

# The GRANT COUNTY BEAT

## Rio Chama Acequia Association Members Share Limited Water Supply

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(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – The New Mexico Office of the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission and leaders of the Rio Chama Acequia Association (RCAA) in the lower Rio Chama valley continue to collaborate helping local irrigators to share the drought reduced water available to them this summer.

Simultaneously, RCAA is helping New Mexico officials protect the San Juan Chama Project water passing through the lower Chama valley for downstream owners.

The drought has substantially reduced the supply of native water in the Rio Chama for two summers in a row. Most of the water now in the river downstream of Abiquiu Reservoir is San Juan Chama Project water imported to the Rio Grande from the San Juan Basin. That water is not available to Rio Chama irrigators.

"I am proud of the Acequia leaders who have listened to neighbors and state officials, have been proactive, and have carved out the preliminary water shortage sharing schedule," said Governor Martinez. "They set a good example for all of us in these difficult times by finding a model that helps stretch our limited resources."

RCAA leaders have actively and consistently worked with officials from the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission to address the issue. Most recently, they hosted a public meeting to determine a way to share the little water available to them this summer, identified a plan, and started it over Independence Day weekend. The plan includes shutting off ditches for certain time periods each week and reducing diversions during the remaining time to about half the normal amounts.

"Based on river gage flow data, the plan worked over the weekend to protect the San Juan Chama Water and continue to get water to RCAA farmers," said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López. "The drought has reduced the amount of surface water available around the state. Despite dry times, these irrigators are sharing water and making sure water owned by others is passed through the valley to make it to the rightful owner. By working together they will help one another endure the summer."

"Members of the Rio Chama Acequia association hold water rights dating back to 1600. They have elected to rotate their irrigation schedule to maximize what little water is available this year so that all the 17 plus member ditches get some water instead of just one or two. New Mexico's longest running non-tribal water users are an important example of how to get through drought and difficult times," said State Engineer Scott Verhines. "Sharing water this summer is the only path forward."

The Rio Chama Acequia Association has been working with staff at the NMOSE/ISC and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District over the past decade to offset their use of water in times of drought by purchasing San Juan Chama Project water from various San Juan Chama contractors. This innovative approach has been successful to date. Unfortunately, prolonged, severe drought conditions have forced the RCAA to exhaust their limited supply of San Juan Chama Project water and implement the new rotation plan.

The nine-member Interstate Stream Commission is charged with separate duties including protecting New Mexico's right to water under eight interstate stream compacts, ensuring the state complies with each of those compacts as well as investigating, conserving and protecting.

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