



La Jicarita

An Online Magazine of Environmental Politics in New Mexico

Another Army Corps of Engineers Acequia Rehab Project Bites the Dust

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La Jicarita, September 26, 2016

On the heels of the decision in Llano San Juan to cancel its costly acequia rehab project with the Army Corps of Engineers, on Sunday, September 25, the communities of Chamisal and Ojito voted to also stop their \$2.7 million project with the Corps for many of the same reasons. The two projects originate from the same presa, or headgate, near Hodges Campground, and both utilize feeder acequias that lead to their communities. It was these feeder ditches that were slated to be replaced by large diameter plastic pipe for over a mile each.



Parciantes of Acequias de Chamisal y Ojito voting on the rehabilitation project. Photo by Robin Collier

The Acequias de Chamisal y Ojito parciantes, like those in Llano, were concerned about incurring debt, the maintenance requirements of the pipe, and the drastic restructuring of an earthen ditch. According to Commission Chair Samuel Lopez, in an [interview](#) with Cultural Energy the day before the meeting, the project was first proposed in 2005 to address problems in the Acequia Cañon and in 2006 a committee was approved to seek funding through the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC). In 2008 an initial survey by the Army Corps of Engineers estimated a project to replace the ditch with plastic pipe would cost

approximately \$1.9 million. The project remained in abeyance, however, because there was no funding available.

Then suddenly, early this year, the ISC announced there was funding for the project to proceed and the Army Corps of Engineers began a resurvey for the pipeline. Lopez himself had to find out from the state and the Corps what exactly the project would entail so he could inform the parciantes, which he did at a meeting on August 28: the Corps planned to place a 42 inch plastic pipe in the ditch for 1.3 miles to be covered by two feet of dirt, which would cost approximately \$2.7 million. The portion of the cost share program for the acequia is 7.5 percent, which would come to \$203,625, amounting to individual payments of \$182 if paid per acre or \$1,339 if paid per parciante. The parciantes were of course taken by surprise and wanted to again vote on the project.

To his credit, Lopez, who in his interview with Cultural Energy said he saw the need for the project, tabled the August 28 meeting and scheduled the September 25 meeting with an agenda item to allow a vote. But before that vote took place, Lopez dropped a bombshell: an e-mail from the ISC on the previous Friday ordered that all ISC funded projects for which contracts hadn't been signed prior to September 6 be stopped because of state budget shortfalls. The ISC's portion of the Acequias Chamisal y Ojito cost would be \$575,000 (17.5 percent). The former commissioners who backed the pipeline project immediately called for Lopez to cancel the meeting, but he told them that the Army Corps of Engineers wanted a definitive decision from the acequia regarding the project now.

While the meeting progressed to the vote more quickly than the one in Llano San Juan—a little over an hour compared to three—the vote was less overwhelming: 21 to 20 to stop the project. Several parciantes were unable to vote because they weren't caught up with their dues and others didn't come prepared with signed proxies for those who couldn't attend. Commissioner Lopez ended up voting against the project but admonished the parciantes that this was a lesson to stay involved, to pay their ditch fees, and work together to maintain their acequias.

The fee already incurred to the ISC of \$3,800 was much less substantial than that of Llano San Juan (\$160,000) and would cost the parciantes only a one-time payment each of \$25. They voted to afford the commission permission to pay the fee.

In an e-mail from the ISC, any ongoing projects are ordered stopped \$575,000

Needing to repair that section in 2005, 2006 to form a committee to look for funding, went to ISC, money available thru Army Corps, then told no money. Commission signed agreement with ISC even though there wasn't any funding. Early this year, funding became available for the project. It got me by surprise, I started on commission in 2012, I never heard about it. I saw that in 2006 it was approved for them to look for money. No engineering design, Army Corps did survey, though. Redid survey, design engineers came from Tennessee. 42 inch culvert, mayordomo wanted 54, ARmy said 42 was enough. Designers say water will go through fast enough to keep it clean. What is the problem? It's always been a problem, rocks go in there, used dynamite to break apart years ago. There's always seepage on road below. I kind of agree it's a problem area but I'm neutral on this. What is maintenance on a plastic pipe? One of the concerns expressed. Pipe will be covered with 2 feet of dirt with clean-outs, trees or rocks won't do any damage. I don't know about maintenance of cleanouts or qualifications to do it. Could be a problem with debry.

7.5 percent. Original estimate \$1.9 million, now 2.7, \$203,625 our share \$182 per acre, \$1,339 per parciante. 20 year loan would be \$10,181 per year.