

Piping La Acequia Madre Cañon not a threat, but a viable option

By Bonifacio I. Vasquez

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Piping 3,500 feet of La Acequia Madre Cañon de Llano San Juan Nepomuceno is the best option and the right thing to do. We must do this to improve reliability, efficiency, and health and safety conditions of our main source of water.

Our acequia flows in a 311 degree northwest direction for nearly five miles. Approximately 5,000 feet of our main water source from the Rio de Santa Barbara runs along the side of a very steep hill at the end of the Upper Llano Road. The southwest bank of our acequia has several areas that threaten our water flow, not only temporarily, but could be for several weeks at a substantial cost. The northeast bank has some areas that are over six feet high, but there are at least four different locations that the bank is extremely narrow and also shallow. In some areas of our acequia we no longer have the proper grade and water tends to pool. Also, our acequia has become the dumping area for trash, tires, box springs, mattresses, kitchen sinks, camper shells, dead animals and gallon containers full of used engine oil.

Rock slides are a continuous problem. Some of these areas cannot be cleared by manual labor. To remove the huge amount of dirt and large rocks is going to require some sort of machine. It has been suggested that we use a track-hoe. There are two challenges to this recommendation. First, the opposite bank is too high to place the dirt and rocks. Secondly, when we remove the large rocks we compromise the grade of the acequia. There are several trees that could fall at any time. The roots of at least four large blue spruce trees are at least 50 percent exposed due to erosion. When one of the trees falls, the bank will give way and a great amount of rocks and dirt will end up in the acequia. This is going to cause big problems. It will take an extended period of time to clear the debris. Furthermore, this will back-up the water that could easily break any of the weak areas on the northeast bank.

There are three areas in the northeast bank that require reinforcement because the bank of the acequia is very narrow and shallow. When the acequia is flowing at an optimal capacity, the water level is only four to six inches from the top of the bank. About eight years ago, we placed a temporary bank on the northeast bank with a tree and 700 sand bags. The break on this section of the acequia was due to water backing up after someone threw a mattress into it. Two years ago, a laborer was hired to remove a camper shell from inside the ditch. He had to cut the camper into six pieces and walk them nearly 2,000 feet through the ditch to get the entire camper out. There is also an area where we have a unwelcome rodent digging into the bank. This situation is monitored closely to avoid a break in the bank.

Our acequia no longer has the proper grade for the efficient flow of water. Because the water does not flow freely there is also a growth of algae in the acequia that hinders the flow of water. These pools freeze in the winter. When water freezes in these areas there is the potential problem for water to back up and break the northeast bank.

All foreign material placed in our acequia is a concern, but nothing compares to the dumping of oil into our water system. Our people use the water from Acequia Cañon to water their gardens and for their animals. In some cases the water from Cañon is used for personal consumption. Our water is also used for refilling the fire truck water tanks if a fire should occur in Llano.

The health and safety of our community is paramount. Having people inside this acequia during cleaning is very dangerous. A rock slide that could bury someone alive is a true possibility. Also, requesting them to move the heavy rocks away from the main water flow could result in injury. Children that play in the acequia are no safer than the individuals that are assigned to clean the ditch.

In closing, many allegations have been made that neighboring land owners were not being notified of the project and also that the membership has not been informed. There was, or is, a need to notify the neighboring land owners of this project. The piping work does not require the contractor to access their properties. All work can be done within the rightful easement of the acequia. At every annual meeting and several special meetings since 2009, the membership was provided with information. At no time was this project moved forward without the support and voting of the majority of acequia members in good standing. At no time has this project been increased in scope, and no one is being saddled with an unreasonable assessment.

A special meeting on the issue, for parciantes, is scheduled for Sept. 11 at 1 p.m. at the Llano Community Center.

Vasquez is Mayordomo of La Acequia Madre Cañon.