

# Drouth Reality; Going to Waste

# Our Knowledge

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Drouth forecast five years ago is with us. We might have alleviated it considerably by using knowledge available to us.

In fact, a number of areas did do something about dry weather in some years, but lack of financing, intermittent wet spells, public indif-

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ference, bickering among scientists and official skepticism resulted in interruptions of cloud seeding.

The Great Plains drouth forecast long ago by Dr. Irving P. Krick and other private meteorologists is hitting hard in the Upper Midwest, but drouth also is serious in other areas from coast to coast. It likely will get worse this summer.

Timely rains produced good yields of wheat in many parts of Oklahoma, so we tend to forget that large acreages of winter wheat were plowed under last winter because of drouth.

In spite of sporadic use of weather modification, Oklahoma remains one of the leading states in application of this science. At least a dozen projects have operated, mostly paid for by local funds and on the initiative of small groups of citizens.

Sen. Henry Bellmon, R-Okla., has three bills pending in the Senate that he introduced to advance the development and utilization of weather modification to stop drouth.

Sen. Bellmon says that what came out of the committee is not exactly what he wanted. The bills might turn out to be pretty much what the bureaucrats want, if the final result ties up everything in Washington and leaves out local control.

Rep. Glenn English, D-Okla., has had an emergency appropriation bill pending in the House since March that would help local weather modification districts finance cloud seeding. It calls for \$5 million to be allocated through local soil and water conservation districts on a 60 per cent federal-40 per cent local basis, with each district making its own cloud seeding contract.

The Oklahoma Legislature has enacted laws allowing this, with administrative responsibility assigned to the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. However, the board does not take the initiative in starting projects and does not decide when to seed clouds.

Gov. David Boren has suggested that a study be made to develop a state weather modification program, and the Water Board is in process of naming a new advisory committee. It probably will be announced following the board's next meeting on July 13.

A major obstacle to weather modification is an obsession for research that prevails among meteorologists. They want large sums for research projects, which is fine, except

that they do not seem to want any knowledge used until they find out "all about it."

Many scientists and most bureaucrats think of weather modification only in terms of changing the climate for the globe or at least for the continent. This is typical of Washington, but it is a handicap to drouth breaking. The objective sought is not to change the climate but to normalize local rainfall.

Drouth may be widespread, but it is local. Rain storms move across the country but generally rain is falling only along lines of the storm front, making rainfall a local matter, too.

Farmers are familiar with the types of storm fronts which drift across their parched lands, yielding only a sprinkle of rain, or perhaps none at all. Such clouds carry moisture, and effective cloud seeding can get rainfall started, usually producing useful amounts of precipitation. This has been known 30 years.

With exception of a couple of federal projects which used planes for cloud seeding in the Altus area in 1971 and 1972, Oklahoma projects utilized ground-based electric generators to release invisible silver iodide crystals into cloud formations.

Results from both types of operations have been observed by many Oklahomans and, in spite of what laboratory scientists claim and bureaucrats argue, drouth can be alleviated on a local basis without upsetting the ecology. It has happened many times.

One aspect of the problem is that no way has been found to produce proof acceptable to scientists that rainfall has been generated or increased by cloud seeding. Skeptics argue that "it might have rained anyway; how do you know seeding helped?"

The present decade of drouth is not expected to end until about 1980, and the way it looks now, the bureaucrats' prolonged search for a final answer that would lead to action will never end.