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Sooners Reminded It Can Be Dry

IT'S getting dry again and Oklahoma's weather modification districts are shut down. A couple of good seasons seem to have blurred our awareness that it can get dry here — very dry!

Three years ago, a dozen cloud seeding projects were operative to enhance rainfall needed for municipal and agricultural purposes in Oklahoma. When it rained and reservoirs were filled, Lawton and Stillwater projects were shut off to save money.

Cloud seeding was in operation for part of 1975 in Harper, Woodward, Ellis, Beaver, Cotton and Kiowa counties. The five-county Arbuckle association at Ardmore did not operate, and neither did Custer, Washita and Woods county projects. All of these were financed by voluntary local contributions.

Weather modification is still a topic of much debate. Meteorologists are haggling over their inability to prove how much rain might have

fallen on a given area if clouds had not been seeded. Farmers are more concerned with how much they actually received. Available data offers convincing proof that rainfall may be increased from 15 to 35 per cent by cloud seeding.

At least a dozen federal agencies are engaged in weather modification research and their rate of progress gives the impression that scientists engaged in them don't want to learn answers to questions about drouth prevention before their retirement dates.

Sen. Henry Bellmon is drafting legislation which will propose a national commission to concentrate research data on weather modification into usable operational forms, and set up a funding system to help local groups utilize it to combat dry weather.

Clouds are regenerated from evaporation of rainfall, tending to prolong rainy spells and, conversely, dry weather tends to perpetuate it-

self for lack of clouds. Delayed seeding could produce poor results for this reason, while timely cloud seeding may be effective in heading off a threatened long dry spell.

"Unless you have generating equipment in place, you can't get the maximum benefit even when a storm comes through," says Dr. Irving P. Krick, whose California firm has handled contracts in Oklahoma, many other states and many foreign countries.

Too often in the past, Oklahomans have missed the "rainfall boat" by waiting too long to get started. We have tried to "cure" drouths, instead of trying to prevent them, and it's much harder. They hope it will rain and they won't need to put up any money.

The cost? Just about a nickel per acre per year to keep a program going to "normalize rainfall." After their crops are gone, landowners often wish they had invested a few cents for rain.