

Questions for Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

For the Record:

I have testimonies from the New Mexico Acequia Association and the New Mexico Acequia Commission that speak to the importance of this legislation and I ask unanimous consent that they be entered into the record.

Introduction:

Thank you for holding this hearing today to discuss how we can better address the challenges faced by land grant communities, and communities that still use their land for traditional uses. I also want to thank my friend Arturo Archuleta from the New Mexico Land Grant Council for testifying today. It's great to virtually see you and I hope you are doing well.

The Land Grant and Acequia Traditional Use Recognition Act, which I introduced, ensures greater consultation between the federal government and New Mexico's land grants and acequias. My bill also creates a process to allow New Mexico's land grants to establish their historical boundaries and provides them with pathways for acquiring land when the federal government disposes of it.

I grew up in the small community of Nambé and grew up near the Jacona Land Grant near Pojoaque. This experience engrained in me an understanding of the importance of taking care of our land and waters for generations to come.

This legislation will make it easier for land grant-mercedes to work with federal land management agencies, such as the Forest Service. It requires federal agencies to make land grant-mercedes aware of changes made to management plans and encourages agencies to mitigate any adverse impacts due to federal actions.

This bill instructs the federal government to issue guidance on permitting and permissible uses of these lands to the land grant-mercedes. That way, if a permit is required, communities will know exactly what they need to do and when they need to do it.

This legislation also ensures that the federal government appropriately recognizes spiritual and cultural sites, while providing greater tools for land grants to acquire the lands that these sites reside on.

This legislation also helps New Mexican families who have stewarded these lands for generations maintain precious infrastructure, such as acequias. Acequias are crucial water infrastructure for traditional communities, which is why this legislation codifies a previous legal ruling that determined consultation and special use permits are not required for maintenance and improvements within the historic easement for Acequias.