



***Discovery Road***  
presents  
***The Acequias***

**Acequias story documented for television**  
**farms, ditch riders and water**

The Sangre De Cristo National Heritage Area (SDCNHA) and *Discovery Road* are bringing forward the story of acequias in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. The half-hour documentary episode titled "*The Acequias*" introduces viewers to an intriguing profile of a *Ditch Rider*, who oversees the distribution of water to the farms and ranches.

"Well, I get up in the morning. I come out to the ditch. I take a look at what the river is doing. How much water we have coming down the river. I check the diversion which is further up. Make sure there is no debris. Making sure there is water to do the diversion ditch behind me." David Gallegos, ditch rider, said in an interview with *Discovery Road*.

Gallegos is one of hundreds of ditch riders who manage the water resource. They check the ditches, clean the ditches, measure water flow, open gates, shut gates and like a traffic cop on a farm, they signal when the water is coming your way.



**DITCH RIDER & WATER-** David Gallegos, ditch rider, approaches a canal to check water flow and levels. A *Discovery Road* television crew traveled with Gallegos as he made his rounds in the summer of 2023. -credit *Discovery Road*.

*Discovery Road* traveled to Lajara, Colorado to see how one family pulled water from the ditches, planted the crops and raised their families to make ongoing generational contributions to the San Luis Valley. Norma Chacon remembers early playtime days in the water. She also recalls how quickly playtime was swapped out for more important things on the family ranch. Her ancestors helped settle the area. They developed the land and distributed water rights for the sheep and cattle daily operations.

“I look at my grandmother as a very strong-willed woman. She hired hands. She had her sons do the work and she was a go-getter. She didn’t give up. She didn’t give up. I would hear stories about her. She ran the land. She ran the land along with her sons.” Norma Marquez Chacon said during an interview with *Discovery Road*.



**FAMILY SCRAPBOOK-Norma Chacon shows pages of her family history while being interviewed by a Discovery Road television crew. The Acequias episode explores several family stories and their relationship to water. -credit *Discovery Road*.**

“My grandfather is from Los Sauces. His father, Diego Marquez, came from New Mexico. He was one of the three settlers of Los Sauces. My grandfather and I believe there were about ten kids there that were born. And out of those ten kids my grandfather Jose Luis Marquez, he treaded out west. And he came from Los Sauces over here. Which is probably about 10-15 miles from Los Sauces. My understanding is he bought dirt road, to dirt road, to dirt road. He bought a square mile of land.” Chacon said.

Beauty can be found throughout the San Luis Valley, but it is not enough to keep the younger generation from leaving and seeking life in another place. More than one family told us their biggest heartache is losing the young people. They want the next generation to understand



that acequias are water carriers of life and historic pieces of the past. Otherwise, the true meaning of tradition, culture and heritage will be lost. *Discovery Road* found one family that might help save history.



**FARM BEAUTY**-The San Luis Valley farmland and lifestyle are featured in the documentary production *The Acequias* produced as part of the ongoing series *Discovery Road*. -credit *Discovery Road*.

“To me it is not really work. It’s more like they say if you like what you do you don’t work a day in your life. I don’t mind what I do. It’s like a process. You go through your seasons. Now it’s growing season, harvest season, stuff like that. This fall is the harvest of the grains, and stuff. Barley, straw and that time of year.” Michael Martinez said in an interview.



**GETTING THE STORY**-Michael Martinez being interviewed by a *Discovery Road* television crew on the Vigil family farm property in June 2023 for an upcoming documentary on acequias in the San Luis Valley. -credit *Discovery Road*

The important history is not lost on Martinez. Just 28 years-old he wraps both arms around the farming opportunity that has been handed down to him from his grandfather and great-grandfather. He now runs the farm operation in Capulin, Colorado.

*Discovery Road* show producer James Nelson says many young families move away from farming and on to other professions but not Martinez. “The time we spent with Michael Martinez and his family was a real eye opener. He’s only 28 years-old but handles the farm responsibilities like someone with decades of experience would. It’s a marvelous thing to see up close.” Nelson said.



Chuck Finnegan's family roots in Colorado can be drilled back to the 1800s. His wife Valerie Martinez Finnegan has family beginnings that go back even further. The very same issues surrounding water have always been there.



**THE WATER FUTURE IN COLORADO**-Chuck Finnegan holds his grandson near an irrigation pond on the family farm in LaJara, Colorado. Finnegan discussed the importance of protecting water rights in the San Luis Valley. -credit *Discovery Road*

“There are many organizations that have attempted to reappropriate water in the valley here. Mainly to take and export it outside of the valley for other uses. Claiming that there is an excess of water that is unclaimed. Many battles have taken place in this valley in order to protect the water and keep it in the valley.” Chuck Finnegan stated during the documentary production.

*The Acequias* offers viewers an insightful look at the relationships several families have with the land and water in the San Luis Valley. The documentary presents an intriguing portrait of the beautiful valley, the

water that quenches the ever-present thirst for success on the land and the people who have stayed on for generations hoping to preserve a traditional lifestyle.

*Discovery Road* is an award-winning ongoing documentary series broadcast each Saturday on the Utah Education Network (channel 9) at 6pm MST and on several local cable television stations in Utah and the region. The program partners with the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area (MPNHA) on history, culture and heritage elements brought forward in the television programs. *Discovery Road* also produces programming for several other national heritage areas in the United States.

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