



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## Year in Review: Drought takes toll on farmers, puts focus on water



J.R. Logan

**Norbert Ledoux, mayordomo for the Acequia Madre del Rio Grande del Rancho, diverts water into his ditch this summer. Area water users are debating the merits of the Abeyta Water Rights Settlement, and how to prepare for future development is at the heart of those**

**Posted: Thursday, January 2, 2014 12:00 am | Updated: 3:37 pm, Thu Jan 2, 2014.**

**By J.R. Logan**

The drought of 2013 was a vicious one.

Taos County was officially declared a natural disaster area in January, and that was before things got really ugly.

By early summer, parched pastures meant local ranchers had to keep buying expensive feed for their herds. The problem was compounded when the opening of grazing allotments in the National Forests was delayed because forage in the high country was suffering from the drought as well.

Some communities bound together in inspiring ways to beat the stress. Three large acequias in the Ranchos Valley agreed to a water-sharing agreement that had not been used since the '30s.

The 300-year-old acequias in that valley tap into Río Grande del Rancho to irrigate hundreds of acres. But with flows at less than 10 percent of normal in June, irrigators agreed to take turns putting the full flow of the river into one ditch at a time. While simple in practical terms, the sharing agreement represented remarkable cooperation at a time when the lack of water had many on edge.

"We've got to work together in tough times," one acequia commissioner said.

Ironically, the brutal drought was followed by torrential downpours that led to widespread mudslides and some minor flooding. The rains were welcomed as a blessing, but the wild swing had some uneasy about the future of the climate in the Southwest.

That unease factored into increased attention paid to water use and water rights. Just about everyone who tried to get a water transfer past the State Engineer this summer was met with protests from other water users. Those who spent decades hashing out the Abeyta Settlement have been met with sharp criticism about their plans to tap into the aquifer with a series of deep wells spread out across the Taos Valley.

After the summer of 2013, most people are more wary about where their water comes from and making sure it stays there.

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This story was selected by *The Taos News* editorial team as they reflected on the biggest issues and events they covered during 2013.