Images of Agua y Tierra
Changing the Narrative of Chicano/Mexicano Farming

Where is San Luis, Colorado?
Background

San Luis is part of the Sangre de Cristo grant in Costilla County in Colorado. elevation is 7965 ft above sea level. San Luis was Established in 1851 - the oldest town in Colorado.

Some Quick Facts

- Landscape mosaic of bottomlands and uplands includes every major life zone in North America from Upper Sonoran (cold desert) through alpine tundra.
- Wildlife includes threatened and endangered species like Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and the Western Willow Flycatcher. This biodiversity is supported and extended by the acequia system.
• It's documented that there are more than 400 native plants and more than 400 native animals including visiting yellow-throated warblers and resident flycatchers. 'We grow ecosystems'.
• 23k acres acequia irrigated row, field, orchard crops.
• 350 small farmers with adjudicated water rights on 76 acequias.
• Water rights pertain to historic use rights by heirs and successors to the 'restored' common lands of the 80,000-acre La Sierra Commons.

Acequia

• What does Acequia mean? It comes from the Arabic, as-Saquis, the water bearer or the one who carries the water; also: the barmaid.
• The acequia is a snow-melt dependent, gravity-driven, community irrigation ditch system managed by local farmers who hold use rights and do not “own” the water itself. These use rights holders are known as parciéntes.
• First acequia in Colorado, San Luis Peoples Ditch (1852); 35 acequias by 1861.
Acequia facts

- 1861-76: Colorado Territorial Legislature recognized acequia institutions and law. Attempts have been made to remove this law so that commercialization of water use could be established. April 2009: HB 09-1233 -Colorado Acequia Recognition Law signed by Gov. Ritter.
- The allotment of water (repartimiento) on the acequia is managed by a mayordomo (ditch rider or ditch boss) elected on the basis of one irrigator/one vote.
- The acequia system produces significant economic-base services and cultural ecological benefits
Redefining Water Rights

HB 1233-09. The Colorado statute declares that acequia institutions are among the oldest forms of local self-governance in the Western U.S and that community ditches
represent a much older alternative of law to the doctrine of prior appropriation. It declares and that acequia customary norms emphasize equity and fairness and not just priority in the allocation of water rights.

The law also established that acequias and their farming communities are worthy of protection and preservation.

Wheat.
Devon Peña, Professor in Anthropology, Founder of The Acequia Institute
Devon Peña at his home ranch in San Luis, Summer 2017.

Why San José State University?
• An opportunity to develop the archives of the King Library’s Cultural Heritage Center within the areas of environmental issues and community action.
• An opportunity to focus on a region of historical importance to Chicana and Chicano Studies, the Indo-Hispano culture area of the Upper Rio Grande.
• Build a pedagogical arm on sustainability and communities for the undergraduate and graduate curriculum.
• Inform ways of addressing water management issues in California.
Protest regarding Logging in La Sierra.

Preparing 7000 Images for Scanning
Work still Untouched
Images of Agua y Tierra: A Glimpse into the Photo Collection

Thirty years of documenting the work and people of the San Luis Valley.
Compuerta Demonstration
Ditch Work
Pea Harvesting
Adobe Horno Construction
Root Cellar Construction
Irrigation Work
Potato Harvesting
Questions?