

New Mexico Land Grant Council (NMLGC)
January 16, 2026 – 10:00am
UNM Continuing Education
South Building – Room 207
1634 University Blvd. NE - Albuquerque
Zoom Meeting I.D. - 919 5964 5070

**Final Meeting Minutes
Regular Council Meeting**

1. Call to Order - Roll Call

Chairman Juan Sánchez called the meeting to order at 10:01am MST. Roll call of the Council members: Steve Polaco, Monica Rodríguez, Andrea Padilla, and Juan Sánchez were present.

2. Introduction of Guests

Juan Sánchez (NMLGC); Steve Polaco (NMLGC); Monica Rodríguez (NMLGC); Andrea Padilla (NMLGC); Arturo Archuleta (NMLGC/LGMI); Anissa Baca (NMLGC/LGMI); Jacobo Baca (NMLGC/LGMI); Fabian Valdez (LGMI); Mark Meyers (SLO); Camila Romero (SLO); Jason Quintana (DFA IPDD); Jessamyn Young (Los Padillas); Lenora Chavez; Randolph Chavez; State Representative Linda Serrato; Elia Vasquez (staff for Rep. Linda Serrato); Katie Crayton (NMDA – Healthy Soils); Dean Bruce (NMDA – Healthy Soils); Lisa Brown (NMDOJ – Treaty Division); Rita Padilla Gutierrez; Mike Howsden (Cristóbal de la Serna LG); Bella Mollard (USFS – Carson and SF); Tokey Boswell (BLM); Victoria Lovato (New Mexico Legal Aid); A.J. Pacheco (Office of Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández); Jonathan Macias (DFA-IPDD); Eric Chavez (Office of Sen. Ben Ray Luján); Denise Villareal; Maya Garcia (CESSOS); Olivia Romo (Office of Sen. Martin Heinrich); Jorge Garcia (CESSOS); Don Bustos (Santa Cruz de la Cañada LG).

3. Approval of Agenda

Councilor Rodríguez made a motion to approve the agenda; Councilor Polaco seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

- Councilor Rodríguez – aye
- Councilor Padilla – aye
- Councilor Polaco – aye
- Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 19, 2025 Regular Council Meeting

Councilor Padilla made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of the December 19, 2025 Regular Council meeting, with an addition regarding her concerns at Immaculate Conception Church; Councilor Rodríguez seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

- Councilor Rodríguez – aye
- Councilor Padilla – aye
- Councilor Polaco – aye
- Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

5. Discussion and Possible Action on Federal and State Legislative Update – Including Presentation by Rep. Linda Serrato on Potential Feasibility Study Legislation

Federal

A.J. Pacheco (Office of Cong. Teresa Leger Fernández) reported that Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández was very active in 2025, collaborating with federal agencies and working against the Trump administration's reforms. Her office met with the NMDOJ Treaty Division (Enrique Romero and Lisa Brown) to discuss how the NMDOJ office can help to advocate for land grant communities in Washington D.C. The Traditional Use Bill is stuck in the House Natural Resources Committee and the Congresswoman is pushing for passage as the Senate version has passed the Senate Natural Resource Committee. The Cemetery bill passed House Natural Resources Committee and was sent to the House for passage. Applicants for Congressional Directed Spending can find decisions on the Congresswoman's website. Mr. Pacheco stated that he will attend Treaty Day and offer comments on the Congresswoman's behalf.

Eric Chávez (Office of Senator Ben Ray Luján) stated that over 1,200 individual cases were closed in 2025 and that Senator Ben Ray Luján successfully saved millions in federal funds for New Mexico. He advocated against SNAP cuts and highlighted the effects of tariffs. The House of Representatives passed minibuss appropriations package with funding for the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Interior, reduced funding for the NSF and a 50% cap on administrative costs. Senate appropriations totaled more than \$982 million in federal funding, with many projects related to water, commerce, justice, and science. The bill heads to the executive for the president's signature. The House voted to extend enhanced ACA tax credits for 3 years but the Senate did not pass same provisions. The Traditional Use Bill passed Natural Resource Committee, which needs to do reporting to get it to leadership and onto the Senate Floor. Mr. Chávez commented that he is looking into SAMS and GSA information on the replacement of the DUNS system. Councilor Rodríguez asked if the San Joaquín del Río de Chama request for administrative and economic development funding made the cut; Mr. Chávez commented that he would look into her query and let her know, but that the funding request is with the transportation, housing and development bills, which have not yet been passed.

