

County Commissioners

JOHN P. OLIVAS  
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State of New Mexico  
County of Mora

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Ordinance 2013-01

Mora County, New Mexico

WHEREAS, We, the residents in Mora County, are a multi-cultural community with indigenous roots of Many; and

WHEREAS, We recognize the Earth, water, and air as a source of life for all living in Mora County; and

WHEREAS, We are convinced that the quality of life for residents in Mora County, for both the present and the future, will be destroyed if we allow at-risk exploitation and pollution of the Earth, water, and air; and

WHEREAS, We the People of the County of Mora declare that we have the duty to safeguard the water both on and beneath the Earth's surface, and in the process, safeguard the rights of people within the county of Mora and the rights of the ecosystems of which Mora County is a part; and

WHEREAS, We the People of Mora County declare that all of our water is held in the public trust as a common resource to be used for the benefit of Mora residents and of the natural ecosystems of which they are a part. We believe that industrial use of water supplies in this county placing the control of water in the hands of a corporate few, rather than the county would constitute abuse and usurpation; and that we are therefore duty bound to oppose such abuse and usurpation. That same duty requires us to recognize that two centuries' worth of governmental conferral of constitutional powers upon corporations has deprived people of the authority to govern their own communities, and requires us to take affirmative steps to remedy that usurpation of governing power; and

WHEREAS, we are conscious of the urgency of taking decisive action to protect our collective rights and the rights of future generations, and of ensuring a balanced environment for the survival of all residents of Mora County; THEREFORE,

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF MORA COUNTY, NEW MEXICO . . . AN ORDINANCE PROTECTING THE RIGHT OF HUMAN COMMUNITIES, NATURE, AND NATURAL WATER, BY ESTABLISHING A LOCAL BILL OF RIGHTS FOR MORA COUNTY THAT PROTECTS THE NATURAL SOURCES OF WATER FROM DAMAGE RELATED TO THE EXTRACTION OF OIL, NATURAL GAS, OR OTHER HYDROCARBONS, BY AFFIRMING THE RIGHT TO LOCAL AUTONOMY AND SELF-GOVERNANCE, AND BY ELIMINATING LEGAL PRIVILEGES AND POWERS FROM CORPORATIONS VIOLATING THE ORDINANCE.**

Section 1. Name and Purpose

Section 1.1 Name: This Ordinance shall be known and may be cited as the "Mora County Community Water Rights and Local Self-Government Ordinance."

**Section 1.2 Purpose:** The People of the County of Mora are a cohesive community of diverse elements, united by common culture, social bonds and a common destiny, and are represented politically in various aspects by the Mora County Government, numerous Acequias, Land Grants and Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Associations. The People of Mora County recognize that water is essential for the life, prosperity, sustainability, and health of their community and that damage to natural groundwater and surface water sources imposes great tangible loss, to the People, natural communities and ecosystems of Mora County, not just for today but for future generations. The People of Mora County recognize that they may be forced, without their consent, to endure or attempt to repair harm inflicted on their environment and their vital water supply, which they have no equivalent governing authority to prevent under current state and federal law. The governing body of Mora County adopts this Mora County Community Water Rights and Local Self-Government Ordinance to overcome that liability, to provide for community health and safety, to promote a sustainable lifestyle, and to secure the comfort and convenience of the people.

## **Section 2. Authority**

This Ordinance is enacted pursuant to the inherent right of the residents of Mora County to govern their own community. That authority precedes government and is secured, without limitation, by:

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Article VIII & Article IX, which guarantees the "free enjoyment of their liberty and property" of the inhabitants of what became Mora County, and which states that property of every kind "shall be inviolably respected." According to a 2001 Government Accounting Office report (<http://www.gao.gov/new.iemts/d01951.pdf>), this guarantees traditional communal use rights under the Treaty, including, but not limited to, the following rights - hunting "caza," pasture "pastos," wood gathering "leña," and watering "abrevederos;"

The Declaration of Independence, which states that governments are instituted to secure the rights of people, "deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed;"

The New Mexico Constitution, Article 2, which declares that "all political power is vested in and derived from the people: all government of right originates with the people, is founded upon their will and is instituted solely for their good." That section also declares that the people "have the sole and exclusive right to govern themselves as a free, sovereign, and independent state" and that "all persons are born equally free, and have certain natural, inherent and inalienable rights" and that "[t]he enumeration in this constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny, impair, or disparage others retained by the people;"

The Mora County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which states that "[t]he connection between our land, our water and our people has sustained our culture since the first settlements in Mora County, and our future depends on keeping these connections strong. Water is a vital link, which, if severed from the land, will also fragment our people from their land. The allocation of our limited water resources must recognize traditional subsistence agricultural and grazing activities as a priority over other types of more profitable land uses. Water is not just a commodity to be bought and sold, or exploited for short-term gains. Water is the lifeblood of Mora County's traditions, culture and land use. A sustainable future for Mora County requires protection of the most valuable resource for our communities--the Water!"

