



# Acequia Madre

Newsletter of the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association · July, 2013

## SAVE THE DATE

### 2013 Colorado Congreso de Acequias

The SdCAA will host the 2013 Congreso in San Luis on **Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup>**. *All acequia irrigators are encouraged to attend with their families!* Gain valuable information for yourself and your acequia. Learn about acequia bylaws and water rights issues, share information about ditch practices, and ask questions about water administration.

Registration will include all day workshop and lunch. The cost is \$20 for farmers and ranchers; children 18 and under are free. Plenty of **scholarships are available** to any irrigators who cannot afford registration. Please call (719) 695-0060 for more information.

Thank you to our Congreso sponsors: the Costilla Conservancy District, Colorado NRCS, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, and the Trinchera Blanca Foundation!

## Centennial Students Celebrate Acequias

*Kimba Rael, Centennial School Language Arts Teacher*



Joseph Lobato shows students how a headgate works.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, organizations from across the community joined forces to share knowledge with Centennial students about one of our community's vital resources—water. *Acequia Day* was organized by Dominique Quintana and Florintino Rael, both graduating seniors at Centennial High School, as a part of a community service project.

The full day event combined students in mixed groups from kindergarten through high school. The groups rotated through eight stations, both on campus and off, throughout the day. On campus

sessions included a presentation by Tom Stewart, Water Commissioner with the Division of Water Resources, on water rights, a discussion on the culture and history of flood irrigation in the villages of the Rio Culebra by Erving Jaquez, a demonstration on the effect of drought on the underground aquifers of the valley by Judy Lopez, Director of the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative, and an introduction to various local plants and encroaching noxious weeds from representatives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

*Acequia Day continued...*

Students relished the opportunity to get out of the classroom and into the field. The highlight for most students was when they were able to see irrigation in action at Centennial science teacher and local rancher Robert Quintana's land. Mr. Quintana introduced students to the various implements used to prepare the soil and pull the ditches necessary for flood irrigation. Students then walked the ditches and irrigated fields.



Above: Science teacher, Robert Quintana shows students flood irrigation practices on his San Acacio farm. Below: Charlie Quintana discusses the history of acequias.

Joseph Lobato and Charlie Quintana then shared the history of the local acequias and the importance of wise water use and conservation. They also discussed how prior appropriation system works and the flow of water from snow melt run off into the acequias and into the Sanchez Ditch Company reservoir. Outside at the school, Florintino Rael shared some of his livestock and played animal games on the baseball field to deepen the connection between water and the crops and livestock it supports. Finally, soil scientist and science/math teacher Gilbert Apodaca identified the soil types of our area, communicated the importance of being wise with topsoil, and helped the students plant a community garden.



The students buzzed with excitement about the day until the final bell rang. Thanks to all those who helped make the day a success! Let's make this a tradition and reinforce the connection between young people and our acequias.



**SdCAA Welcomes New Board Members**

We are happy to announce that Andy Manzanarres (pictured left) and Norman Maestas (pictured right) were voted onto the Board of Directors in March for a two-year term that began in April. Andy is Secretary/Treasurer for the Vallejos Ditch and Norman is President of the Land Rights Council and irrigates on the Acequia del Cerro.



## Legal Assistance Programs Underway

The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association is working with dedicated attorneys, the University of Colorado Law School's Getches-Wilkinson Center, and Colorado Open Lands to provide low or no-cost legal assistance to acequias. With generous support from the Gates Family Foundation and a private donor, five attorneys and twenty-six law students are working to help acequias draft or amend bylaws and organize or incorporate, to assist acequias and individual irrigators to document their water rights, and to draft a handbook that will address water rights and acequia issues.



*In order to better understand the acequias they are working with, law students traveled to San Luis for question and answer sessions with each acequia's bylaw committee and helped with each acequia's limpieza.*

Currently, the project is helping two acequias to create their first bylaws and is working with two others to review and update their bylaws to ensure that the bylaws reflect the practices of each acequia and comply with Colorado law. Bylaws are not only a way to confirm that all parciantes on a ditch have the same understanding of acequia practices (such as who gets the water when and how commissioners are chosen), but it is also a document that helps the next generation of irrigators who are moving back onto the land. Well-written bylaws can help a ditch to protect its water rights and prevent water from being transferred or sold out of the ditch.

The attorney-student group is also working on three water rights documentation cases for irrigators and helping users on one acequia to apply for a water right on tail water that has been used on that acequia for generations. Lastly, the law students and attorneys are writing a handbook that will be available in English and Spanish that will answer water rights questions and help acequias to gain the legal knowledge to effectively work through issues. Thanks to support from the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, we will be able to give out draft copies of the handbook at the Congreso in order to get feedback. **To hear more about the process and learn how you can apply for assistance, please join us for the Congreso on October 5<sup>th</sup>.**

### Acequia Recognition Law Amendment Passes

House Bill 13-1168 was introduced by Representative Ed Vigil in response to issues raised at the 2012 Congreso de Acequias. The law amends the 2009 Acequia Recognition Law in two important ways: 1) the law eliminates the requirement that 2/3 of the land under irrigation must be in varas, allowing many acequias in Conejos County to qualify and 2) the law allows an acequia to organize as an "unincorporated acequia ditch association". This second change enables acequias to draft legally binding bylaws without having to incorporate with the state of Colorado. Full text of the law is available on our website: [www.sangreacequias.org](http://www.sangreacequias.org). Thank you Representative Vigil!

## Water Administration Q&A

Peter Nichols, Water Attorney with Berg Hill Greenleaf Ruscitti, LLP

**Question:** How does the water commissioner determine when my headgate should be shut off?

**Answer:** The right to use surface (and most ground) water is determined by the priority system. Users are generally entitled to divert the amount of water they need for their beneficial use without waste, so long as no senior water rights are materially injured. When there is insufficient water in the stream to meet everyone's needs, junior users may be "called out" and their headgates shut off by the State so that senior users have the amount of water at their headgate decreed for their use by the Water Court. The government has stream gauges to help them "administer" water uses. The State may also order any water right owner or user at their own expense to install and maintain measuring devices and report their water use. The State may assist with installing, maintaining and reading measuring devices, but is not required to.



The Board of Directors meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6pm and all are welcome to attend.  
Sarah (McDonald) Parmar is serving as the Director of Programs for the SdCAA and can be reached at  
(719) 695-0060.

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