Section 5

Ditches

Existing Conditions

The North Valley and the Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque are served by an irrigation system historically tied to the agricultural nature of the area. The primary use of the system is agricultural irrigation and drainage, though it is also used by pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians for recreation. The ditch system is comprised of acequias, laterals, drains, ditches, and canals, collectively referred to as ditches, which provide agricultural irrigation to properties along them. The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) manages ditch maintenance and use in the valley area.

Ownership of land in this ditch irrigation system is complex. Some lands are owned outright by MRGCD and others are contained within easements held by MRGCD. Though levels of ownership can be difficult to determine, privacy for adjacent landowners is of concern and overall, regardless of ownership, it is encouraged that all ditch users respect the private nature of the ditches.

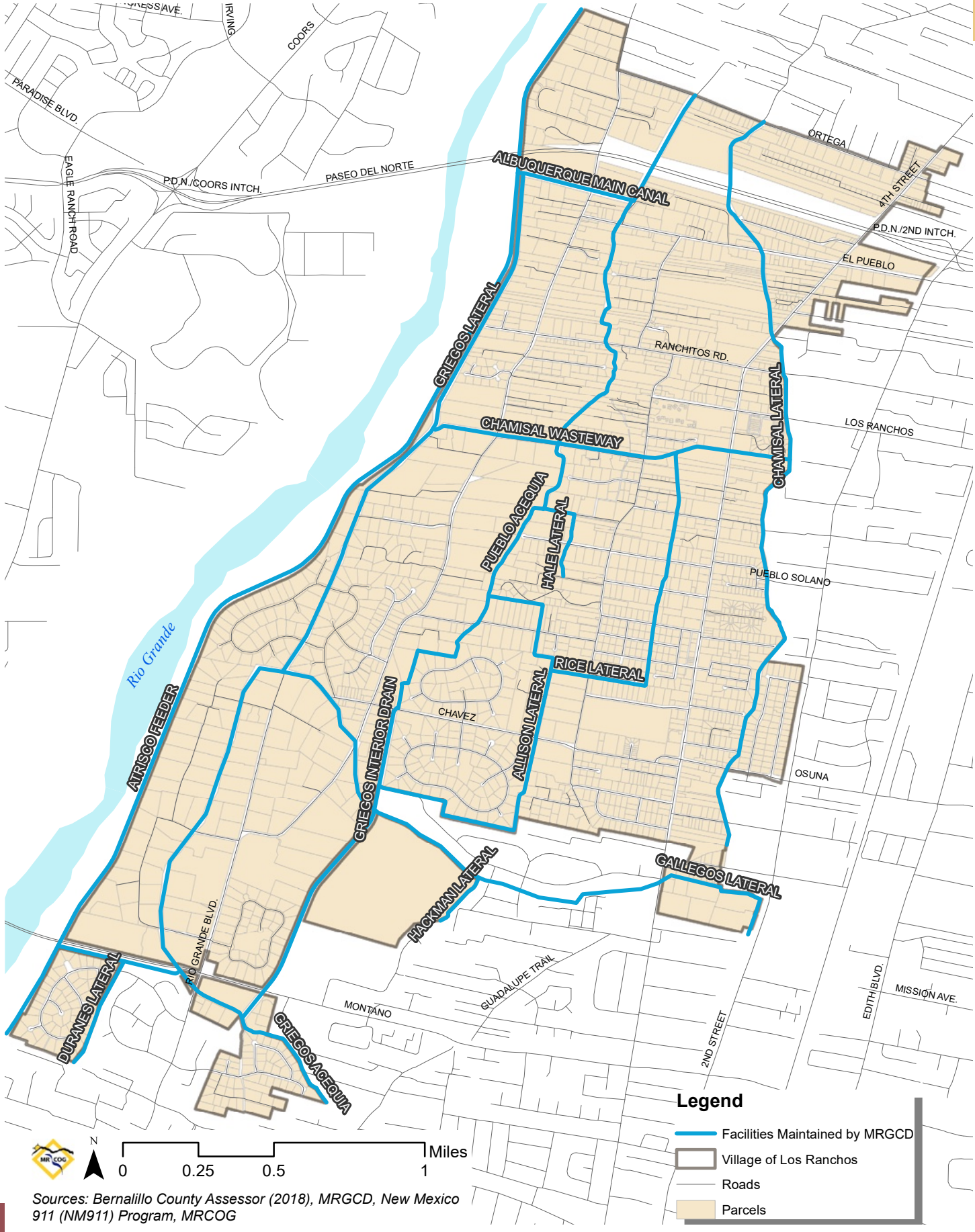
History

Irrigation, vital to agriculture, was first seen in the area with a system developed by Native American pueblos. Later, Hispanic settlers expanded upon the existing infrastructure and developed their own system of acequias. However, neither system had drainage, leading to a swamp-like nature for many fields and leading to the accumulation of salt on fields. By 1920 much land was out of production due to recurrent flooding and poor drainage. MRGCD was formed in the 1920s to implement drainage and flood control improvements in the area through a system of irrigation ditches, intended to both irrigate and drain. This system supplements the older acequia irrigation system and is one of the original services provided to area landowners. It has shaped the early use of land in the area, influencing the creation of tripa lot patterns, and continues to define the Village for the future.