## **Section 3. Definitions**

**Section 3.1:** "Corporation" shall mean any corporation, limited partnership, limited liability partnership, business trust, or limited liability company organized under the laws of any state of the United States or under the laws of any country, and any other business entity that possesses State-conferred limited liability attributes for its owners, directors, officers, and/or managers.

**Section 3.2:** "Extraction" shall mean the digging or drilling of a well for the purposes of exploring for, developing or producing oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons.

Section 3.3: "Horizontal drilling" shall mean intentional deviation of a wellbore from the vertical for the purpose of reaching subsurface areas laterally remote from the point where a well drilling bit or similar equipment enters the earth at the surface.

Section 3.4: "Hydraulic fracturing" shall mean an activity in which water, propane, diesel, chemicals and a solid proppant or any other agent are pumped into a wellbore at a rate sufficient to increase the pressure downhole to a value in excess of the fracture gradient of the formation rock, causing the formation to crack, thus allowing the fracturing fluid to enter and extend the crack farther into the formation, forming passages through which natural gas, oil, or other hydrocarbons can flow.

Section 3.5: "Hydrocarbons" shall mean any of numerous organic compounds, such as benzene and methane, that contain only carbon and hydrogen.

Section 3.6: "La Querencia de la Tierra" shall mean the loving respect which Mora County residents have towards the land and Earth, which is rooted in our indigenous worldview—the Earth is living and holy, is the habitat that sustains us, and is composed of all natural & living systems, flora and fauna - interrelated, interdependent and complementary - which share our common destiny: The right to live free from contamination.

Section 3.7: "Natural Gas" shall mean any gaseous substance, either combustible or noncombustible, which is produced in a natural state from the earth and which maintains a gaseous or rarified state at standard temperature or pressure conditions, and/or gaseous components or vapors occurring in, or derived from, petroleum or natural gas.

Section 3.8: "Oil" shall mean any thick, flammable, yellow-to-black mixture of gaseous, liquid, and solid hydrocarbons that occur naturally beneath the earth's surface.

#### **Section 4. Statements of Law – Rights of Mora County Residents and the Natural Environment**

Section 4.1. Right to Water: All residents, natural communities and ecosystems in Mora County possess a fundamental and inalienable right to sustainably access, use, consume, and preserve water drawn from natural water cycles that provide water necessary to sustain life within the County.

Section 4.2. Right of Water for Agriculture: All Mora County residents possess the fundamental and inalienable right to unpolluted natural water to produce healthy food, to nourish our bodies, livestock and land and to continue "La Querencia de la Tierra," Love of the Land.

Section 4.3. Rights of Natural Communities: Natural communities and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems, possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within Mora County against oil and gas extraction. Residents of the County, along with the Mora County Commission, shall possess legal standing to enforce those rights on behalf of those natural communities and ecosystems. Natural communities and ecosystems protected by this ordinance shall be protected on all lands within Mora County, including those owned by the state and federal government

Section 4.4. Right to a Sustainable Energy Future: All residents, natural communities, and ecosystems in Mora County possess a right to a sustainable energy future, which includes, but is not limited to, the development, production, and use of energy from renewable fuel sources, and the right to have an energy system based on fuel sources other than fossil fuel sources. This right shall also include the right to energy practices that do not cause harm, and which do not threaten to cause harm, to people, communities, or the natural environment.

Section 4.5. Right to Self-Government: All residents of Mora County possess the fundamental and inalienable right to a form of governance where they live which recognizes that all power is inherent in the people, that all free governments are founded on the people's authority and consent, and that corporate entities and their directors and managers shall not enjoy special privileges or powers under the law which make community majorities subordinate to them.

Section 4.6. *People are Sovereign:* The Mora County Commission shall be the governing authority responsible to, and governed by, the residents of the County. Use of the “Mora County” municipal corporation by the sovereign people of the County to make law shall not be construed to limit or surrender the sovereign authority or immunities of the people to a municipal corporation that is subordinate to them in all respects at all times. The people at all times enjoy and retain an inalienable and indefeasible right to self-governance in the community where they reside.

Section 4.7. *Rights of La Querencia de la Tierra:* The farm-based indigenous/mestizo (mixed blood) people who created the original Mora County culture considered the Earth to be living and holy; thus they referred to their homeland as “La Querencia de la Tierra,” Love of the Land. This sacredness connotes an intrinsic right of the land to exist without defilement.

Section 4.8. *Rights are Self-Executing:* All rights delineated and secured by this ordinance shall be self-executing and these rights shall be enforceable against both public and private actors, and shall not require implementing legislation for their enforceability.

