



Acequias and Regional Water Planning

Presentation to the Water and Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
August 24, 2024, Socorro, NM

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 respective 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, an ancient form of “water planning.”
- Acequias have the authority to approve or deny water transfer/water lease applications.



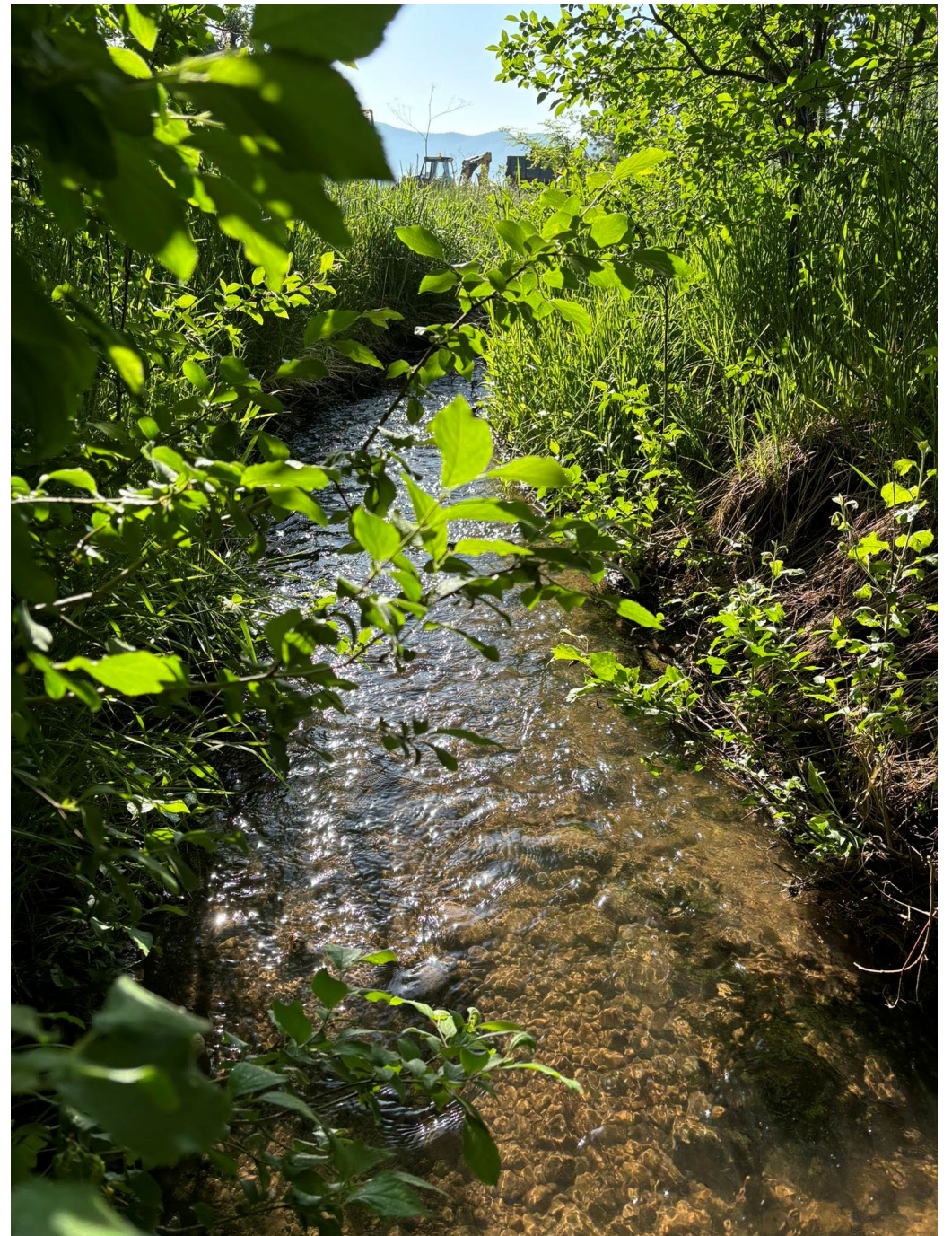
Why is water planning important to acequias? Planning is needed to

- 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, 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/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 and can address **issues of common concern**:

