

## **Corazón y Querencia: Acequias Respond to the Water and Climate Crisis**

2021 Congreso de las Acequias

FINAL DRAFT 12/2/2021

Our theme for 2021, Corazón y Querencia, is rooted in love, which is the most potent force for survival and resilience for our families and communities in the years to come. Drought, climate change, and the global pandemic have reminded us of our interconnectedness both locally and globally. We believe in the power of building stronger communities through cooperation, sharing, and mutual understanding.

Acequias have been caretakers of water for centuries in New Mexico. For nearly four decades, acequias have mobilized to protect water from commodification through protests of water transfers and by strengthening acequia governance. Our communities are confronting an urgent existential crisis that must be addressed on multiple levels:

- 1) the **water crisis** has been underway for decades prompted in part by climate change and drought but also by water policy decisions. For more than two generations, acequias have sounded the alarm about an impending water crisis resulting from overappropriation of water, unsustainable and inequitable management of our water resources based on water markets, water transfers out of agriculture to other uses, and irreversible depletion of finite groundwater.
- 2) the **climate crisis** has increased the urgency to be exemplary caretakers of our watersheds, rivers, acequias, and farmland, to reaffirm customs and traditions of water sharing, i.e. the *repartimiento*, as well as to re-localize our food systems with native and landrace seeds, healthy soils, resilient and dynamic herds of livestock, and regenerative agricultural practices.
- 3) the **economic crisis**, driven by unprecedented wealth inequality, manifests in our communities as gentrification, development patterns that cannot be sustained in an arid environment, underinvestment in rural community development and infrastructure, and food and agriculture policy that undermines small-scale farmers. The most immediate impact for acequias is the commodification of water driving the movement of water out of agriculture to extractive industries, water speculation, land development speculation, as well as luxury resorts and hunting lodges for the extremely wealthy.

### **Core Values**

Guided by our core values, acequia parcientes, families, and neighbors will strive to work together to not only survive multiple levels of crisis but to strengthen our communities. We resolve to build and sustain relationships based on *respeto* (respect) in which we treat each other with dignity. As acequias, water sharing customs and traditions, known as the *repartimiento*, are central to our culture and our identity. Likewise, *mutualismo*, characterized by relationships of mutual aid, democratic decisions, and collective management of resources, is a

core value deeply rooted in acequia history and culture. The core value of solidarity compels us to work with multiple movements for social, economic, and environmental justice.

### **Acequias and the Way Forward: Actions for 2022**

**Water Sharing Agreements:** The *repartimiento* tradition, as we define it for our present time, is the practice of sharing water within acequias and between acequias. As long-term megadrought and climate change intensify, communities have to prepare for less snowpack, less runoff, and less predictable precipitation. In 2022, the NMAA invites acequias to engage in a local dialogue to affirm values and customs of water sharing and to update and reinvent customary practices during this era of climate change when adaptations are necessary.

**Water as a Community Resource vs. Commodification:** Acequias have been on the front line of challenging the commodification of water for over a century in New Mexico. In 2022, NMAA will continue to support acequias in filing protests of water transfers, to build capacity to exert decisions over proposed water transfers out of acequias, and to organize a base in communities to defend water as a community resource.

**Infrastructure and Disaster Preparedness:** Generations of acequia parciantes have built and maintained acequia infrastructure. NMAA remains committed to supporting local acequias securing resources for improvements to infrastructure and to advocating for climate-resilience in planning and design of irrigation works. Acequias must remain vigilant to disasters such as fires and floods and will need support to prepare for disasters and to navigate emergency management and disaster recovery.

**Care for our Watersheds and Aquifers:** Our watersheds, rivers, and aquifers are interconnected. Efforts to improve the health of our watersheds must be increased by an order of magnitude to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Acequia leaders can be valuable partners in planning watershed restoration projects with soil and water conservation districts and other partners. Likewise, acequias have a role in protecting aquifers from groundwater depletion. It is vital that stronger conjunctive management be implemented in New Mexico to ensure that aquifers can be sustained for future generations. The acequia landscape, our waterways and farmland, which contribute to aquifer recharge, must be protected through various regulatory and legal tools.

**Clean Water for Drinking, Growing Food, Wildlife, and Ceremonies:** Climate-change induced water scarcity will likely exacerbate water quality problems in our streams and rivers. Pollution from industries, municipalities, weapons laboratories, and ski areas continues to be a concern because of detriment to water supplies, including surface waters used for irrigation. NMAA will continue to partner with advocates and community leaders in defending water from contamination and will work toward a regulatory framework that is effective in achieving clean water for our communities and future generations.

**Food and Seed Sovereignty:** Growing food and raising livestock are central to acequia continuity for centuries past and future. Re-localizing our food systems includes all the necessary work of protecting land and water as well as saving, protecting, and propagating native and landrace seeds. Our communities need a more robust support system for acequia-scale farming and ranching that includes paid training and apprenticeship opportunities, assistance with purchasing and using equipment, food system infrastructure for aggregation, storage, and distribution, and community support in providing a vibrant local market. We can build upon programs that incentivize making fresh, locally grown food affordable and available to the most vulnerable in our communities.

**Land:** In New Mexico, a tiny fraction of land is arable and these irrigated lands hold the promise of food sovereignty. Irrigated lands used for farmland and pasture are vulnerable to economic forces driving subdivision and development. All lands, including rangelands, are vulnerable to soil erosion, which will be exacerbated by climate change. Major investment of resources from the state and federal level for conservation programs is needed to restore the health of our landscape and to build healthy soils that support food systems and sequester carbon. It is imperative to people who wish to farm with people willing to lease or lend their land to be used for growing food. Acequias will continue to work with land grants to gain more recognition and protection for traditional land uses.

**Youth Education and Leadership.** Younger generations are inheriting a land vastly different from that known by our parents and grandparents. We are in a time of reckoning when we will be assessing our efforts to protect our land and water, gleaning our lessons learned, and supporting youth in taking on leadership roles in our movement. In 2022, NMAA will support existing youth projects, encourage networking between youth leaders, and incorporate youth leaders into NMAA projects, programs, and governance. Additionally, NMAA will collaborate with partners to develop curriculum inclusive of acequias and land grants for use by schools and organizations.

**Organizing and Popular Education:** For over three decades, the NMAA has been engaged as a grassroots organization to protect water and strengthen acequia agriculture. NMAA includes elders with deep roots in social justice and the civil rights movement. The dual climate and economic crises that we confront require us to learn from our past work to organize in our communities and to strengthen our efforts to build a grassroots base so that we can act in our collective interests. Our methods will be to embrace popular education methods and to involve youth in key roles in community organizing.

[APPROVED BY THE CONGRESO DE LAS ACEQUIAS ON the 4<sup>th</sup> of DECEMBER, 2021.]