

A MEMORIAL

SUPPORTING LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT BY ACEQUIAS IN NEW MEXICO  
AND COMMEMORATING THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEW  
MEXICO ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION.

WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches in New Mexico have created a cultural landscape and way of life centered around local agriculture, water governance and customs of sharing scarce water; and

WHEREAS, acequias are a centuries-old form of water governance in New Mexico, are recognized as political subdivisions of the state and are responsible for the management of many of the surface water rights on their respective rivers and streams; and

WHEREAS, in many rural, unincorporated communities, acequias are an important, and in some instances the only, form of local government; and

WHEREAS, acequias contribute to the well-being and livelihood of tens of thousands of families who irrigate from an estimated eight hundred acequias; and

WHEREAS, according to hydrological research, acequias enhance the natural process of aquifer recharge by slowing and spreading mountain runoff through an intricate network of waterways that support river flows and riparian habitats; and

WHEREAS, while acequias have a positive effect on the

hydrology of lower reaches of watersheds, they depend on healthy forests in the upper watersheds to generate clean water for rivers and streams; and

WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches face many challenges related to long-term water scarcity and drought, demands to transfer water rights out of agriculture to other uses, adjudication of water rights and the need for investment in irrigation infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches came together in the past four decades to form several regional associations and, twenty-five years ago, established a statewide membership organization, the New Mexico acequia association, NMAA, to protect and defend acequias and to work toward a common vision for the future; and

WHEREAS, some of the policy accomplishments of acequia leaders over the past few decades include the creation of the acequia and community ditch fund, the acequia construction program and cost-share funding at the interstate stream commission and the creation of the governor-appointed acequia commission; and

WHEREAS, acequia leadership through the NMAA also contributed to the passage of new laws strengthening acequia governance, including acequia authority to regulate water transfers and to administer acequia water banking as well as laws strengthening acequia enforcement powers regarding

easements and illegal uses of water; and

WHEREAS, the NMAA and its partners have contributed to efforts to support children, youths and young adults to become stewards of acequia knowledge and practice through community education projects and have started a process to develop curricula with acequia-related themes for public schools that are aligned with educational requirements; and

WHEREAS, acequia leadership has called upon the state engineer, who administers water rights in New Mexico, to affirm its historic role in local water management and to work collaboratively to allocate water as fairly and equitably as possible; and

WHEREAS, as water scarcity has intensified with long-term drought, acequias have developed seasonal water-sharing agreements with the support of the state engineer in certain areas, but much work remains in other areas to involve local acequia officials in water management decisions; and

WHEREAS, as demands increase for water rights, acequias and community ditches will be under greater pressure with regard to transfers of water rights out of agriculture to other uses and will have the authority to regulate such transfers in consideration of whether such transfers are detrimental to the acequia or its members; and

WHEREAS, because of their unique role in water allocation and in making decisions about water transfers,

acequias are important policymakers at the local level and vital partners to the state in water administration by the state engineer and regional water planning by the interstate stream commission; and

WHEREAS, acequias throughout the state are working in close collaboration with the interstate stream commission, the natural resource conservation service and local soil and water conservation districts to restore, rehabilitate and upgrade historic irrigation works to support the continued growth of the agricultural economy to meet the demand for locally grown food;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that acequias and community ditches be recognized for their unique contributions to the culture, history, hydrology, ecology and agricultural economy of the state of New Mexico; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the New Mexico acequia association be congratulated on its twenty-fifth anniversary and its ongoing work to strengthen local acequias, protect acequia-based water rights, support acequia-grown foods, support the engagement of youth through educational projects and curricula and encouragement of new generations of leadership in acequias and community ditches; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the house of representatives recognize the ongoing work by the state engineer to work with

acequias in certain areas of New Mexico and urges the state engineer to expand efforts to collaborate with local acequia elected officials and support their unique role in local water governance and management; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the interstate stream commission and the state engineer be requested to continue to work with leadership from the New Mexico acequia association to expand investment in acequia irrigation infrastructure and to facilitate the involvement of acequias in regional water planning; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be transmitted to the office of the state engineer, the interstate stream commission, the New Mexico acequia association, the acequia commission and the governor.