



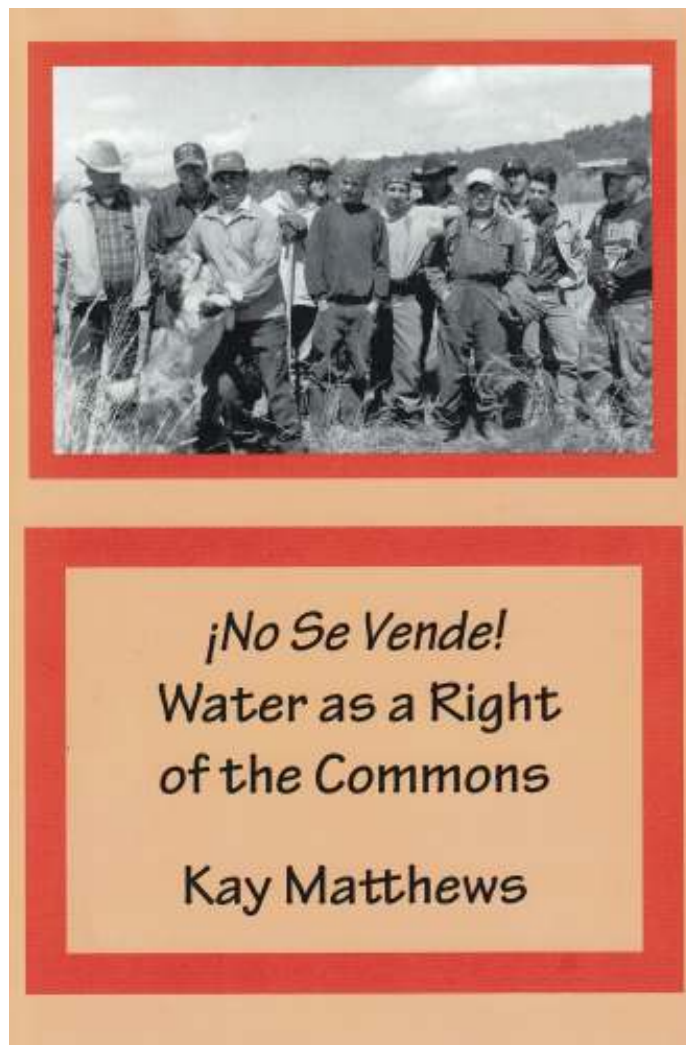
# THE TAOS NEWS

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Book review

## Kay Matthews chronicles water issues in new book

Posted Thursday, November 29, 2018 12:01 am



Kay Matthews latest book, "*¡No Se Vende! (Not for Sale) Water as a Right of the Commons,*" is informed not only by her dogged research, but also by her hands-on experience, first as a *parciente* in El Valles, then as part of a watchdog group, the Río Pueblo/Río Embudo Watershed Protection Coalition.

“We were concerned about some issues that were evolving in our watershed, such as the proposed expansion of the Sipapu Ski Area,” she said. Later, she was asked to join the board of the New Mexico Acequia Association. “My knowledge and involvement expanded from there.”

What does she mean by “the commons”? “The acequias are a good example,” she said. “They have traditionally shared the water in community without owning it.”

Matthews will read from and sign copies of her book Saturday (Dec. 1), 4 p.m., at Cultural Energy, 112 Civic Plaza Drive. Admission is free.

Matthews grew up in Colorado, went to Antioch College for a few years, then came to New Mexico in 1971. She and her partner, Mark Schiller, built a house and raised two children. They were together 34 years. He died of cancer in 2010. “I’m really lucky that both my sons live in New Mexico,” she said. To make a living back in the day, she worked as a freelance writer. “We established Acequia Madre Press back in the 1980s and published hiking guidebooks,” she said. They also published *La Jicarita* as a nonprofit newspaper, which segued into an online publication you can subscribe to at [lajicarita.wordpress.com](http://lajicarita.wordpress.com).

“¡No Se Vende!” succinctly covers decades of water history and the environmental politics of New Mexico as previously published in *La Jicarita*. Matthews includes chapters on the process of adjudication, in-stream flow, water transfers, the Taos regional water plan, the Pueblo Water Rights doctrine, the Abeyta and Amodt adjudications, and Top of the World water transfers. “In Taos Valley all water rights are currently being adjudicated by the Abeyta Settlement, but to my knowledge there has not been a final decree,” Matthews said. “It’s a privatization of water.”

The reader might not agree with Matthews on some of the issues, but to follow this absorbing account of her dance through the tangled web of environmental politics in New Mexico is an education in itself. The blurb on her back cover says that the future of water in New Mexico is “inextricably linked to the policies and prejudices of those at the state and federal level who are engaged in its commodification – determining its ‘highest and best use,’ a euphemism for movement to money. If the market forces continue to control who’s going to get the water there won’t be much hope for mutually beneficial ways of life, justice or beauty.”

Is the acequia system sustainable? In an interview, Matthews said, “I guess it depends on whether the kids stay or come back, and if the people feel it’s important enough to sustain the acequias, maintain them.”

She said she worries about the changing demographics. “I don’t romanticize the acequias in this book. It’s harder to find people to help clean the ditch anymore.” She deplored the current tendency to use technology to clean and line the ditches instead of shovels, muscle and community effort, which would allow the acequias to continue to recharge the aquifers.

Did she ever get out and help clean the ditch? “Oh yeah,” she said with a grin. “Every year.”

When Tomás Montoya, who is on the cover of her book, was the mayordomo, he always made it fun, she said. “We would have a big lunch or a party afterwards. As soon as the community

realized Mark and I wanted to do things the way they did, they had open arms for us and we became best buddies. They called us good neighbors, *buen vecinos*.”

She said she only got to irrigate three times last summer. “These are tough times we're headed into. A lot of these adjudication settlements have not incorporated contingencies for what we're facing in terms of climate change and aridification. I think they need to go back and redo the terms of the Abeyta Settlement.” she said. “They based the Abeyta Settlement on a faulty hydrology model that they got from the State Engineer's office,” she continued. “Based on some new information they got from New Mexico Tech, they are having to re-do the hydrology.”

Her tone rose. “Can we go back and renegotiate when we're talking about future growth? And tie that to the water we can reasonably expect instead of assuming we are going to have enough water to meet the needs of this so-called future growth?” She took a sip of her water and rubbed her forehead. “If we keep getting dry years like we had last year, we're not going to have enough water in the Río Grande to meet our obligation to the Río Grande Compact.”

To her readers she says, “Don't be intimidated by the book. There's a lot of information, but I try to juxtapose it with more personal details, an overview of what it's like living in a small village in Northern New Mexico. Hopefully you will come away with an understanding of how complex water issues are and also be energized to get involved, keep your eyes and ears open and not let the powers-that-be do whatever they want.”

For more information, call the venue at (575) 758-9791.