Olivia Romo (Office of Senator Martin Heinrich) stated that Senator Heinrich has introduced legislation to reroute ICE funding to local law enforcement. He delivered a floor speech for permitting reform energy projects, which can take 10-17 years and currently is saddled with too many administrative delays. The Senate passed legislation funding \$102.9 million for New Mexico projects for FY 2026. Senator Heinrich also sponsored passed legislation to amend water rights settlements with technical corrections, which authorizes spending \$18.3 million in earned interest. Ms. Romo reported that she will attend Treaty Day and deliver remarks on behalf of the Senator. Arturo Archuleta (NMLGC) stated that the Council will likely travel to Washington DC in the Spring and would like to coordinate that with any movement with the bills, be they committee hearings or a floor vote.

State

Rep. Linda Serrato, chair of the standing land grant committee and interim land grant committee, thanked the Council and land grants for their clear messaging and priorities, especially the land

grant and acequia infrastructure bill. She reminded that as a 30 day session, the Governor sets the priority on legislation and that Representative Miguel Garcia pre-filed the infrastructure bill, House Bill 21, with Senator Leo Jaramillo and herself signing on. She will speak with the chair of the Taxation and Revenue Committee and let them know the infrastructure bill is her priority legislation and Senator Jaramillo will do the same in the Senate. She is also working with the federal delegation to see how the legislature and the delegation can collaborate. Her district legislative aide, Elia Vasquez, is in attendance and she encouraged constituents to reach her via phone or text as her legislative e-mail inbox is full. Rep. Serrato added that while she worked for Senator Luján in the past and learned a bit about land grant issues, as interim chair she learned about the work that land grants do, protecting the land and future economies for New Mexico's families. She added that she is looking into the creation of a land grant and acequia center like the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center to help people understand what land grants are, their history in our state and region. She plans to explore supporting a feasibility study (\$100,000-200,000) to explore possibility of such a center. She also discussed easing regulations on child care centers, where, for example, they need to install sprinkler systems if they have more than 5 children, even though at home childcare centers are devalued when systems are installed. Councilors Polaco and Rodríguez mentioned the Mercedes Unidas Center as a possible site for a land grant and acequia center. Mr. Archuleta expressed concern that the feasibility study might interfere with infrastructure fund and expressed hope that programs where grandparents are paid to watch their grandkids are expanded.

Councilor Polaco made a motion to endorse House Bill 21, the land grant and acequia infrastructure bill; Councilor Padilla seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye
Councilor Padilla – aye
Councilor Polaco – aye
Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

Councilor Padilla made a motion to endorse House Bill 88, which amends the Land Grant Merced Assistance Fund; Councilor Rodríguez seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye
Councilor Padilla – aye
Councilor Polaco – aye
Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

The NMLGC budget in both the Governor's and LFC recommended budgets remains flat; Mr. Archuleta has reached out to both the Governor and Rep. Serrato to express concern. Rep. García asked for a write up about the need for a budget increase that he presented to the Democratic Caucus and discussed using GROW monies to increase the Council's budget. If the Council received GROW monies, it will need to work with DFA to see if it can go directly to Council rather than through COGS, which usually receive GROW monies. Chairman Sánchez stated the Council could always try and present in front of LFC and DFA so we can justify our need for increase. Mr.

Archuleta added that the Interim Land Grant Committee stated that they would ask at their hearing in Las Vegas last summer. Personnel costs and cost of living increases have eaten \$55,000 in funding since FY 2024 and budget increase is needed to offset, save monies for programming and expand staff. Councilor Padilla added that if the infrastructure bill passes, the Council needs more NMLGC staff expertise to help with zoning, comprehensive plans, etc.

