

La Voz

DE LAS ACEQUIAS DE ATRISCO



Mactlactli ihuan Ome Tekpatl

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Community,

It is my pleasure to present to you the first issue of La Voz for 2025. La Voz remains a platform for our collective perspectives on land, water, and education.

Our community faces ongoing water scarcity. The 10-year projections indicate declining snowpack in the Colorado River System, impacting the Rio Grande and our water supply. By mid-century, global temperatures may rise by 5 degrees, reducing clean water availability by up to 25%. We must cultivate a renewed relationship with our ecosystems and understand the water systems that sustain life in our fragile ecosystem so that we build resilience in the advent of climate change, and its consequences.

Building resilience requires a community-wide effort. I extend my most sincere gratitude to other organizations, elders, leaders, and public servants committed to protecting our land and water.

Acequias are more than irrigation ditches—they are the lifeblood of our valley, embodying sustainability and resilience. The Atrisqueños, the original land stewards, maintained these systems from 1692 until 1935 when their management was transferred to the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. These people left a legacy of stewardship that merits being learned and reincorporated as a way of preserving the communal aspect that Acequias adds to these lands and the community of water users.

This year, our programming focuses on recognizing challenges and taking action. We aim to deepen our community's knowledge of acequias and their role in fostering resilience and a greater appreciation for the outdoors. Our goal is to advance place-based education, coupled with community knowledge, to continue fostering stewardship and *querencia*—a deep connection to the land and water through the history, values, norms, and ways of the Acequia system.

To advance this mission, CESOSS is extending the use of the Ciclos de la Tierra curriculum, and its Community Development Framework for Social Change composed of *resolana*, *querencia*, *mutualismo*, and self-governance as the basis to encourage an education that promotes appreciation for natural cycles and ecosystem preservation as the basis of our quest for social change. Strengthening our bond with land and water ensures environmental stewardship, which remains central to our acequia community education.

Despite the challenges ahead of us, and as part of carrying on with a positive outlook of the year ahead of us, I am inviting you to participate in the acequia workshops, meetings, and activities that we will be coordinating throughout this year. Our 2025 programming begins with an Acequia Workshop on February 13 at 6:30 PM at La Plazita Institute. In March, we plan to conduct our annual acequia *limpias* with students from the South Valley. In collaboration with the Center for Diverse Populations from Highlands University and the Public Education Department, CESOSS is expanding its educational partnerships to support the use of curriculums that are inclusive of our local community knowledge. Our long-term plan is to establish a Ciclos de la Tierra Teacher's Network, integrating environmental education and fostering sustainability through teacher and community education.

Let's make 2025 a year of action and collaboration. A toast to our partners, friends, families, spiritual leaders, teachers, and the entire community for preserving the traditions of El Valle de Atrisco—the South Valley of Albuquerque.

Muchas gracias por su apoyo!

Jorge Garcia
Director, CESOSS



ACEQUIA EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Sustainability and Preservation Initiatives

Valle Vista Acequia Outdoor Learning Initiative – We are collaborating with local schools to establish outdoor classrooms irrigated by acequias, blending environmental education with cultural preservation.

The Pajarito Landmark Project – We are working with the City Economic Development Office to install information posts along the Pajarito Acequia corridor, featuring historical accounts and community testimonials.

Agricultural & Acequia Revitalization Projects – We are partnering with local organizations to promote sustainable farming and community healing.

Join us for upcoming community events!

South Valley Acequia Limpias (Feb/March) – Community-led acequia cleaning events where we walk together and learn about the acequias while picking-up waste. All supplies provided.

Atrisco Acequia Madre – Primera Agua (April) – Annual celebration of the first waters of the season where we come together and hold a traditional blessing ceremony for la agua.

Acequia Walk and Talks (Spring/Summer) – Walk along an acequia with us and learn about its historical roots and present day significance. This year we are including acequia walks in Los Lunas, Moriarty, Los Ranchos, and Atrisco!

Acequia Fun Run (October) – Gear up for a beautiful trail run with our robust community to close the season with this 5K run along South Valley acequias.

