

NM Acequia Association

El Agua es Vida. Water is Life.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands

by New Mexico Acequia Association

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Regando en Mora con la Acequia de Los Luceros- Photo taken by Rosalie Mondragon

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,907,670 (State)

Lead Partner: NM Association of Conservation Districts, NM Interstate Stream Commission, NM Acequia Association

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

New Mexico has a rich history of community acequias supporting agriculture. Approximately 800 acequias and community ditch associations serve many farmers or "parciantes" who make all, or part of their livelihood from farming and ranching. Farms served by acequias range in size from less than 1 acre to over 500 acres. The majority of farmers depending on acequias are minorities in underserved communities. Acequias are located in 12 of the most impoverished counties in the state. In New Mexico we say "agua es la vida" (water is life). This project will help sustain this critical social and spiritual connection as a matter of social and environmental justice.

The objective of the proposal is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes. Critical riparian habitats for dependent wildlife and plant species will be conserved. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities. Traditional acequias in irrigated valleys of northern New Mexico provide multiple hydrological benefits including, aquifer recharge, temporary reservoir storage, and delayed return flow. Recent studies indicate that hydrologic functions of traditional acequia systems prolong the river runoff hydrograph, save water through reduced transpiration loss from ground water storage in comparison to above ground storage, while ameliorating climatic variation on local and regional water users.

Some aspects of the traditional acequia system resemble natural hydrologic processes and mitigate altered hydrologic characteristics. These altered characteristics include stream channelization and flood control structures. Irrigation via acequias provides functions similar to overbank flooding and meandering streams. A coordinated/collaborative effort with the Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico Acequia Association throughout the entire planning and implementation process will serve as the basis for program implementation.