Section 4.9. *Exemption.* Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed in such a manner as to impact the water rights of acequias, Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Associations or land grant, or to affect or color any negotiations regarding water rights, distribution or usage between these political subdivisions and the County of Mora.

## **Section 5. Statements of Law – Prohibitions Necessary to Secure Bill of Rights’ Protections**

Section 5.1: It shall be unlawful for any corporation to engage in the extraction of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons within Mora County.

Section 5.2: It shall be unlawful for any corporation to engage in the extraction of water from any surface or subsurface source within Mora County for use in the extraction of subsurface oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons, or for any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation to use a corporation to extract water from any surface or subsurface source, within Mora County, for use in the extraction of subsurface oil or natural gas or other hydrocarbons. It shall be unlawful for a corporation to import water or any other substance, including but not limited to, propane, sand, and other substances used in the extraction of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons, into Mora County for use in the extraction of subsurface oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons; or for any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation to do so.

Section 5.3: It shall be unlawful for any corporation, or any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation to use a corporation to deposit, store, transport or process waste water, “produced” water, “frack” water, brine or other materials, chemicals or by-products used in the extraction of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons, into the land, air or waters within Mora County.

Section 5.4: It shall be unlawful for any corporation, or any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation to use a corporation to construct or maintain infrastructure related to the extraction of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons within Mora County. “Infrastructure” shall include, but not be limited to, pipelines or other vehicles of conveyance of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons, and any ponds or other containments used for wastewater, “frack” water, or other materials used during the process of oil, gas, or other hydrocarbon extraction.

Section 5.5: Corporations in violation of the prohibitions enacted by this ordinance, or seeking to engage in activities prohibited by this ordinance, shall not have the rights of “persons” afforded by the United States and New Mexico Constitutions, nor shall those corporations be afforded rights under the 1<sup>st</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> amendments to the United States Constitution or corresponding sections of the New Mexico Constitution, nor shall those corporations be afforded the protections of the commerce or contracts clauses within the United States Constitution or corresponding sections of the New Mexico Constitution.

Section 5.6: Individuals or corporations in violation of the prohibitions enacted by this ordinance, or seeking to engage in activities prohibited by this ordinance, shall not possess the authority or power to enforce State or federal preemptive law against the people of Mora County, or to challenge or overturn County ordinances adopted

by the Mora County Commission, when that enforcement or challenge interferes with the rights asserted by this ordinance or interferes with the authority of the county to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its residents.

**Section 5.7:** No permit, license, privilege or charter issued by any state or federal agency, Commission or Board to any person or any corporation operating under a State charter, or any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation operating under a State charter, which would violate the prohibitions of this Ordinance or deprive any County resident(s), natural community, or ecosystem of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by this Ordinance, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the New Mexico Constitution, the United States Constitution, or other laws, shall be deemed valid within Mora County.

**Section 5.8:** The New Mexico Constitution's Bill of Rights, and the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights and amendments thereto, shall be recognized as preemptive law within the County of Mora only to the extent that their interpretation and application are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Ordinance regarding the powers and "rights" of corporations, and to the extent that they do not otherwise elevate property interests over rights secured by this Ordinance.

**Section 5.9:** Laws adopted by the legislature of New Mexico and rules adopted by any State agency, and laws adopted by the United States Congress and rules adopted by any federal agency, shall be recognized as preemptive law within the County of Mora only if those laws and rules both expressly preempt County ordinances and charters, and provide greater protections for the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Mora County than County ordinances and charters.

## **Section 6. Strict Liability**

**Section 6.1:** Persons using corporations to engage in the extraction of oil, natural gas or other hydrocarbons in a neighboring municipality shall be strictly liable for all harms caused to the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Mora County from those activities, and for all harms caused to ecosystems and natural communities within Mora County.

## **Section 7. Future Lost Profits**

**Section 7.1:** Within the County of Mora, corporate claims to "future lost profits" shall not be considered property interests under the law, and thus, shall not be recoverable by corporations seeking those damages.

## **Section 8. Enforcement**

**Section 8.1:** Any violation of any provision of this Ordinance shall be considered a criminal offense, punishable by maximum penalties and imprisonment as authorized by applicable New Mexico law. Each instance of a violation of the provisions of this Ordinance shall be treated as a separate offense subject to penalties authorized by applicable New Mexico law.

**Section 8.2:** Mora County may enforce this Ordinance through an action brought in any court of competent jurisdiction. In such an action, Mora County shall be entitled to recover all costs of litigation, including, without limitation, expert and attorney's fees, in addition to damages caused by the violation of this ordinance.

**Section 8.3:** Any County resident shall have the authority to enforce this Ordinance through an action brought in a court of competent jurisdiction. In such an action, the resident shall be entitled to recover all costs of litigation, including, without limitation, expert and attorney's fees.

