



Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association

# El Parciante

PO Box 721 San Luis,  
CO 81152

**Annual  
*Congreso de las Acequias*  
Keeping Acequia Traditions Alive**

The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association will be holding their annual Congreso on Saturday, January 20, 2018. The theme for this year's event will be Keeping the Acequia Tradition Alive! The event will host a variety of topics and speakers that are pertinent to acequia irrigators. Topics will include Blessing of the Acequia Waters, Acequia Traditions in a Modern Context, Colorado Water Law and the Acequia, Bylaws and Incorporation: Why or Why not Establish Bylaws, Understanding the New Mexico Acequia's, A Hemp Panel: Understanding the Possibilities of this Crop, and the annual SDCAA meeting.

Doors open at 8:00 am for registration and the Congreso will commence promptly at 8:30. The Acequia Association will be providing a light breakfast and a full lunch for all participants. The Acequia Association will also be giving out door prizes throughout the day and there will be a chance to purchase tickets for a drawing for a rifle, semi-load of wood, and \$500 to pay for the annual acequia cleaning. There will also be a variety of vendors present to chat with and get the latest information on a variety of topics.

The Acequia Association will also be hosting a reception on Friday, even-

ing at the Costilla County Conservancy District office at 6:00 pm. Come Learn, Laugh, and Share with other Acequia Parciantes. Light refreshments will be served, and local foods door prizes will be given out. For questions , please contact Mathew Valdez, at 719-672-0810.

This event is made possible by these great Partners and Sponsors: Costilla County Conservancy District, NRCS, San Luis Valley Conservation Fund—the LDR Foundation, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, Colorado Open

**Ancient Traditions Keep Desert Water Flowing  
By Arturo Sandoval**

This section is a portion of an article by Arturo Sandoval in YES Magazine.

New Mexico has spiritual power emanating from the landscape—its rios, mesas, llanos, sierras—that informs our traditional cultures..

Native Americans live each day in a vibrant relationship with everything around them . For them, New Mexico is not just a place to live, It is a way

to live.

Similar, Indo-Hispano have created an intimate relationship with the landscape over the past three or four centuries. They built *acequias*—communal irrigation systems.— not only to sustain an agriculture lifestyle, but also to caress and sustain the Earth and its natural creatures.

Acequias evolved over 10,000 years

in the deserts of the Middle East and were introduced into southern Spain by the Moors during their nearly 800- year occupation. Spanish colonizers took acequias to the New World. Acequias included specific governance over water distribution, water scarcity plans,

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## Acequia Profile:

### The Vallejos Ditch

The Vallejos Ditch was established in 1854, priority No. 5 and used for the irrigation of lands and it takes its supply of water from the Vallejos Creek, its head gate is located on the Northbank of the Vallejos Creek about 150 yards above the place where the creek forks, and about 2400 yards above the town of the Vallejos or "Plaza de los Vallejos." The total number of acres irrigated is 1,316.

In 2012, the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association requested funds in the amount \$100,000 on behalf of the Vallejos Ditch Association in order to replace a diversion on Vallejos Creek. Built around 1965, the head gate had surpassed service life.



Commissioner Roy Esquivel and Jonathan Moore,  
Forsgren Associates Inc.

The concrete structure having deteriorated, which the walls cracked and crumbling. In high flows the headgate failed to divert excess water, causing flooding of the neighboring residential areas. Some of the objectives of the project is to replace the deteriorated Vallejos Ditch Head gate with a new structure, improve downstream

water quality, Eliminate greatly reduce maintenance problems, and upgrade water control efficiency for the Vallejos Ditch.

The Vallejos Ditch project was a collaboration with the SdCAA and is an organization built uniting, consolidating, bring together, and supporting the interest of acequia irrigators. They collaborated to collect data and other documents from other agencies.

The parciantes of the Vallejos Ditch can thank the members of the Vallejos Ditch Association and the Mayordomo Augustine Esquivel for there work in the completion of this project.



## Ancient Traditions Keep Desert Water Flowing

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and all other matters pertaining to what was viewed as a communal source. The *mayordomo*, or water master, of the acequia made decisions about water distribution among community members with the consent and advice of the acequia members.

The communal system of irrigating is a response to the scarcity of water in arid regions and was key to the survival of agricultural communities. In many instances, the acequia governance system was also used to settle other community conflicts, especially in areas of New Mexico, located far from the seat of government in Mexico City. The irrigation system

that evolved over centuries and that was implemented in New Mexico was created to ensure a formal civil process to resolve water-rights issues, especially in dry times. Each irrigator had one vote to elect the *mayordomo*. The *mayordomo* had the ultimate authority over water disputes and his word was final. He derived his authority from the communal power vested in him by all the irrigators

In the spring, every able-bodied male was required to show up on the appointed day and to clean and repair the *acequia madre*—

The mother ditch from which each individual plot received irrigation water. The commitment to main-

taining the village's primary irrigation supply bonded villagers together over the years. The concept of working communally became an integral part of the village's world view: the group was valued over the individual.

The acequias and other communal traditions in New Mexico and "Southern Colorado Today" demonstrate the positive values that permit us to embrace each other despite our fears and bias. We build on those and root out those negative behaviors that limit our capacity to grow and give.



Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association

## The Hallett Decrees and The Rio Culebra Waters

In 1844, the Mexican government presented the grant to Steven Luis Lee, the Governor of Taos, and Narciso Beaubien, the twelve year old son of businessman Carlos Beaubien. Following the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, The United States annexed the area through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty allowed Mexican citizens in the acquired territory to become U.S. citizens if they chose to remain in the United States, and stated the property rights granted or held under Mexican Law would be respected. The grant was confirmed by congress on June 21, 1860.

By 1852, the parciantes, constructed the first Rio Culebra acequia, "the San Luis Peoples Ditch." By the time Rio Culebra became part of the newly formed Colorado Territory in 1861, more than 1700 people lived in the Rio Culebra Watershed and the parciantes had constructed several additional acequias. Not long after the parciantes established the original acequias on the Rio Culebra, Americans with different development ambitions begin to buy land in the area.

After the death of Carlos Beaubien in 1864, William Gilpin, the Governor of the Colorado Territory, purchased the majority of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant from Beaubien's Estate. Gilpin and his associates attempted to sell the grant. Freehold attempted to settle the grant with immigrants from the East and promoted the area in Europe.

By the 1870's, San Luis and the surrounding villages were already established. Freehold's plan for Costilla Estates was to build a community and to begin to challenge the claims of the parciantes. The parciantes had settled on the best farmlands and to irrigate these had constructed acequias and appropriated vital water supplies. The challenge pitted the parciantes water rights which they acquired by using the water of the Rio Culebra and its tributaries which had been recognized in 1889, by the Colorado Court applying the prior appropriation doctrine against Freehold's assertion that it's ownership of the

Costilla Estates gave it the right to control the Estate waters. After ten years in the courts, Freehold's lawsuit was resolved by a series of consent decrees between Freehold and the parciantes on each acequia. In the decrees, the parciantes agreed to give Freehold a portion of the water rights they had obtained under state law in 1889. These decrees are commonly known as the "Hallett Decrees." After the Hallett Decrees were entered in 1900, Freehold and its successors and the parciantes on the original Rio Culebra acequias fought over whether the decrees were valid, how they should be interpreted, and whether or how Colorado water officials could enforce them. Today, Freehold no longer exists, and the status of the water rights it acquired through the Hallett Decrees is unclear.

To find out more on the Hallett Decrees attend the Congreso de Acequias on January 20, 2018 @ Centennial High School.

## Conservancy District to Develop New Watershed Plan

The CCWCD is working to develop a watershed plan to better understand the condition of the Culebra Watershed. Though this plan will be housed at the Conservancy District they are reaching out to the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association, the Land Rights Council, the Vega Board, Costilla County Commissioners and the new owner of La Sierra. The Conservancy

is keenly aware of the need for collaboration and looks forward to working thru this community process.

The Development of the Watershed Plan will consist of 3 phases. The 1st phase will be the Assessment. To assess the drainages, logging area, grazing areas, the geology, the wildlife and fire prevention

The 2 phase will be Management and 3rd phase will be Implementation of the Watershed Plan.

The ultimate goal is to revitalize the watershed, so that more water will be brought down to the acequias and to the river or creeks creating a healthy habitat for those depending on the Watershed.

### The Board & Staff

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### SdCAA Meeting Dates:

SdCAA Meeting are held the 2nd Tuesday of the Month @ the Economic Development Conference Room.

The SdCAA is looking to fill two (2) vacancies. If you would like to serve on the SdCAA Board, submit a letter of intent to SdCAA, P.O. Box 721, San Luis, CO 81152 or 719-672-0810.

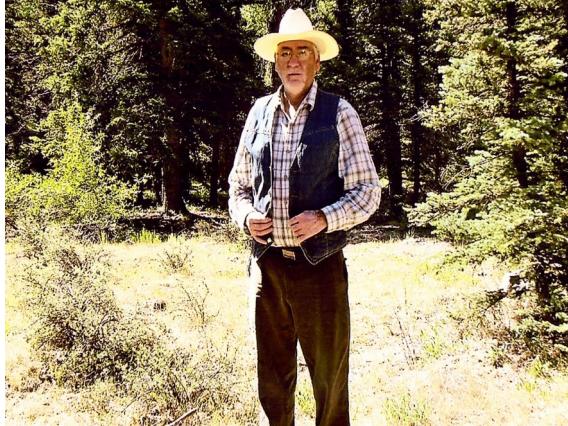


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401 Church Street – PO Box 721  
San Luis, CO 81152  
719-672-0810

## The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association Memorial Scholarship Fund



Following the sudden deaths in 2016 of two valued board members, the SdCAA established a scholarship fund in their honor. Felix Lopez and Joe Gallegos were devoted to acequia traditions and lifeways; they also recognized the importance of both academic and practical education in sustaining the acequia way of life under changing conditions. To continue their work, the scholarship fund will help defray the expenses of college courses as well as internships and practical training. Modest scholarships will be available to parciante, their family members, and others committed to upholding the acequia traditions. We are currently growing the fund, developing the application process, and defining award criteria. Watch our newsletter, El Parciante, for updates.

Please address contributions to the SdCAA Memorial Scholarship Fund, and mail to PO Box 721, San Luis, CO 81152. We are a 501 c (3) non-profit organization so your donation is tax deductible. The Acequia Association will send you a return receipt acknowledging your donation.