

Editorial

Water Data Needed

WATER is a limiting factor in agricultural production, industrial growth and individual prosperity. Lack of water quickly becomes critical in any category of life.

Necessity of water is in itself sufficient reason for the Oklahoma Legislative Council to consider seriously a proposed study of economic impact of the developing Comprehensive Oklahoma Water Plan. It would take two years and cost \$250,000.

Drouth and water shortages have occurred around the world this year, including several areas of the United States. Crises range from domestic water shortages in England to threat of shipping stoppages on the Mississippi river to reduced food production in Russia and Western Europe.

The 1974 Legislature appropriated \$100,000 to the Water Resources Board to make a preliminary study of water supplies and needs in 33 southern counties. When this report was brought in a year ago, legislators challenged it. They said it did not contain enough details on costs, failed to outline procedures for determining surplus water, and that it relied too heavily on federal agencies for economic data.

Nevertheless, the 1976 Legislature appropriated an additional \$300,000 to proceed with Phase 2 of the Comprehensive Plan, which calls for a similar preliminary study of 44 northern counties. Detailed engineering data obviously were not expected to be provided in either preliminary study.

Basically, the Comprehensive Plan is intended to utilize a substantial part of an estimated daily average outflow of 55 billion gallons of water from Oklahoma. Our state seems to

have a great amount of water in areas where it is not used.

Although both the plan and state law provide that no water shall be removed until all water needs have been met in the basin of origin, this continues to be a topic of dispute. Spokesmen sometimes have raised the question in ways that stirred emotional reactions among residents, possibly hoping to gain political or personal advantage.

The situation is complicated by the expansion of federal authority to control and regulate water resources and water usage. Federal officials attribute this largely to lack of effective state water laws and failure to utilize available water resources properly.

Factual data are needed before excess water in eastern counties may be transferred to western counties where rainfall is less plentiful. Studies are needed to devise alternate means for moving water, to evaluate them for practicality and cost, and finally to set up procedures for construction.

Each of these steps is time consuming and requires initial outlay of substantial sums. Statesmanlike leadership and cooperative citizenship also are needed. Otherwise, we may be left high and dry, without access to water in our own state.

Texas has been looking with covetous eyes on our surplus water, and unless we act to make use of it, some federal bureau might decide to allocate it south of the border.

There is no intention to deprive Eastern Oklahoma of water resources needed in that area. The entire state would benefit if we make better use of our water resources.