- Water rights & Water supply
- Threats to acequia continuity

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

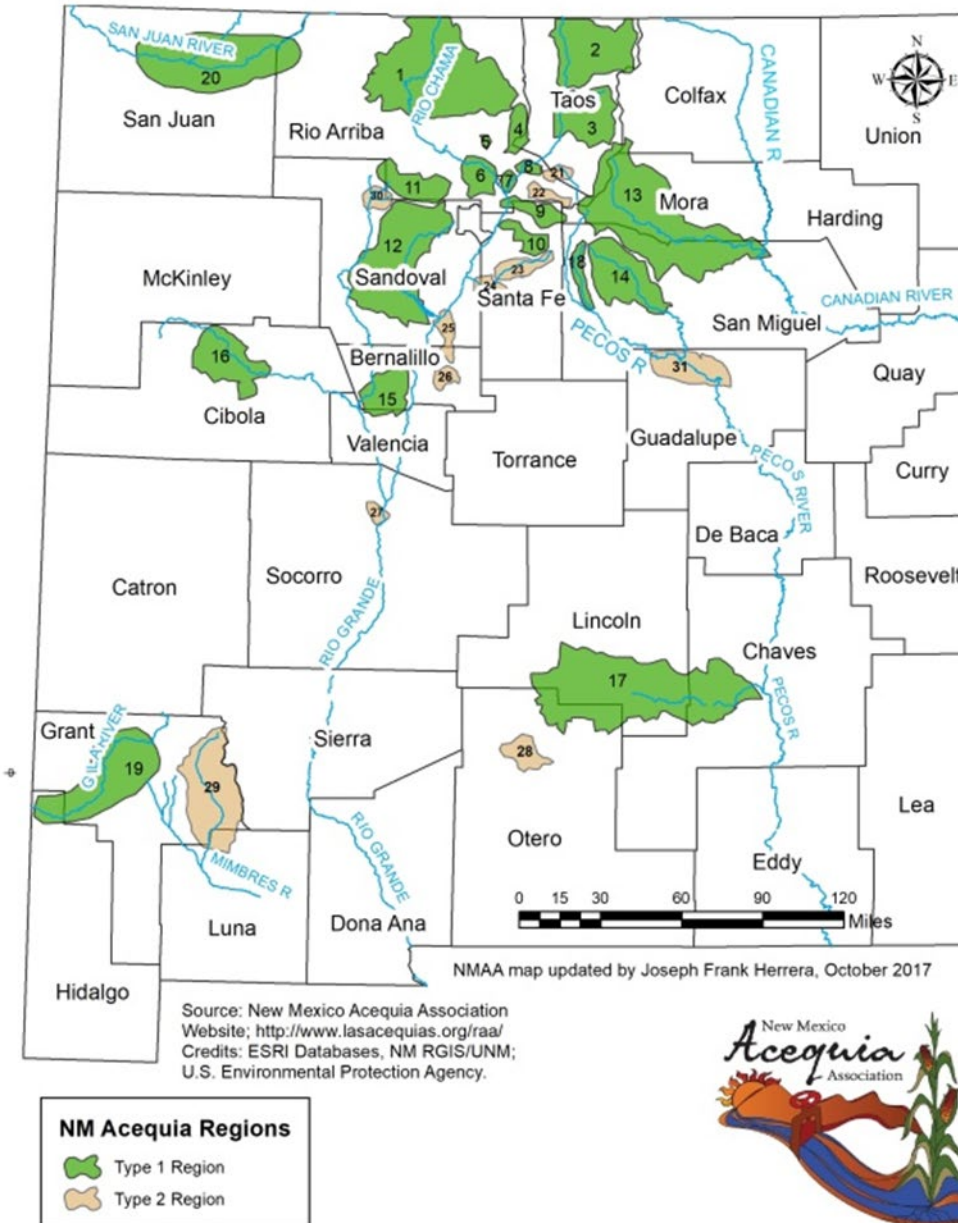


~700 Acequias in New Mexico

- 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

Congreso de las Acequias Regional Acequia Associations



Acequia-centered support for regional water planning

Acequia Water Planning Working Group

- Delegates from various regions will participate in the working group
- This group will give input during the rulemaking process of the ISC
- Advise on the development of an Acequia Guidebook for RWP

Acequia Decision Support Tools

- With NMSU Water Resources Research Institute (WRRRI), develop acequia decision support tools including modeling, data sets, and training modules.

Acequia Guidebook for Regional Water Planning (with WRRRI)

- How to ensure acequia representation in regional water planning body
- How to interpret data to make good decisions
- How to engage respectfully and effectively with diverse interests

Capacity-building for regional acequia associations:

- Training for regional leaders
- Facilitate acequia involvement
- Support engagement the regional process with other stakeholders



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

Legislative & Budget Recommendations

- Appropriate funds for local groups, with an emphasis on underserved communities including acequias, to apply for resources for staff support to attend meetings and prepare research summaries that assist acequias in decision-making.
- Adequately fund the ISC planning program to enable staff to effectively engage with acequias and contribute to capacity-building.
- Create opportunities to leverage federal funding such as BOR WaterSMART grants.