Acequia Workshops (Year-round) – Hosted in collaboration with the American Friends Service Committee and New Mexico Activities Association to educate the community about acequia maintenance and sustainability.



For more information, visit www.cesoss.org or contact us at jorge@cesoss.org (505)459-4949



NEW MEXICO'S WATER CRISIS: GROUNDWATER USE IMPERILS COMPACT COMPLIANCE, URGENT ACTION NEEDED

By Elaine Hebard, Member of the Atrisco Research Collaborative Group

New Mexico's water usage has reached a critical juncture, with new data revealing that groundwater withdrawals in the Middle Rio Grande region continue to increase, imperiling compliance with the Rio Grande Compact. The Compact, an agreement between three states to share the river, limits how much we can use. At a recent meeting of the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) on January 21, water policy expert Elaine Hebard raised concerns about the state's growing water deficit and called for immediate action to address overuse.

Delays in Water Data Hinder Policy Decisions

In November, the Office of the State Engineer (OSE) released the New Mexico Water Use by Categories for 2020 report, providing a comprehensive breakdown of water withdrawals across the state. However, Hebard pointed out a significant issue—the five-year delay in data availability.


“It is much more difficult to seek changes for water uses and users when the most recent data is already five years old,” Hebard stated. She urged the state to find a way to release water use numbers sooner, allowing policymakers and communities to react in a timely manner.

Groundwater Withdrawals on the Rise

A comparison between the 2015 and 2020 reports highlights a troubling trend—water usage in the six Compact Counties of the Middle Rio Grande has increased by nearly 10% over five years. Groundwater pumping surged by 22%, while surface water diversions increased by 7%.

Bernalillo County, in particular, saw a dramatic spike in groundwater withdrawals, while its surface water use declined. Meanwhile, Sandoval County experienced an increase in surface water withdrawals, and Sierra County's rising water usage was largely attributed to evaporation losses from Elephant Butte Reservoir.

Groundwater usage results in depletions of river flows for decades, requiring water rights and other offsets, which in turn limits the usage of such water for other purposes.





Compact Deficits

When Compact allotments are not attained, we owe our neighbors the difference. One result is that surface water users are restricted under Article 7 of the Compact. In 2020, New Mexico once again ended the year with a Compact deficit. While the deficit only grew by 1,300 acre-feet last year, the total now amounts to approximately 123,000 acre-feet with the long-term trend concerning.

Balancing the Burden: A Call for Fair Water Reductions

Hebard emphasized that the responsibility for reducing water use should not fall solely on surface water users. “The depletions caused by groundwater pumping—from a wide range of sources including vested water rights, ESA (Endangered Species Act) requirements, and domestic wells—are not fully offset,” she explained. “Rather than continuing to place the burden of Compact deficits on surface water users, the ISC should require all users to reduce their consumption.”

To address the crisis, Hebard proposed several key measures:

- **A Comprehensive Depletions Model:** Developing a water depletion model to better understand and manage consumption across the region.
- **Statewide Review of Permits:** The OSE should evaluate previously issued water permits and assess their impact on river flows. If permits require offsets, the state must take action.
- **A Middle Rio Grande Water Alliance:** Following the example of the Lower Rio Grande, Hebard suggested forming a Water Alliance to curb excessive depletion. This initiative could align with the new Biological Opinion Settlement with WildEarth Guardians, integrating conservation efforts with regional water planning.
- **Formal Notices to Major Water Users:** The OSE should issue directives—similar to the letter sent by former State Engineer Hamman to the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD)—to all major water users, requiring reductions in consumption.

The Time to Act Is Now

With water supplies dwindling and the Rio Grande under increasing strain, Hebard stressed that the region cannot afford to wait.

"The Middle Rio Grande cannot continue on this trajectory. We need immediate, enforceable measures to prevent further depletion and ensure a sustainable future for all water users," she concluded.

As New Mexico grapples with the realities of climate change and prolonged drought, the issue is—state and local leaders must take the necessary steps to protect the region’s most vital resource before it’s too late.

For more information, visit www.cesoss.org and www.svraa.org



Good afternoon,

My name is Elaine Hebard, and I am a long time advocate of bringing sanity to water administration.

