

My Turn

TSV needs to consider downstream neighbors in Rio Hondo restoration

Commission, Acequia de San Antonio, Valdez and Sylvia Rodriguez, Santa Fe

The Taos News. 6/7/2018

The May 24 *Taos News* featured a promotional piece by Taos Ski Valley Inc. CEO Dave Norden about restoration work on the upper Rio Hondo. The article reports various federal and state agencies and adjacent private landowners reviewed and authorized the restoration project.

The value of river restoration notwithstanding, it is telling that the “local stakeholders” who were consulted did not include the downstream acequia associations who have irrigated off the Rio Hondo for generations. Not one acequia commissioner or mayordomo was notified in advance when the river was temporarily re-routed at the ski valley in 2016. The project was well underway before rumors and high turbidity reached downstream irrigators. A project manager was finally persuaded to allow a small delegation of commissioners from Des Montes to tour the restricted access site. Commissioners from Valdez and Arroyo Hondo were never contacted despite repeated efforts to inform project managers that acequias are the oldest stakeholders and watershed stewards of record and deserve notice of changes to the river channel as a matter of respect if nothing else.

The welfare of the upper watershed is of concern to all who reside along the Rio Hondo, including those who use its waters for their livelihood. The Rio Hondo was the lifeblood of acequia communities long before it became a recreational asset for resort developers. Human habitation is integral to a watershed system. An attitude that ignores this social-ecological fact cannot possibly bode well for our shared environment.

Commission, Acequia de San Antonio, Valdez and Sylvia Rodriguez, Santa Fe