6. Discussion and Possible Action on State Land Office Update

Camila Romero and Mark Meyers (SLO) reported that the Bearcat is moving along, with Dee Tarr of Claunch Pinto SWCD awaiting the project plan to be approved by NM State Forestry. The SLO already has a contractor to haul fuelwood to Chililí. It will start soon, with only 20 hours of hauling once it is cut. The cutting will take one to one and a half months, where we'll have a better idea of number of cords produced. The Villanueva is on the way to close out; it produced 64 cords. Planning has started for a third phase. Ms. Romero also announced SLO supports House Bill 21.

7. Discussion and Possible Action on Bureau of Land Management Update

Tokey Boswell (BLM) reported that a new wildland fire fighting agency, the Wildland Fire Service, will be created in the Department of the Interior, combining all firefighting services under that department. The Department of Agriculture is not part of this reorganization yet. Reduced fuelwood permits are still on sale through January and cost \$1 permit for 10 cords for dead and down. Individual field offices can inform about opportunities, including where and what can be. Former Congressman Stevan Pearce has been nominated for the Director of BLM. The BLM delivered 5 certified BLM patents last month and will work with Council staff to identify the next priorities. The BLM still funded via continuing resolution through the end of January and will evaluate new projects once the budget is known. BLM lease sales from Carlsbad and Oklahoma netted \$325 million in revenue.

8. Discussion and Possible Action on U.S. Forest Service Update

Bella Mollard (USFS) reported that the Santa Fe NF is meeting regularly with the San Joaquín del Río de Chama Land Grant. The Wood for Life program has wood available from Rio Chama CFLRP (the Wood for Life Program may be going away). Manny López from the National Forest Foundation is the contact person (mlopez@nationalforest.org) and wood will be delivered in the summer of 2026. The Carson NF is working on landscape restoration projects, including dead trees around Pot Creek and the McGaffey Ridge area. The project will take several years and involve several partners and is done via Good Neighbor Authority. Pile burning continues on the Carson National Forest near Agua Piedra, Sipapu, Capulin Peak and Pueblo Ridge, north of Taos Canyon. The Rio Trampas project near Peñasco continues, with ignitions south of chamisal and continuing near Ojo Sarco, Trampas, and El Valle. Other pile burns are taking place near Canjilón, El Rito, Taos Ski Valley, San Cristóbal near Turley Mill, and Red River. Each forest website has interactive maps identifying the location of ignitions and pile burns. Chairman Sánchez asked if the Cíbola National Forest has been engaged in conversations regarding the MOU between the Council and the Santa Fe and Carson NF. Ms. Mollard stated that James Durán of the Carson NF and Shaun Sánchez of the Santa Fe NF will work directly with the Cíbola NF to discuss.

9. Discussion and Possible Action on Natural Resource Issues & Concerns – Including Presentation on New Mexico Department of Agriculture Health Soils Program & Presentation on South Valley Regional Acequia Association Initiatives

Katie Crayton and Dean Bruce (NMDA Healthy Soils) presented regarding the 2026 Healthy Soils program. The Program was created in 2019 and land grants are eligible entities under the program, which can apply for up to \$100,000 provided they have a UEI (unique entity ID) from SAM.gov. Those entities that do not have a UEI are capped at \$25,000, the same cap as individuals. No match is required and the online application period starts today and ends March 20 at 12:00pm. The Town of Tomé LG won a grant in FY 2022. These projects can take place on public or private lands. Projects can last up to 15 months start mid July and can run through September 2027. Applications need to address at least one of the five healthy soil principles, which are: Maximize Soil Cover, Minimize Soil Disturbance, Maximize Plant Diversity, Keep Living Roots, and Integrate animals (livestock, earthworms). Individual applicants encouraged to work with NRCS. NMDA welcomes help to review applications. Reviewers will review 10 applications over 2 weeks and one day will review together and recommend projects for approval by NM Agriculture Secretary Jeff Witte. Ms. Crayton thanked Arturo Archuleta, Jacobo Baca, Anissa Baca, Chairman Juan Sanchez and Councilor Monica Rodríguez reviewing applications in the past. Councilor Rodríguez commented that traditional communities have been engaged in healthy soils practices for centuries. She added that no conservation planning nor partnerships are required for entities, but asked if entities need to engage in a conservation plan with NRCS; they do not.

