

## Ranchos de Taos diversion dam fails

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During crucial watering days recently, *parciantes* who use the Acequia Jarosa in Ranchos de Taos were shocked to see that water had not made it into their entry headgate to the more than 80 acres irrigated off the ditch.

More than two weeks ago, acequia Chairman Toby Martinez and Secretary Treasurer Sam Martinez noticed the diversion dam on the R'o Grande del Rancho, which diverts water from the river to their acequia, had failed. The men said the gabions, blocks of stones encased in wire, had broken apart with the strong current from the recent rains and were toppled by the water in the river. Without the diversion wall of gabions in place, water was unable to get from the river to the headgate for the Acequia Jarosa and several farms and plots of land have been without their water since.

“Thirty-four folks can’t irrigate, 80 acres are not going to get water and if we don’t do anything, that will continue until we replace the diversion dam,” said Toby Martinez. “It means the loss of a way of living.”

Acequias are largely the responsibility of those involved in the cleaning and usage of the water. Traditionally, before the water comes in spring, members of the acequia association join together to clean them for use in the watering months. Repair, maintenance and usage are tended to by the *mayordomo* (the acequia leader) and *parciantes*. Large-scale repairs sometimes require additional funding from users or government entities.

After assessing the damage and realizing they needed assistance, Toby Martinez and his *parciantes* made attempts to get help from Taos County and are planning to contact Taos Soil and Water Conservation District for further assistance. Estimating the repairs to cost less than \$3,000, the acequia association requested financial and possible construction support from the county to get the water flowing back into the ditch.

“As I understand, it’s not the only area that has been damaged by the flooding a couple of weeks ago,” said Commissioner Gabriel Romero, District 3.

Snowmelt and rainstorms in mid-May hit the Taos area hard, turning normally quiet streams and acequias into flooded areas that concerned local residents. Taos County Road Department responded by clearing debris and assisting in repairs on damaged roadways. The major difference in the case of the Acequia Jarosa is that the county is out of its jurisdiction to assist.

“In the case of an emergency, it probably would be all right, but it takes a while,” Romero said. “I can understand they are in a hurry to get some water.”

According to Romero, the county would only be responsible for the repairs if the damage were under Taos County supervision or if the emergency involved a road or bridge repair, but for the most part, acequias are controlled and maintained by the association.

Despite the jurisdiction dispute, Romero says he is trying to lend a hand however possible, but that the association has run into an issue that must first be resolved in order to receive funding. According to a text sent from County Manager Leandro Cordova, a regional Department of Homeland Security representative determined that the dam would not qualify for emergency funds and stated trenching work may have compromised the river and that the failure was not due to natural causes.

Toby Martinez and the members of his acequia claim the work was done after the dam broke in an attempt to clear debris so that the water would reach the irrigation headgate. As of Tuesday (May 30), a large mound of sand and debris was piled atop the existing gabion. The acequia, though still muddy from a previous flow, was dry with no standing or flowing water.

“The long-range consequences will be dire,” said Sam Martinez. “There will be problems with the river via the water flow and we’ll basically be without water.”

The acequia association’s members acknowledge the responsibility of the acequia to be theirs and are simply requesting supplementary funds from the county as well as Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Ultimately, association members said if no one is able to lend assistance, then they will have to find a way to fix the water situation and get the dam rebuilt.

In an email Cordova received from Bobby Lucero, director of the Taos County Office of Emergency Management, Lucero mentions that the acequia association had advised the office he helms that a contractor had been hired to remove debris from the river “a couple weeks before” the incident and that if this were the case, the responsibility would fall back on the acequia association for repairs.

In a phone interview, Lucero said that while the association may not be able to receive emergency funding, he is trying to assist however he is able and understands the need to repair the situation. The email also states that Office of Emergency Management officials met with the acequia association’s leaders and advised them on what their next move should be. The email also states that Office of Emergency Management officials assisted the association with making calls to rectify the situation. “Whatever we did, that was done after the river had actually busted our diversion dam,” said Toby Martinez. “You couldn’t get a backhoe anywhere close before the dam broke. We did nothing that would have contributed to the demise of the dam.”



**Water flows past the entrance to the Acequia Jarosa after the diversion dam letting water into the headgate failed more than two weeks ago. The acequia’s parciantes have been asking local governing entities for funding to assist in repairs of the ditch, which delivers water to 34 people.**