Recreation

The primary purpose of the ditches is for agricultural irrigation and drainage. In addition, their right-of-way has also been used by residents for recreation by pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists. Ditch users are encouraged to exercise caution along ditch right-of-way, as safety is of concern, especially in low light or high-water level conditions.

MRGCD Facilities



Sources: Bernalillo County Assessor (2018), MRGCD, New Mexico 911 (NM911) Program, MRCOG

5.1 Ditches Goal

In recognition of the importance of the ditch irrigation system to the Village and of its uses, primarily for irrigation but also for multimodal recreation and greenery, the goal is to preserve and enhance the ditch irrigation system.

5.1.1 Objectives

- Ensure preservation and maintenance of open ditches and ditch right-of-way by appropriate agencies and private landowners
- Encourage care and courtesy by all users of the ditches
- Recognize and respect the range of ditch and ditch right-of-way ownership in the Village
- Recognize the need for privacy and safety for those adjacent to ditches
- Coordinate with agencies and private landowners to preserve the open and accessible nature of the ditches
- Recognize the historic significance of ditches and their impact on land development, lot patterns, and agriculture
- Preserve the rural nature of the ditches and their right-of-way for vegetation and wildlife habitat
- Recognize and encourage the range of ditch uses
- Preserve the interconnected ditch system within and outside the Village
- Promote ditch safety

5.1.2 Policies & Action Steps

Policy A

Support the preservation and maintenance of the ditch system throughout the Village.

Action Steps

- Require ditch access, maintenance, and preservation of irrigation in development proposals
  - Encourage use of ditch irrigation
  - Encourage preservation of open ditches and ditch right-of-way in the planning process
  - Discourage abandonment of ditch or irrigation easements and access in subdivisions and replatting
  - Encourage landowners to preserve access to ditches

- Discourage the fencing off, closing, piping, or otherwise covering of open and accessible ditches and ditch right-of-way
- Enforce ordinance prohibiting ditch contamination
- Enhance connections where ditch system is interrupted
  - Identify and promote safety around ditch road crossings
    - ◊ Prioritize intervention level and location based on highest need for safety and non-motorized traffic volumes
    - ◊ Consider safety interventions such as signage or crosswalk paint
  - Enable non-motorized ditch crossings to the bosque
- Encourage creation of a volunteer committee to assist the Village in ditch preservation efforts
- Coordinate with agencies to promote ditch preservation and use
  - Identify historic ditches
  - Inventory ditch condition, including imminent closure, uses, and user type
  - Map ditches in the Village
  - Identify linkages and areas for improvement between ditches
  - Encourage youth participation in projects involving ditches
  - Encourage participation in community ditch clean up days

Policy B

Recognize the range of ditch ownership and balance the uses of the ditches with respect for adjacent property owner privacy and safety.

Action Steps

- Accommodate a range of ditch users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, equestrians, and those with physical disabilities while recognizing that not all users can be accommodated along all ditches
  - Develop criteria to identify and prioritize where each user type can be accommodated in ditch inventory efforts
- Encourage a range of ditch uses, including:
  - Irrigation
  - Multimodal recreation (equestrians, bicyclists, pedestrians)
  - Wildlife habitat
- Encourage the provision of appropriate ditch access while considering privacy and safety for adjacent landowners
- Provide amenities where possible to contain litter and animal waste at convenient points on ditch right-of-way and at access points, such as trash cans or dog waste bags
  - Encourage users to pick up waste and litter along the ditches as a courtesy

- Recognize and respect the understanding that most ditches within Los Ranchos are private property
  - Post and maintain signage indicating private property
- Coordinate with agencies and adjacent landowners to avoid or minimize negative impacts from the ditch system on properties adjacent to ditches
- Support agencies which enforce restrictions against motorized use of ditch right-of-way, except for official agency vehicles

Policy C

Coordinate with appropriate agencies and landowners in preservation, maintenance, and educational efforts.

Action Steps

- Support the maintenance of public ditches by the appropriate agency
- Support agencies which enforce maintenance of private ditches by private landowners
- Coordinate with appropriate agencies, government entities, and landowners to prevent abandonment or closure of ditches
- Coordinate ditch preservation and maintenance with neighboring jurisdictions and appropriate agencies to ensure connection between ditches within and outside the Village
- Coordinate with appropriate agencies and landowners to preserve the open and accessible nature of the ditches
- Coordinate with government entities and appropriate agencies on public health and safety issues involving ditches
  - Ensure awareness and involvement in legislation involving ditches
  - Coordinate with New Mexico Land Trust and other jurisdictions in purchasing efforts for ditches threatened by closure
- Provide information and support other entities in ditch education efforts, including but not limited to:
- Enforce ordinance prohibiting ditch contamination
- Enhance connections where ditch system is interrupted
  - Ditch safety, particularly for children and pets
  - Ditch usages
  - Ditch maintenance, such as weeds
  - Ditch ownership
  - Impact on the natural environment around ditches
    - ◊ Ditch contamination
    - ◊ Minimizing use impact in ditch right-of-way
  - Applicable water laws
  - The importance of irrigation