Councilor Polaco asked about keyline plowing technologies, if they were supplied or if they had to purchase the plows. Ms. Crayton responded that durable goods capped at \$5,000 and NMDA recommends that applicants hire a contractor to do that work. Councilor Polaco asked if NMDA has a list of contractors that offer keyline plowing; Ms. Crayton responded the NM Healthy Soils working group has a list and that many SWCDs have equipment available for rental. Chairman Sánchez added that the East Rio Arriba SWCD has equipment available and a list of contractors. Applications close on March 20th and reviews take place in April.

Denise Padilla, Jesse Young, Santiago Maestas, Maya Garcia, and Jorge Garcia (South Valley Regional Acequias; Los Padillas Neighborhood Association; CESSOS) presented regarding concerns about development in Albuquerque's South Valley and the transferring of water rights to Valencia County. Denise Padilla stated that they are not rejecting growth but are against irresponsible development. The Neighborhood Association is interested in protecting culturally important lands, ecologically important areas for birds, habitat and biodiversity and natural heritage of Los Padillas. Families chose Los Padillas because of the connection to nature, access to acequias, and an interesting in preserving the rural character. Residents understand that rapid development uses resources, changes the character of areas and leads to displacement and they feel they have a responsibility to project land, open spaces and ditches.

Santiago Maestas (commissioner of the Pajarito Acequia) stated that they are protesting the transfer of 40 acres of water rights to pecan farm in Valencia County, which does not have any pre-1907 water rights. The lands were part of Pajarito Land Grant and the property is owned by a multi-millionaire. They do not need a special use permit but county regulations require A-1 property zoning and the owner needs to notify nearby property owners. Parciantes are concerned since people cannot get a lease from MRGCD's water bank if these water rights are transferred. 130 acres of water rights are moved from Angostura diversion (Santa Ana Pueblo Land, Sandoval County) and travels down main canal through pueblos to Valencia County. Councilor Padilla is

familiar with the land owner and attests that the Valencia County property is rangeland and not farmland. She suggested that the presenters inform the public via this NMLGC meeting. Jesse Young added that they need help to stop this transfer and later transfers and want to explore reconstituting the Pajarito Land Grant to stop this and other transfers.

Councilor Rodriguez stated that acequias have 2003 law that empowers acequias to approve water transfers and was unsure if the MRGCD hurts acequias in the district in this process. Mr. Maestas responded that the State Engineer does not want to recognize their acequia and claims that they are not filed with the Secretary of State. The OSE's Water Rights Division opposes the acequia and has stopped their acequia from accessing their capital outlay monies and acequia fund monies. For this reason they are pursuing a more general protest rather than as an irrigator or water rights holder. Sandia Pueblo recently did a general protest, using religious and ceremonial grounds to stop action. Rita Padilla Gutierrez expressed her support and opposition to pecan farming in Valencia County, citing the excessive water usage, and stated that the OSE should be at Council meetings.

Santiago Maestas clarified that their acequia, the Los Padillas acequia, has been organized under Chapter 72 and 73 since 2007 and that even though they have the transfer provision in their bylaws, the OSE refused to acknowledge that they are a legitimate acequia. Jorge Garcia commented on the impact of datacenters, the growth of Los Lunas as an economic hub, and water and food shortages. Councilor Padilla added that land grants and acequias need to meet with the Pueblos to form coalitions, that the OSE needs to send a representative to Council meetings so we can ask why they can ignore acequias and hold them accountable. They just listen to developers and not the communities harmed – Meta just purchased 40 more acres in Valencia County.

