

El Grito de Las Mercedes

Newsletter of the
New Mexico Land Grant-Merced
Movement

Interim Land Grant Committee holds hearing in Peñasco

The Merced de Santo Tomás Apóstol del Río de las Trampas and the Merced de Santa Bárbara hosted the Interim Land Grant Committee of the New Mexico State Legislature in Peñasco on August 22 and 23. Board members from the Las Trampas, Santa Bárbara and Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grants presented before the committee, providing updates on everything from fuelwood projects to land acquisitions, historic properties to public outreach to their Taos County communities. Las Trampas President Alex López and Vice President José Arnaldo López discussed the Grant's pursuit of a piece of property and the lack of opportunities to purchase land in their small communities, which are surrounded by federal land managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Las Trampas *ejido* was lost to land speculators in a 1903 partition suit and these common lands passed through the hands of lumber companies before the federal government purchased them in 1926 via a land exchange, enveloping the land grant's communities (Las Trampas, El Valle, Ojo Sarco, Chamisal, Ojito, Vallecitos, Diamante and Llano de San Juan Nepomuceno) in 21,000 acres of federal land with restricted use. Merced de Santa Bárbara President, Bonifacio Vásquez, and Treasurer, Manuel Trujillo, discussed the fuelwood project spearheaded by the Grant, which delivered hundreds of cords of firewood to the community, most of which came from the contingency lines cut during the Hermit's Peak / Calf Canyon Fire of 2022 that prevented the fire from crossing the ridge into the Peñasco valley and watershed.

La Merced de Santa Bárbara also lost their common lands to a partition suit, initiated in 1897 by Napoleon Laughlin, the very attorney they had hired to win confirmation of their 1796 grant. Just as in the case of Las Trampas, the land grant communities of the Merced de Santa Bárbara, including Santa Bárbara (now known as Rodarte), Peñasco, Llano Largo, Llano de la Llegua, Vadito, Placita and Tres Ritos and portions of Llano San Juan Nepomuceno suddenly lost access to the common lands that surrounded their community. Now, these former commons were controlled of the Santa Barbara Pole and Tie Company, which pulled some 400,000 ties off of the Grant annually. In 1931, the Forest Service fully acquired the common lands from the Company via a timber exchange, surrounding the communities in 24,000 acres of federal lands. With the purchase of the Las Trampas and Santa Bárbara *ejidos*, the federal government owned 45,000 acres of land whose title derived from 18th century land grants made to these communities by the King of Spain.



Merced de Santa Bárbara President Bonifacio Vásquez discusses USFS watershed mismanagement and the impact on area land grants and acequias, August 2023.

... story continued



San Acasio Church in Llano Largo was recently acquired by La Merced de Santa Bárbara

The Committee also received an update from José Mondragón of the Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grant in (Talpa, Llano Quemado and Ranchos de Taos), who discussed community outreach and complications purchasing *lineas*. Arturo Archuleta of the Land Grant Council addressed the loss of common lands and the efforts by land grants to rebuild their community land base. Through unfair adjudication processes, decades of adverse rulings by the courts, taxation, partition suits, and rampant land speculation, land grants have only retained 7% of their historic land base. Still, many, like la Merced del Pueblo de Chililí, have successfully expanded common lands by strategically purchasing tracts and creating community housing, ensuring future generations of heirs can continue to call Chililí home. Mr. Archuleta also discussed the effect of development schemes by land speculators, whose failed housing subdivisions threaten the uplands and watershed of the Tierra Amarilla, Chililí, Tomé and Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grants. If land grants-*mercedes* had access to sufficient capital to purchase large tracts of land when they are on the market, they can preserve these watersheds and uplands and protect the natural resources for the benefit of heirs and residents of their communities. This may be accomplished by creating a land acquisition revolving fund that would offer low interest loans on long terms to provide manageable annual payments.

Paula García of the New Mexico Acequia Association updated legislators on the Acequia and Community Ditch Fund, capital outlay to acequias, the acequia bureau in the ISC, water leasing and disaster recovery. J.R. Logan, coordinator for the Taos County Forest and Watershed Health Program, discussed wildfire threat in Taos County and statewide, the involvement of land grants in risk reduction through stewardship programs like the mayordomo projects, which augment fuelwood harvesting on federal lands. He also discussed how the legislature can help expand these projects, particularly through capital outlay, by adding a natural resource manager to the staff of the New Mexico Land Grant Council, and amending the Tort Claims Act to give land grants the same protections afforded to acequias.

