

**From the *Green Fire Times*  
January, 2014**

## **Anatomy of an Acequia**

*La Sierra:* The upper watershed and source of the snowmelt that creates the flow for rivers and streams that are diverted into the *acequias* through a diversion structure known as a *presa*. The *sierra*, often under the management of the US Forest Service, is also the location of livestock grazing permits.

*La Acequia:* The *acequia* has both a physical and a social definition. The word *acequia* refers to the water canal that carries irrigation water from the stream to fields and refers to the irrigation infrastructure along the way. The word *acequia* also refers to the community of families who use the *acequia* for irrigation. For example, one would say, "I belong to the *Acequia del Monte*."

*Presa:* The *presa* is a small impoundment, historically made of rock, brush and logs, to divert water from the river to the *acequia madre*, or the mother ditch. Modern *presas* are usually constructed of concrete.

*Compuerta:* Individual farm headgates divert water from the *acequia* to the fields that are owned by individual *parciantes*, or irrigators, who own water rights along the *acequia*.

*Parciante:* Individual irrigators who own water rights are called *parciantes*. Each *parciante* owns a *derecho* or a water right that is attached to his or her land.

*Comisión:* The three-member elected commission of each *acequia* is responsible for certain decisions concerning the maintenance and operation of the *acequia*.

*Mayordomo:* The *mayordomo* is the day-to-day caretaker of the *acequia* and the person who manages the irrigation system. *Acequias* differ in their local customs sharing water within the *acequia* and between neighboring *acequias*.

*Derecho:* Each *parciante* on the *acequia* has a *derecho* or water right attached to his or her land. The *derecho* may be measured both in terms of approximate acreage and also in terms of time or flow rate for purposes of water allocation by the *mayordomo*.

*Sacar la acequia:* Each spring, the *mayordomo* organizes a work crew of *peones* (or workers) to clean the *acequia*. Each *parciante* is required to participate in the spring cleaning by contributing *peones* in proportion to the amount of *derechos* owned by each *parciante*.

*Regadío*: Land that is irrigated along the *acequia* is often referred to as *regadío*. Irrigated lands of the *acequias* support pasture, orchards, crops and livestock. During the summer, many *parciantes* take their livestock to grazing allotments in the *sierra* while allowing hay and pasture to grow on their *regadío*.



### **About the author**

*The Green Fire Times* is published by [Skip Whitson](#), edited by [Seth Roffman](#) with design by [Anna Hansen](#), webmaster [Karen Shepherd](#) and Breaking News editor [Stephen Klinger](#). All authors retain all copyrights. If you need to contact a particular author, or want to write for us, please [be in touch](#).