

State's Fields Desperately Dry, And So Are Rainmaking Funds

THERE is no way to make it rain unless moisture-laden clouds are present, and it can't be done without money.

Oklahoma's weather modification districts ran out of funds last year and had to suspend needed cloud seeding during the winter. Clouds have not been plentiful, but most areas have had periods when a half inch or more of rainfall might have been brought to the ground, if generators had been operating.

Glenn English of Cordell, congressman representing Oklahoma's big Sixth District, which grows most of the state's wheat and feed grains, is introducing emergency legislation that could break the drouth grip for spring planting.

Rep. English's bill is a straight funding measure by which he hopes to avoid scientific debates over "the state of the arts" and just get enough federal money to help local weather modification districts set up their own programs and contract for cloud seeding with firms of their choice.

Immediate reaction to the idea from farmers and ranchers appeared to be favorable. A meeting has been called at Fairview for March 8 in an effort to get Major County ready to participate, if the law is passed. It does not now have a project.

English's plan is to channel funds through local soil and water conservation districts, which enjoy strong public confidence because of their accomplishments. Cloud seeding qualifies as a conservation measure when it lays the dust to stop blowing, helps to establish soil cover crops, and stops range fires.

English is asking for \$5 million to be provided to districts on a 60-40 basis between now and Sept. 30, 1976. This is a modest amount, in comparison with most federal appropriations.

It is modest in comparison to outlays that have been made in the past for drouth relief, too. In 1971-1972, more than \$150 million was paid out in Oklahoma and adjacent states for emergency drouth relief assistance. This does not reflect business and crop losses that resulted from failure to adopt and implement large-scale cloud seeding proposed in 1970 and 1971.

Recent quotations for seeding clouds as directed by local committees, using ground-based silver iodide generators, run about 7.5 cents per acre per year. This is \$12 per quarter section, amounting to \$40,000

to \$50,000 for average size counties.

If the federal government should make available 60 per cent of the cost, as English proposes, the local unit would need to provide \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year for its part. In a large county, the local share could run as high as \$35,000 a year.

Under Oklahoma law, county commissioners are allowed to allocate for this purpose funds not otherwise encumbered. They also may call elections to vote on small property tax assessments, or voters may petition for an election. Private contributions may be accepted and used in combination with county or other money.

English said the chairman of the House Committee on Conservation and Credit, Rep. Bob Bergland, D-Minn., has assured him that hearings on his bill will be scheduled early in March. Rapid action is vital, if farmers are to get "cloud money" in time.

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