The second day of the hearing began with a tour of the nearly two-and-a-half century old Iglesia de San José de Gracia in Las Trampas, which was built between 1760-1776, soon after Las Trampas was granted in 1751. The church has been maintained by the community, which gathers to plaster the adobe church, and has walls between four and six feet thick that rise to a height of 34 feet. The Committee also toured the *escuelita*, which sits near the church on the plaza and is owned by the Peñasco Independent School District. The Las Trampas Land Grant is working with the local acequias and mutual domestic water users association to petition the school board to deed over the building to the community. The tour continued to the Merced de Santa Bárbara, where the legislators visited the San Acasio church in Llano Largo, which was purchased from the Archdiocese of Santa Fe in the winter of 2022 and is under renovation. Santa Bárbara President Vásquez also took the legislators to the *compuerta* of several acequias on the Río Santa Bárbara.

(From September 8-17, a wildfire burned 525 acres in the community of El Valle, including 340 acres on the Carson National Forest and 180 acres of private land. The fire forced evacuation in El Valle and Las Trampas and was suppressed by crews from the USFS, local volunteer fire departments, and many other partners)



Las Trampas Land Grant President, Alex López reports efforts of the local community to recover the escuela



View of the iglesia and escuela located in the plaza of Las Trampas

New Mexico Land Grant-Merced Consejo returns to in-person meetings

The New Mexico Land Grant-Merced Consejo held its annual meeting in June 2023 in Cañones, where it discussed increasing annual dues, training on reporting and auditing requirements for land grants, appraisals for land purchases, federal and state legislation, and held its bi-annual election. The following members were elected to the executive board:

President - Andrea Padilla (Town of Tomé)
Vice President - Jason Quintana (Manzano)
Treasurer - Andrew Gutierrez (Tajique)
Secretary - Nancy López (Chihene Nde Nation)
Parliamentarian - Bonifacio Vásquez (Merced de Santa Bárbara)
Member at large - Monica Rodríguez (San Joaquín del Río de Chama)
Member at large - Victoria García (Merced del Pueblo Abiquiú)

The Consejo also held a quarterly meeting in September in Manzano, discussing fundraising, taxation of common lands, liability insurance for forest mayordomo projects, fleet insurance for land grant vehicles, the guaranteed revenue stream for land grants, capital outlay, federal and state legislation, and the concept of a loan fund for land acquisition. Member land grants are currently selling raffle tickets as part of the Consejo's 2023 fundraiser. More information is included in the flyer below. Contact your local land grant to buy a ticket for your chance to win one of these great prizes!

Important Reminders

- The Interim Land Grant Committee of the New Mexico Legislature will hold its next meeting on **October 23 and 24** in **Carnuel**. Visit www.nmlegis.gov for more information.
- The next Land Grant Council meeting will be held on **September 29, 2023 at 10:00 am** in **Albuquerque**. Visit lgc.unm.edu for location information and how to participate virtually or in person.



Support the Land Grant-Merced Consejo's 2023 fundraiser!

Buy a raffle ticket for only \$5.00 for a chance to win one of these great prizes!



- 1st Prize** 2 tickets to Broncos vs Raiders (Jan. 6 or 7, 2024) in Las Vegas
- 2nd Prize** 2 night stay at the "Casita" in Tomé, 2 dinners & 1 breakfast included
- 3rd Prize** cord of wood and cash prize
- 4th Prize** cord of blocked wood
- 5th Prize** retablo by Sophie Garcia
- 6th Prize** \$100.00 cash prize
- 7th Prize** carne seca and New Mexico baked goods gift basket
- 8th Prize** \$75 gift card to Lowe's
- 9th Prize** "Taste of New Mexico" gift basket
- 10th Prize** \$50 gift card
- 11th Prize** \$50 gift card
- 12th Prize** blanket
- 13th Prize** blanket
- 14th Prize** signed and framed Edward Gonzales poster
- 15th Prize** handmade knife
- 16th Prize** \$25 Amazon gift card
- 17th Prize** \$25 Amazon gift card