Last year, the former State Engineer Hamman wrote to the MRGCD, as one member of the MRG, regarding the need to reduce depletions. With the water distribution policy, the MRGCD is showing that it is taking this matter seriously.

While it does not appear that the other MRG water providers have received a similar letter, obviously, that is needed. Reducing our consumptive use cannot be just by surface water users -- be they fish or farmer, it must be a basin-side effort.

As such, I would like to encourage the Board and staff to participate in region-wide efforts to reduce the over-consumption outside of any particular agency silo. One is the MRCOG's Water Resources Board meeting on March 5, where the District could urge a discussion to reduce depletions. The Rio Grande Basin Study, on which the District has played a significant role, will be next meeting on February 19, and is another good place to urge for solutions to be modeled for implementation.

Only with such proactive efforts will we basin residents, and particularly your customers, have a chance of keeping the river flowing and satisfying the Compact requirements.

Finally, I would like to make a suggestion with respect to HB 308. While I am glad to see the acknowledgement that MRGCD voters are a unique bloc, why hold a separate election? Is it not really possible to have separate ballots for District voters on the same day as everyone else votes, but would be printed at vote centers throughout the four counties? As it stands now, it is likely that the Albuquerque mayoral race will drown out the Bernalillo candidates for the MRGCD running a month earlier.

Thank you.



CICLOS DE LA TIERRA

By Gina Breña, Education and Development Coordinator, CESOSS

Greetings! My name is Gina Breña and I am happy to be the new education coordinator for CESOSS.

For the last five years, I have been mostly stuck on a place I call Baby-Toddler Island where I was raising my four kids. My youngest turned one, so I seized the milestone moment and started swimming off the island as fast as I could. I quickly got caught up in a current and taken along an acequia where I met the CESOSS team. Landing here as the education coordinator is a new, yet, familiar place to be. I have worked as a garden teacher and coordinator for several schools in Albuquerque and in Flagstaff, AZ, where I earned my Masters degree in Sustainable Communities. During my graduate studies, I focused on developing garden-based programming for elementary students.

Many years ago, I realized that if our species is going to get on track with living harmoniously with the planet, then garden and place-based education has to become a priority throughout our nation's schools. Thankfully, in Albuquerque the movement towards outdoor education has been growing stronger with more schools realizing the benefits of getting students outside and connected to the earth. Still, there's a lot of work to do!

I am currently focused on reaching out to schools within the Middle Rio Grande Valley (and beyond) to promote our Ciclos de la Tierra curriculum. We are offering the curriculum free to any New Mexico public school educator. This is an especially great program for teachers who work with 3rd-5th grades as the curriculum is aligned with Common Core language arts in those grades. But really any teacher can benefit from working with Ciclos because its framework includes concepts-- *Resolana*, *Mutualismo*, *Self-Governance* and *Querencia*-- that are valuable and applicable to all ages. Everyday our CESOSS team lives these concepts as we work with fellow educators and community members to collaborate around our shared land and water.

Even when we don't name our actions as *resolana* or *mutualismo*, they are happening and helping us stay connected and grounded, especially as many of us are feeling uneasy about the direction our country or planet is heading.

The other day my friend was acknowledging how important it is these days when so many feel a sense of doom, that we come together in-person, face-to-face, and just be together. It seems so obvious and yet it's easy to forget how much we need to physically be there for one another. As CESOSS gears up for another season of acequia education and community events, we look forward to seeing our growing community together learning, hanging out and celebrating our shared earth and water.





Preserving Acequias and Agriculture in Bernalillo County's Southwest Area

By Santiago Maestas, President of the South Valley Regional Association of Acequias (SVRAA)

Bernalillo County's Southwest Area, known for its rich agricultural traditions and acequia irrigation systems, is at a crossroads as urban development pressures threaten its rural character. The Southwest Area Plan (SWAP), developed with input from local residents, property owners, and business stakeholders, aims to balance growth while protecting the region's cultural and agricultural heritage.

The South Valley, situated within this region, remains a landscape dominated by farmlands and acequia networks that have sustained generations of residents. However, increasing residential, commercial, and industrial developments have led to a steady decline in agricultural acreage. As a result, community leaders and policymakers have intensified efforts to safeguard these lands.