Acequia Guide to Regional Water Planning

Create, plan, and implement flexible water sharing and resilience practices and strategies
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Help get your acequia region a seat at the table in the ISC regional water planning process

- ISC is currently in Year 1 establishing rules, such as boundaries, structure, representation
- Future years aim to support planning and project implementation



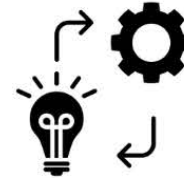
Acequias are central to the health of the watersheds, rivers, groundwater basins, and mutual domesticity

- Contribute to educating the public on the importance of acequia traditions
- Collect knowledge and stories about what keeps acequias thriving



Create your own acequia regional water plans

- Build goals from your community's visions of the future, issues faced, and desired strategies to implement or test
- Build collaborative network of partnerships across landscape



Assess your region and seek support to increase understanding

- Identify what you more you need to know to manage your system and what support can help to gain those understandings
- Develop and prioritize projects for implementation
- Target funding sources



Implement action, assess, and adapt

- Implement projects that address both immediate needs and the root of issues
- Identify road map to achieve visions, expand collaboration to other areas with shared resources and needs



Ensure Acequia Representation in the ISC water planning process

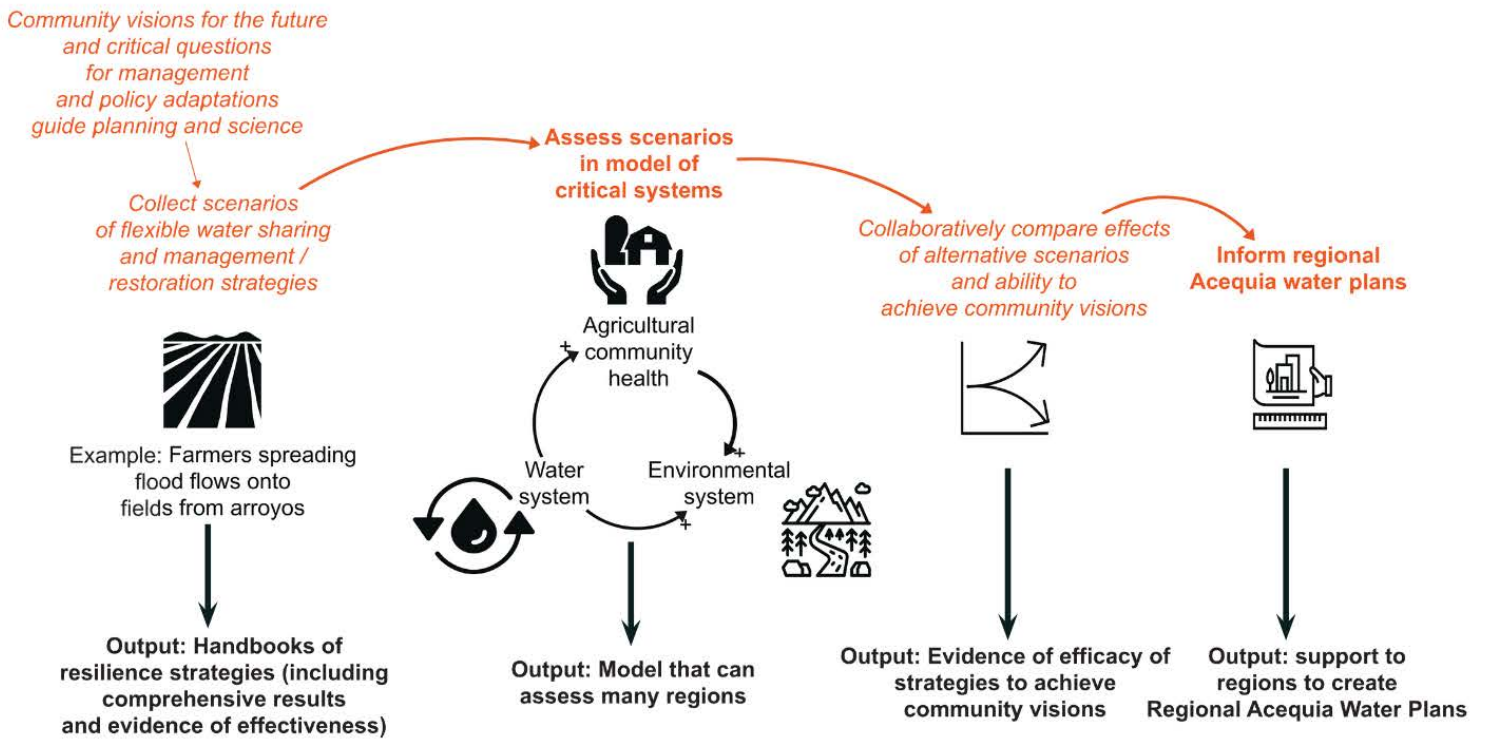
- Give input on process and regional plans
- Each acequia region will provide a delegate to a Acequia Water Policy Working Group to lift up acequia priorities

Acequia Drought Resiliency Project

Guide organized and produced by:



Acequia Drought Resiliency Project (Acequia DRP) Decision Support Tool



- Project funded by:



— BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

WaterSMART
Drought Resiliency Program