



COLORADO OPEN LANDS AND ACEQUIA INSTITUTE COMPLETE MAJOR CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROJECT

Colorado Open Lands and The Acequia Institute are pleased to announce the completion of a project establishing a conservation easement on the Institute's 181-acre acequia farm in Viejo San Acacio, Colorado.

The easement will also protect water rights on the oldest ditch in Colorado. The San Luis People's Ditch (*La Acequia De La Gente*) is a gravity-fed irrigation system which was dug by hand and draught horses in 1851 and later widened and extended by plow. It was eventually awarded the first adjudicated water rights in Colorado, nearly a quarter of a century before Colorado became a state.

The Acequia Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting acequia research and community knowledge, purchased one of the varas, which was originally owned by Dario Gallegos, a founding member of the town of San Luis. The Institute worked to convert the property from a center pivot back to the historic flood irrigation methods practiced by acequias.

Devon G. Peña, founder of the Acequia Institute, is a leading scholar on acequia history and culture, and is a passionate practitioner of acequia irrigation. Alfalfa is grown on the property and the Acequia Institute has been working on a seed saving and exchange that focuses on re-establishing the integrity of local heirloom varieties of corn and beans.

Not only does the property support agricultural production, but it has incredible wildlife habitat as well. The Rio Culebra runs through the property and supports a blue ribbon fishery. The farm contains 77 acres of wetlands and serves as a winter concentration area for bald eagles. Located just west of the town of San Luis, near the community of San Acacio, the farm is visible to travelers on the Los Caminos Antiguos National Scenic Byway.

This project was made possible by funding from The Gates Family Foundation, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. The Acequia Institute matched the grant with an investment of \$18,000.