Community-Driven Planning

Citizen participation has played a central role in shaping the Southwest Area Plan. Through neighborhood associations and a Citizen Steering Committee, area residents have actively contributed to identifying key issues, concerns, and long-term objectives for preserving their way of life. The plan not only addresses current land use challenges but also establishes a framework for future agricultural conservation efforts.


"For centuries, agriculture has been the foundation of life along the Rio Grande floodplain," said Santiago Maestas, President of the South Valley Regional Association of Acequias. "Many of us still value the rural lifestyle and are committed to maintaining this tradition for future generations."

Policies for Agricultural Conservation

Recognizing the urgent need for preservation, the plan outlines several key policies aimed at protecting agricultural land and acequia systems:

- Policy 39: The plan will undergo regular evaluations by Bernalillo County's planning staff and the Citizen Steering Committee to assess its effectiveness. A dedicated agricultural conservation committee will be established to develop policies and programs that preserve farmland and prevent conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- Policy 69: Bernalillo County has amended its Subdivision Ordinance to ensure that acequias and related irrigation infrastructure are recorded as easements, safeguarding these historic water networks from future encroachments.

Further recommendations include a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) ordinance to identify priority lands for protection. Community advocates are also calling for county funding, potentially in partnership with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) and the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute (NMWRRI), to conduct a depletion analysis quantifying the ecological and economic value of acequias and local irrigation.



A Call to Action

With these measures in place, the next challenge lies in implementation. Some community leaders are advocating for an ombudsman program to assist local residents in formally declaring their water rights, ensuring long-term security for acequia users.


“The key to preserving our acequias is continued community involvement,” Maestas emphasized. “If we don’t take action now, we risk losing an essential part of our identity.”

As the Southwest Area Plan moves forward, the collaboration between residents, policymakers, and conservation advocates will be critical in shaping the future of the South Valley.



Photo taken during San Isidro procession in Atrisco.

Contact us for more information and updates on these initiatives. For more information, please www.cesos.org and www.svraa.org



Preserving Acequia Culture and Envisioning Social Sustainable Systems: Our need to return to basics

By Jorge Garcia, CESOSS Director

In a world where environmental sustainability and cultural preservation are more critical than ever, our organization, the Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS), is making a profound impact in Albuquerque's South Valley by integrating education, advocacy, and preservation efforts. By seeking to reinstitute the culture, history, and the rights of the people who live in historical lands with water rights, we are ensuring that the region's historic acequias—the life-giving irrigation systems of the Southwest—continue to support local agriculture, heritage, environmental health, and a beginning toward becoming self-sustainable once again, just like the Indo-Hispanos were prior to the industrialization and gentrification of the local New Mexican culture.

Understanding the Importance of Acequias

Acequias have been at the heart of New Mexico's agricultural and community systems for centuries. These intricate irrigation networks not only sustain farmlands but also foster community cooperation, environmental resilience, and cultural identity. On top of that, since Acequia communities were here before the state, Acequias have special powers and legal rights that ensure the communal aspect and history of the community that comes with the nature of acequias as communal systems, even if they are within the urban areas of our metropolitan area. Through **Ciclos de la Tierra Curriculum, Acequia Walk and Talks, and Agricultural Revitalization Projects**, our organization is keeping acequia traditions and history alive for future generations.


Education and Community Engagement

One of the key strategies CESOSS employs to ensure the longevity of acequia culture is education. The **Ciclos de la Tierra Curriculum**, developed with support from the Public Education Department (PED), brings acequia knowledge into classrooms, teaching students about the historical, scientific, and cultural significance of these irrigation systems. CESOSS is currently in the process of implementing this curriculum in several schools in the South Valley, including Valle Vista Elementary, Polk Middle School, South Valley Academy, as well as many others. Our push for Acequia knowledge into the classroom aims at ensuring that young minds appreciate the importance of sustainable water management, while they also learn culture, traditions, and values that are in accordance with the formation of social sustainable community systems rooted in local knowledge systems, and following place-based education practices rooted in acequia community knowledge systems. This is what maestro Tomas Atencio would say 'Is our **resolana**' Our way of understanding and knowing our community, which is our **querencia**. That which we love the most, our land.

