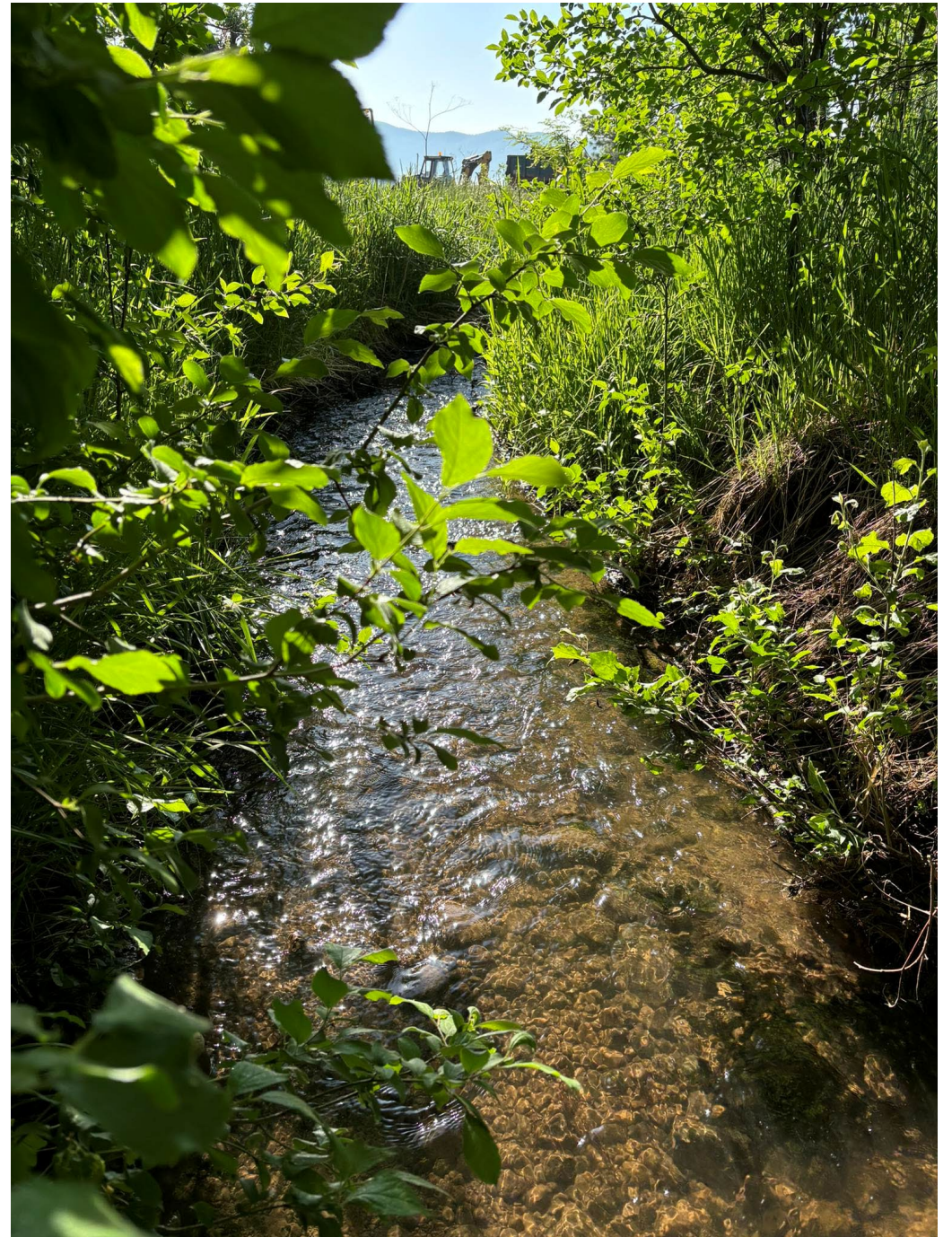
Why is water planning important to acequias? Planning is needed to

- Support **watershed health** through restoration projects,
- Prevent **groundwater depletion** that impairs acequia surface water rights,
- Ensure that **water transfers and leases** are not detrimental to acequias,
- Plan and implement **infrastructure projects** that enhance conservation and efficiency,
- Adapt to **drought and water scarcity** by building upon water sharing customs,
- Engage in **disaster** preparedness, response, and recovery,
- **Protect water for future generations.**



Acequias and Interconnected Waters

- Acequias are interconnected with neighboring community water systems (MDWCAs), Pueblos, towns, and subdivisions.
- Watersheds are the source of snowmelt, runoff, springs, & streams that feed acequias.
- Aquifers and subsurface waters sustain river flows and acequias.
- Acequias and community ditches contribute to aquifer recharge. *Source: NMSU “Acequias of the Southwestern United States: Elements of Resilience in a Coupled Natural & Human System”*



Acequia Engagement through Regional Acequia Associations

Many acequias are organized into **Regional Acequia Associations** at the watershed and basin level.

Regional Acequia Associations (RAA) have taken on numerous **leadership** roles: adjudication, water sharing agreements, legal defense and litigation, & advocacy.

Regional associations have representation from their respective stream systems and acequias, which can address **issues of common concern**:

- Water rights & Water supply
- Threats to acequia continuity
- Regional water planning

NMAA's approach to water planning will be to **build the capacity of regional acequia associations** to engage in acequia-level planning and to engage with other stakeholders & agencies.