**Section 8.4:** Any person or municipality who brings an action to secure or protect the rights of natural communities or ecosystems against oil and gas extraction within Mora County shall bring that action in the name of the natural community or ecosystem in a court of competent jurisdiction. Damages shall be measured by the cost of restoring the natural community or ecosystem to its pre-damaged state, and shall be paid to the County of Mora or other applicable governmental entity, to be used exclusively for the full and complete restoration of the natural community or ecosystem.

**Section 8.5. Reinstatement of Moratorium on Oil and Gas Extraction.** In the event that this ordinance is overturned or nullified, for any reason, a moratorium on the extraction of oil and gas within the County of Mora shall become effective on the date that this ordinance becomes inactive. That temporary moratorium shall have a duration of no more than six months, during which the Board of County Commissioners shall adopt another ordinance which permanently bans hydrocarbon extraction within the County of Mora.

**Section 9 Effective Date and Existing State Permit Holders**

This Ordinance shall be effective five (5) days after the date of its enactment, at which point the Ordinance shall apply to any and all extractions of oil, natural gas, or other hydrocarbons in Mora County regardless of the date of any applicable governmental permits.

**Section 10. County Commission Action and Voter Referenda to Repeal Ordinance**

The foundation for the making and adoption of this law is the people's fundamental and inalienable right to govern themselves, and thereby secure their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Accordingly, this Ordinance automatically suspends the operating rules of the Mora County Commission when the question of repealing this Ordinance is introduced. Repeal of this ordinance shall require both a unanimous vote of the Mora County Commissioners voting in favor of the repeal of the ordinance, and a voter referenda following that vote which shall make the repeal effective only if two thirds of the Mora County electorate vote to repeal the ordinance.

**Section 11. People's Right to Self-Government - Preemption**

Any attempts to use other units and levels of government to preempt, amend, alter, or overturn this Ordinance, or parts of this Ordinance, shall require the County Commission to hold public meetings that explore the adoption of other measures that expand local control and the ability of residents to protect their fundamental and inalienable right to self-government. Such consideration may include actions to separate the County from the other levels of government used to preempt, amend, alter, or overturn the provisions of this Ordinance or other levels of government used to intimidate the people of Mora County or their elected officials.

**Section 12. New Mexico Constitutional Changes**

Through the adoption of this local law, the people of Mora County call for amendment of the New Mexico Constitution to explicitly secure a community right to local self-government that cannot be preempted by the State if the community's laws enforce rights or standards more protective of the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Mora County and the natural environment, communities, and ecosystems. The people of Mora County also call for a state constitutional amendment that explicitly elevates community rights above corporate property rights, and that recognize the rights of nature enforceable by the residents of a community.

**Section 13. Severability**


The provisions of this Ordinance are severable. If any court of competent jurisdiction decides that any section, clause, sentence, part, or provision of this Ordinance is illegal, invalid, or unconstitutional, such decision shall not affect, impair, or invalidate any of the remaining sections, clauses, sentences, parts, or provisions of the Ordinance. The Mora County Commission hereby declares that in the event of such a decision, and the determination that the court's ruling is legitimate, it would have enacted this Ordinance even without the section, clause, sentence, part, or provision that the court decides is illegal, invalid, or unconstitutional.

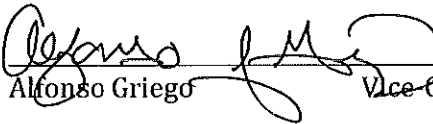
**Section 14. Repealer**

All inconsistent provisions of prior Ordinances adopted by the Mora County Commission are hereby repealed, but only to the extent necessary to remedy the inconsistency.

ENACTED AND ORDAINED this 29 day of April 2013, by the Mora County Commission.

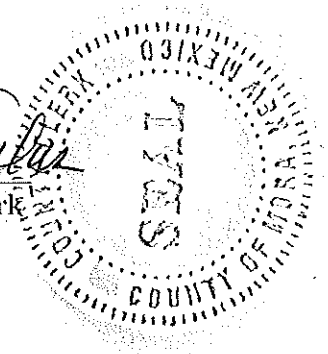
**Mora County Board of Commissioners**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John Olivas Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Alfonso Griego Vice-Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paula Garcia Member

Attest:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joanne E. Padilla Salas County Clerk



COUNTY OF MORA )  
STATE OF NEW MEXICO ) ss  
ORDINANCE COUNTY RECORDS NO FE  
PAGES: 7

I Hereby Certify That This Instrument Was Filed for  
Record On The 2ND Day Of May, 2013 at 08:19:49 AM  
And Was Duly Recorded as Instrument 20130411  
Of The Records Of Mora County

Witness My Hand And Seal Of Office  
Joanne E. Padilla Salas  
County Clerk, Mora, NM  
Deputy 