Beyond the classroom, the **Acequia Walk and Talks** offer community members an opportunity to experience acequia history firsthand. These guided summer acequia walk & talks not only educate participants on the legal, cultural, and environmental importance of acequias but also inspire local residents to become active stewards of their land and water. Our aim is to connect back to the land.

Revitalization and Sustainability

CESOSS's work doesn't stop at education—it extends to hands-on sustainability initiatives. **The Valle Vista Acequia Outdoor Learning Initiative** is a pioneering project that blends environmental education with cultural preservation by creating outdoor classrooms irrigated by acequias. By engaging students and community members in active land and water stewardship, CESOSS ensures that acequia traditions remain a living and evolving practice.



Moreover, projects like the **Pajarito Landmark Project** and **South Valley Acequias Limpias** demonstrate CESOSS's commitment to the physical upkeep of these irrigation systems. By working with local government agencies and community organizations, CESOSS not only protects these water channels but also strengthens community bonds in the process.

Looking to the Future

As CESOSS continues its mission, several exciting initiatives are on the horizon. Plans include:

- Expanding outdoor classrooms across the region.
- Enhancing the **Ciclos de la Tierra Curriculum** with online resources for teachers.
- Strengthening the **Atrisco Research Collaborative Group** for deeper cultural and scientific studies that emanate from our leaders and elders.
- Establishing a Binational Network between Atrisco and Atlixco to build sister communities.
- Advocating for the development of an **Acequia Education Office** in the Middle Rio Grande Region so historical and ancient water rights can be protected and preserved as a legacy from the past.

A Call to Action

CESOSS envisions a South Valley that is environmentally conscious, culturally rooted, and empowered to tackle challenges that climate change is creating. Through collaborative community efforts and steadfast advocacy, CESOSS is ensuring that acequia knowledge and practices remain relevant and sustainable for generations to come.

For those interested in supporting our mission, CESOSS invites community members to participate in our workshops, educational programs, and preservation initiatives. By blending ancestral knowledge with modern education, CESOSS is not just preserving history—it's shaping a sustainable future. It's contributing to the Greening of America from the inside out.



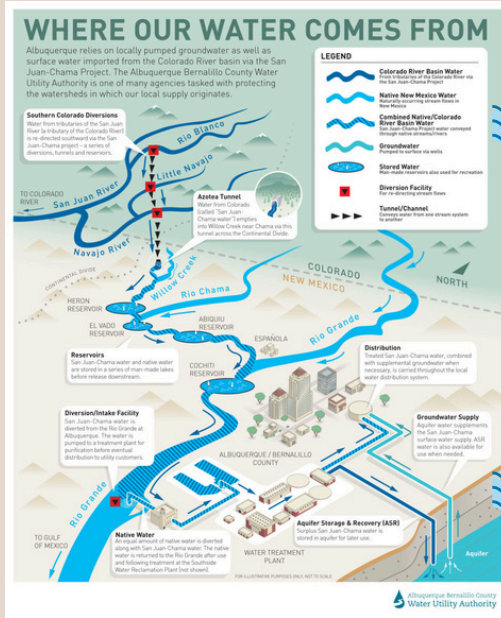
To learn more or to get involved, visit www.cesososs.org or reach out via info@cesoss.org



