

Acequia system maintenance with RMYC

[Sol Feliz Farm & AIRE](#)

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When we started the irrigation season, we came to our *presa* (dam) to open the gate and send some water from the river into our *acequia*. With our returning *Mayordomo* Mark Martinez in charge, he noticed how overgrown our *presa* has become over the last 10 years or so with willows, alders, elms, and other vegetation. He noted that it is our responsibility to maintain this *presa* which was constructed as part of a grant issued by the State of New Mexico to help the *acequias* that irrigate off the *Rio Don Fernando de Taos*. Our *Acequia Madre del Sur* is the oldest of three acequias that are served by this *presa*, the other two being the *Acequia Madre del Norte* and the Randall Ditch.



Now that the water level is diminished due to the end of the snowmelt and the lack of rain, we can get into the river channel and cut down and clear out this vegetation. This will help in the maintenance of the acequia and the presa and will allow downstream users more efficient access to the water. It can also be said that we are mitigating fire danger as much of the vegetation we cleared out consisted of dead branches and logs. The Mayordomo and I came out the day before to make some headway into the thick underbrush. We cut down the overgrowth with a chainsaw and brushcutter in preparation for a crew from Rocky Mountain Youth Corp (RMYC) who volunteered to help us with this project.



I have worked with RMYC in a variety of capacities over the years. The best part is that every time a crew comes to work on a project, there is always a past student, friend, or family member as part of the crew. This time I was happy to see Estevan, Vinnie, and Derrick. Derrick was part of the crew that helped us construct the Grow Dome at Chrysalis, now he is a crew leader.

The crew worked this project like a bunch of ants. Some were lopping dead branches and opening up the riparian area, others were transporting the branches, and others were loading up the truck. We hauled three small truckloads of biomass that will likely be chipped and turned into mulch or compost. We will also use these willows for our trellising on the Grow Dome and perhaps other arts and crafts can be made from the willows if there is student initiative and interest.

After this project we went to the bottom of our acequia to try and reestablish our desague, or where the acequia returns to the river, or in our case, the Acequia del Pueblo. But this project was too involved for the time that we had, we have to dig out a road and put in a culvert (we thought the culvert was buried and just need to be dug out, but it was buried and destroyed).

I hope it was a great afternoon for the RMYC crew because their work was important to us keeping the nearly 300 years of our acequia history alive and we certainly love what they did for our community and future irrigation!