10. Discussion and Possible Action on NM Department of Justice Treaty Division Update & Requests

Enrique Romero (NMDOJ Treaty Division) provided an update on the work of the Treaty Division, including the filing of amicus briefs in the Cristóbal de la Serna case, work with the San Antonio de las Huertas land grant on Sandoval County's tax protest board appeal regarding land grant immunity from property tax assessments, and work with attorney Narciso Garcia on the Manzano Land Grant case where former president Jason Quintana was dismissed from the complaint. The Treaty Division has also worked with the Tecolotito acequia, Acequia bajo la Loma and La Joya Acequia in Socorro County, as well as another acequia case in Mora County. They have help the San Joaquín del Río de Chama Land Grant in their meetings with the USFS in their Cañón de Chama irrigation project, participated in the Cristóbal de la Serna lines working group, and continued meeting with the Sandoval case land grant group and is monitoring the Mora County water contamination issue.

11. Discussion and Possible Action on Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Day

Council staff reported that they are working on plans with the New Mexico Acequia Association. Treaty Day will take place on Monday, February 2, 2026 at the Roundhouse (flyer in packet).

12. Discussion and Possible Action on Council FY 2026 Budget

A budget update was provided, including \$3,015.86 in council travel, \$183,166.29 in staff, \$11,823.96 in facility rental, \$42,587.23 in F&A for grand total of \$292,911.77 spent.

13. Discussion and Possible Action UNM FY 2026 Intergovernmental Services Agreement

Mr. Archuleta stated that the lease for NMLGC’s offices at UNM Continuing Education is up for renewal in April or May and the Council must give 60 days notice if it plans to renew the lease. The price has not increased and remains less than \$24,000 per year.

Councilor Polaco made a motion to renew the office rental lease; Councilor Padilla seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye

Councilor Padilla – aye

Councilor Polaco – aye

Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

Mr. Archuleta presented Pay Request #5 for \$54,861.86, including \$30,532.46 in project personnel, \$1,970.66 in facility rental, and \$9,143.64 in F&A.

Councilor Padilla made a motion to approve Pay Request #5 for \$54,861.86; Councilor Polaco seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye

Councilor Padilla – aye

Councilor Polaco – aye

Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

14. Discussion and Possible Action on Legal Services Contract Update & Requests

A letter (in packet) was sent to the Sen. Bill O’Neill estate regarding the distribution of assets and a defunct partnership that was set to receive proceeds. Victoria Lovato (New Mexico Legal Aid) and Mr. Archuleta discussed briefs filed for the Cristóbal de la Serna LG in the New Mexico Court of Appeals which included arguing immunity for land grants from quiet title suits. Mr. Archuleta also reported that he has discussed his own practice of law with UNM’s general counsel.

15. Discussion and Possible Action on Professional Surveyor Services Contract Update & Requests

Invoice 01162026 was presented for work on the Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grant.

Councilor Polaco made a motion to approve Territorial Land Surveying Invoice 01162026 for \$4,937.63; Councilor Padilla seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye

Councilor Padilla – aye

Councilor Polaco – aye

Chairman Sánchez – aye

The motion was passed.

16. Discussion and Possible Action on Land Grant Registry Update

None.

17. Discussion and Possible Action on Land Grant-Merced Institute Update

Mr. Archuleta reported that the LGMI purchased a new plotter since it could no longer purchase parts and supplies for the old one.

18. Discussion and Possible Action on Correspondence

None.

19. Discussion and Possible Action on Staff Assignments

None.

20. Public Comments – discussion only

Jason Quintana (DFA-IPDD) reported that the DFA IPDD issued its Ombudsman Report, that 117 cases of high impact outreach were conducted by Mr. Quintana and Michael Gilmore and that land grants can use regional COGs more.

21. Miscellaneous Announcements

None.

22. Date and Location for February Council Meeting

The February 2025 New Mexico Land Grant Council meeting will be held on February 27, 2026 in Albuquerque at UNM Continuing Education at 10:00am.

23. Adjournment

Councilor Polaco made a motion to adjourn; Councilor Padilla seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Councilor Rodríguez – aye

Councilor Padilla – aye

Councilor Polaco – aye

Chairman Sanchez - aye

The motion was passed. The meeting adjourned at 1:28pm MST.

Approved:

Chair

Date