

## Oklahoma Can Use Its Water Or Lose It to Other States

**T**HE notion seems to be rather prevalent that if Oklahoma does nothing about conserving, allocating and utilizing our surplus water resources, nothing will be done. That is not the case.

A plan for capturing large quantities of water that now run out of eastern counties and transporting the surplus to water-short western counties has aroused opposition. While we are trying to find answers to satisfy critics, someone else may take our water and run with it.

Delayed action on our part in claiming and using excess water will not prevent these resources from being appropriated and transported elsewhere, probably to Texas. Inaction on our part will result only in our failure to benefit from this water.

Under the "national water policy" federal agencies have been granted extensive, excessive and even dictatorial powers. A federal court in California has ruled, in effect, that states are powerless to plan or manage future use of their water resources.

So far, federal authorities have recognized state and local rights to water actually being utilized, but if bureaucrats decide stream water is federal property, we have lost out.

The Texas Water Development Board has asked the Texas Legislature to provide staff and procedures for transporting water from Oklahoma and Arkansas. A 6-state study by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is looking for water sources to replace depleted aquifers beneath the High Plains.

What these things add up to is that unless Oklahoma gets busy and appropriates our water for our own

needs, there is a very good chance that Texas or other states may ask some federal agency to appropriate our water for their use — and get it!

Objections to the proposed water transportation plan include lack of specific definition of "surplus water" and the complaint that ranchers on whose land dams have been built for lakes have not been allowed to use water from the lakes.

At the recent Green Country Caucus for Eastern Oklahoma's Future in Henryetta, a speaker declared our state is fortunate in having water to meet our needs for 100 years. A LeFlore County landowner retorted: "Oklahoma doesn't have plenty of water; Eastern Oklahoma has plenty of water!"

A spokesman for the 26-county Economic Resource Development Association in southeastern Oklahoma said, "All we want is fair consideration and reimbursement for our water."

An estimated average outflow of 35 million acre-feet per year leaves Oklahoma. In 1975, this reached 75 million acre-feet. Such a quantity of water racing toward the muddy Mississippi is attractive to others and it should be important to Oklahomans.

"Time is essential," said Bob Kerr Jr., president of Water, Inc., "because at present Oklahoma can take care of our water needs and help neighboring states. This should be done by Oklahoma and not by Washington. Legislation is needed now to create a water authority whose sole purpose is to build a water conveyance system."

"We ought to put high priority on water needs of Oklahoma," said Dr. Lloyd E. Church, Wilburton conservationist.