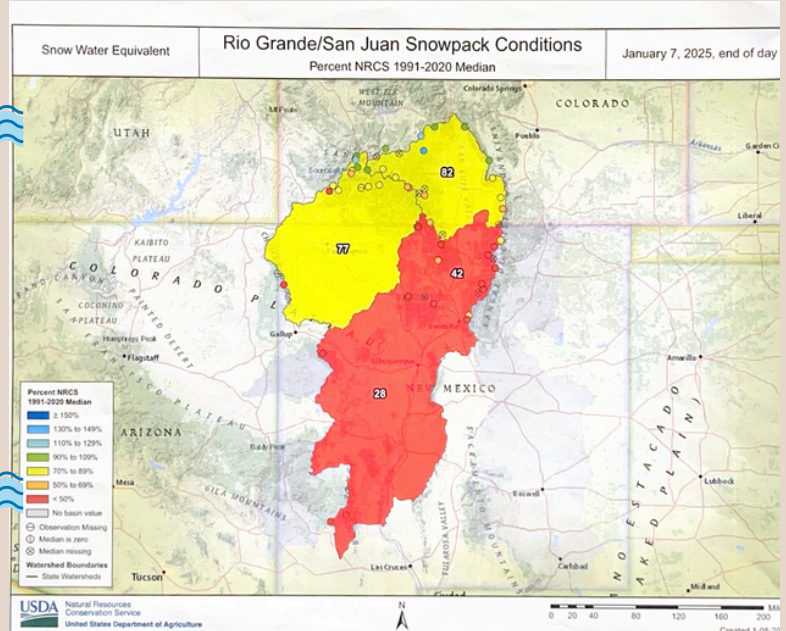
SABIAS QUE?...

Did you know that the water that comes from the Rio Grande originates from the **San Juan/Rio Grande Snowpack?**

What are the snowpack conditions that wash down to our valley today, and what have they been in the last 45 years?

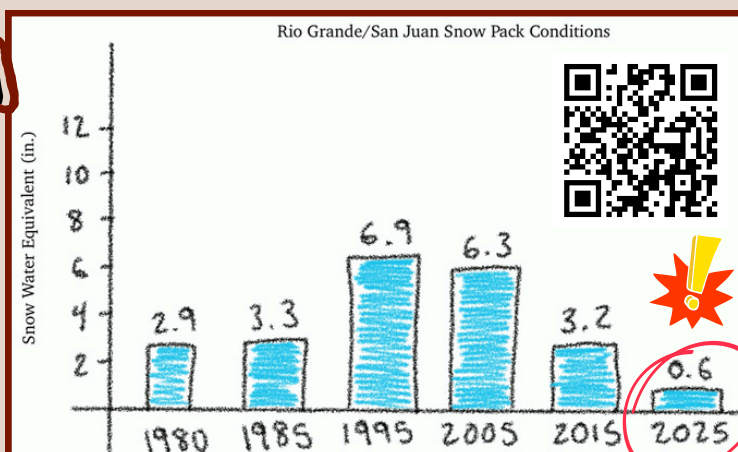


Graphic from Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority

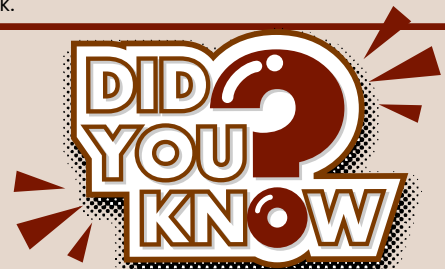


This Map represents the area that encompasses the Rio Grande/San Juan snowpack that washes down into the Rio Grande River. This map shows that the majority of the area on January 7th, 2025 had less than 50% of snowpack.

The following is a graphic representation of the snowpack conditions over the last 45 years from 1980 to 2025.



Data was taken from the Natural Resource Conservation Service
See <https://tinyurl.com/2rj4jmjv>



The snowpack conditions in 2025 are the lowest they've been in the last 45 years with only 0.6 In. of Snow Water Equivalent. This means that **the earth is under major changes and depletions.**

Can our society afford to deny the effects of our extractivist activities? Can our desire for development be sustained in the midst of climate change as one of our greatest and current predicaments?

For more information connect with us at info@cesoss.org



Our **mission** is to develop sustainable community-based and culturally centered events, programs, and initiatives to empower and preserve the traditions and science-based practices of local and Indigenous communities, related to land and water.

Our **vision** is to create sustainable, healthy, and thriving communities where traditions connected to land and water are protected, preserved, and passed onto future generations.

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A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Our partners and funders make CESOSS work possible. May we continue to work towards a world where land, water, and our Mother Earth is honored.

La Lucha Continúa.

*We
thank
you!*



LOS JARDINES DE MOCTEZUMA



Juntos y con ganas, we succeed!



GREENLATINOS
Luchando por la Liberación Ambiental

