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SENATE MEMORIAL 57

51ST LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2014

INTRODUCED BY

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A MEMORIAL

SUPPORTING LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT BY ACEQUIAS IN NEW MEXICO
AND COMMEMORATING THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEW
MEXICO ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION.

WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches in New Mexico have
created a cultural landscape and way of life centered around
local agriculture, water governance and customs of sharing
scarce water; and

WHEREAS, acequias are a centuries-old form of water
governance in New Mexico, are recognized as political
subdivisions of the state and are responsible for the
management of many of the surface water rights on their
respective rivers and streams; and

WHEREAS, in many rural, unincorporated communities,
acequias are an important, and in some instances the only, form

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1 of local government; and

2 WHEREAS, acequias contribute to the well-being and
3 livelihood of tens of thousands of families who irrigate from
4 an estimated eight hundred acequias; and

5 WHEREAS, according to hydrological research, acequias
6 enhance the natural process of aquifer recharge by slowing and
7 spreading mountain runoff through an intricate network of
8 waterways that support river flows and riparian habitats; and

9 WHEREAS, while acequias have a positive effect on the
10 hydrology of lower reaches of watersheds, they depend on
11 healthy forests in the upper watersheds to generate clean water
12 for rivers and streams; and

13 WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches face many
14 challenges related to long-term water scarcity and drought,
15 demands to transfer water rights out of agriculture to other
16 uses, adjudication of water rights and the need for investment
17 in irrigation infrastructure; and

18 WHEREAS, acequias and community ditches came together in
19 the past four decades to form several regional associations
20 and, twenty-five years ago, established a statewide membership
21 organization, the New Mexico acequia association, NMAA, to
22 protect and defend acequias and to work toward a common vision
23 for the future; and

24 WHEREAS, some of the policy accomplishments of acequia
25 leaders over the past few decades include the creation of the

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1 acequia and community ditch fund, the acequia construction
2 program and cost-share funding at the interstate stream
3 commission and the creation of the governor-appointed acequia
4 commission; and

5 WHEREAS, acequia leadership through the NMAA also
6 contributed to the passage of new laws strengthening acequia
7 governance, including acequia authority to regulate water
8 transfers and to administer acequia water banking as well as
9 laws strengthening acequia enforcement powers regarding
10 easements and illegal uses of water; and

11 WHEREAS, the NMAA and its partners have contributed to
12 efforts to support children, youths and young adults to become
13 stewards of acequia knowledge and practice through community
14 education projects and have started a process to develop
15 curricula with acequia-related themes for public schools that
16 are aligned with educational requirements; and

17 WHEREAS, acequia leadership has called upon the state
18 engineer, who administers water rights in New Mexico, to affirm
19 its historic role in local water management and to work
20 collaboratively to allocate water as fairly and equitably as
21 possible; and

22 WHEREAS, as water scarcity has intensified with long-term
23 drought, acequias have developed seasonal water-sharing
24 agreements with the support of the state engineer in certain
25 areas, but much work remains in other areas to involve local

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1 acequia officials in water management decisions; and

2 WHEREAS, as demands increase for water rights, acequias
3 and community ditches will be under greater pressure with
4 regard to transfers of water rights out of agriculture to other
5 uses and will have the authority to regulate such transfers in
6 consideration of whether such transfers are detrimental to the
7 acequia or its members; and

8 WHEREAS, because of their unique role in water allocation
9 and in making decisions about water transfers, acequias are
10 important policymakers at the local level and vital partners to
11 the state in water administration by the state engineer and
12 regional water planning by the interstate stream commission;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, acequias throughout the state are working in
15 close collaboration with the interstate stream commission, the
16 natural resource conservation service and local soil and water
17 conservation districts to restore, rehabilitate and upgrade
18 historic irrigation works to support the continued growth of
19 the agricultural economy to meet the demand for locally grown
20 food;

21 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
22 OF NEW MEXICO that acequias and community ditches be recognized
23 for their unique contributions to the culture, history,
24 hydrology, ecology and agricultural economy of the state of New
25 Mexico; and

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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the New Mexico acequia
2 association be congratulated on its twenty-fifth anniversary
3 and its ongoing work to strengthen local acequias, protect
4 acequia-based water rights, support acequia-grown foods,
5 support the engagement of youth through educational projects
6 and curricula and encouragement of new generations of
7 leadership in acequias and community ditches; and

8 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the senate recognize the
9 ongoing work by the state engineer to work with acequias in
10 certain areas of New Mexico and urges the state engineer to
11 expand efforts to collaborate with local acequia elected
12 officials and support their unique role in local water
13 governance and management; and

14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the interstate stream
15 commission and the state engineer be requested to continue to
16 work with leadership from the New Mexico acequia association to
17 expand investment in acequia irrigation infrastructure and to
18 facilitate the involvement of acequias in regional water
19 planning; and

20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
21 transmitted to the office of the state engineer, the interstate
22 stream commission, the New Mexico acequia association, the
23 acequia commission and the governor.