

# Colorado Law

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## Acequia Assistance Project

Acequia is an Arabic word that means “water bearer.” An acequia is a physical irrigation system – a ditch -- but the term “acequia” in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado also describes a philosophy about water and community. That philosophy encompasses the concept that water is so essential to life that it is a communal resource, one which must be shared. This philosophy shapes intersection of the human and natural environments in the Southern Colorado watersheds in which acequias are found and has created a resilient natural and cultural system. Acequias are found along the southernmost part of Colorado – including four of the state’s poorest counties: Costilla, Conejos, Huerfano, and Las Animas. While water is wealth throughout the arid West, to the small-scale farmer in these traditional communities the acequia culture represents even more: Acequias are the means by which you support your family and by which you participate in your community. A Spanish dicho succinctly provides, “Tierra es la Madre y la Agua es su Sangre” – Earth is the Mother and Water is her Blood.

While acequias are legally treated as any other water right within the prior appropriation system in Colorado, their governance system makes them unique. For example, in times of water scarcity, ditches cooperate to ensure an equitable distribution of water, or when that is not physically possible, a sharing of fields. As we look to the future, acequias will offer an interesting model of alternative water administration and use. However, in order for acequias to remain viable, the acequia community must first address some key challenges. For generations, acequias have operated informally – with many remaining unincorporated and without bylaws.

The Acequia Project is a joint effort by the [Getches-Wilkinson Center](#), [Colorado Open Lands](#), and the [Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association](#) to provide low or no-cost legal assistance and educational materials to Colorado's acequia communities. Under the guidance of Professor Sarah Krakoff ([Colorado Law](#)), Sarah Parmar (Colorado Open Lands/Acequia Association), Ryan Golten (former New Mexico legal services attorney with expertise in acequias), Peter Nichols (of counsel, [Berg, Hill, Greenleaf & Ruscitti, LLP](#)) and Karl Kumli (partner, [Dietze & Davis, P.C.](#)), the law students are drafting a Legal Handbook for Colorado Acequias, assisting acequias that wish to incorporate or amend their by-laws to enable them to protect their rights, and assisting acequias and irrigators to document their water rights and establish their priority rights to water under Colorado law. To support the Acequia Project or get involved, [click here](#).

### Acequia Assistance Project Trainings

Water Law in the San Luis Valley Presentation

[Introduction to Water Resource Issues in Div 3.](#)

[Division 3 - Alamosa Rio Grande Basin](#)

[Amended Costilla Creek Compact Article](#)