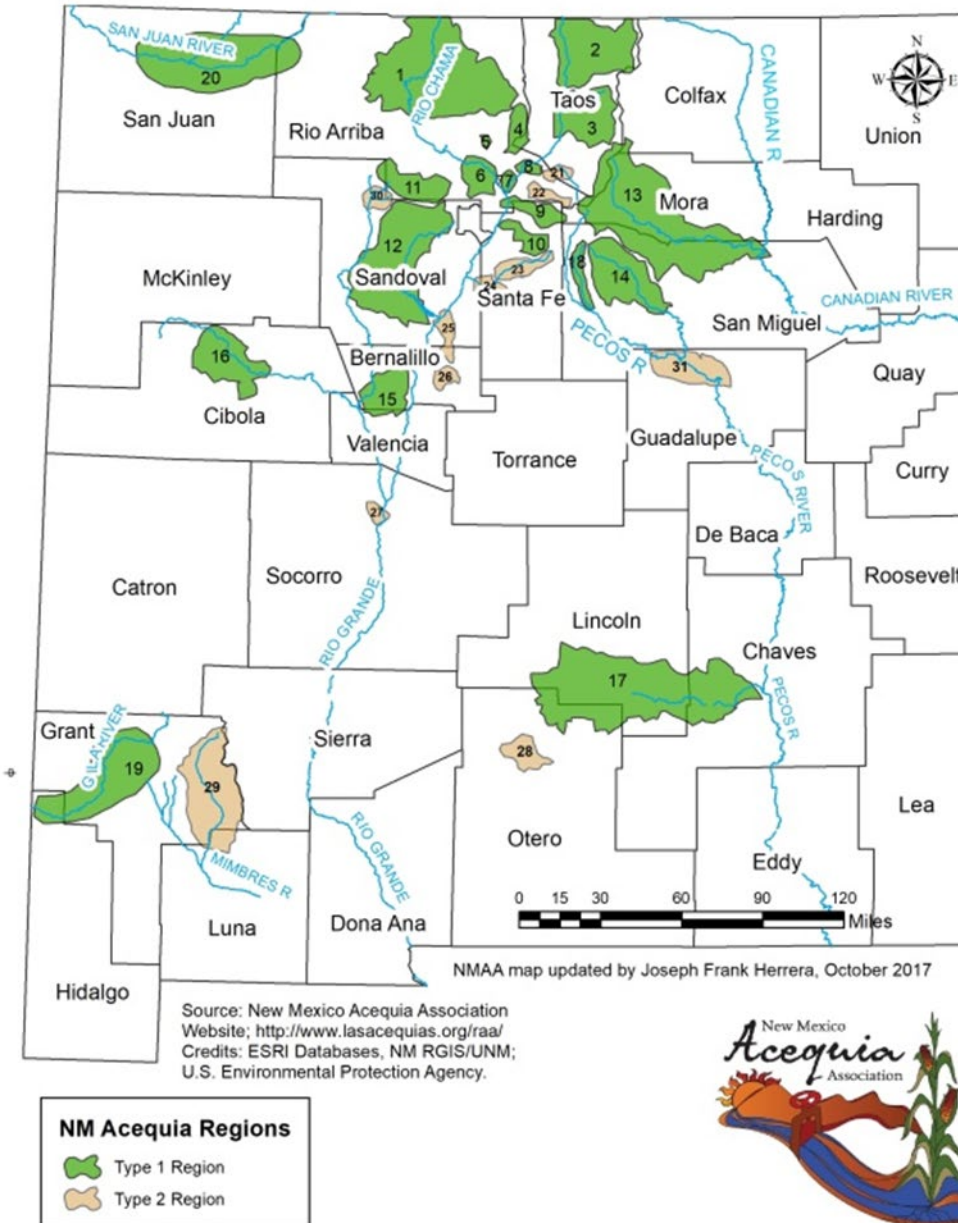


~700 Acequias in New Mexico

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 and high intensity rain event flooding**

Congreso de las Acequias Regional Acequia Associations



Acequia-centered support for regional water planning

NMAA Water Security Planning Act Acequia Working Group

- Delegates from various acequia regions across the state
- This group is working to provide input during the ongoing ISC rulemaking process
- Working to provide detailed comments, recommendations, and language to ISC WSPA rules

Comments and Recommendations

- Creation of the **Acequia and Rural Water Security Advisory Working Group**
 - Composed of acequias, mutual domestics or community water systems, and land grant-mercedes
 - Purpose: provide a forum for input from rural communities to ensure that their water rights, water needs, and viewpoints are considered and incorporated into regional water planning
- Planning regions shall overlap and be contained within the **Councils of Governments (COGs) regions**
 - Leverage overlapping technical assistance services, such as free grant writing, planning, and project implementation services
 - COGs have vast expertise/existing relationships with assisting local government bodies, tribes, and political subdivisions of the state



Local communities, such as acequias, need access to resources to effectively participate in regional water planning.

Legislative & Budget Recommendations

- Appropriate funds for the Acequia and Rural Water Security Advisory Working Group for resources for staff support, attending meetings, and prepare research summaries that assist rural communities in decision-making.
- Adequately fund the ISC planning program to enable staff to effectively engage with acequias/rural communities and contribute to capacity-building.
- Create opportunities to leverage federal funding such as BOR WaterSMART grants.

