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State Could Lose Water Claim

WHILE the legislature and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board dawdle, a Texas group called Water, Inc., is promoting plans to transport Oklahoma water from Arkansas to the Texas Panhandle.

A large part of the water they expect to be moving within seven years is water which runs out of Oklahoma. Once it is allocated to Texas, even people in eastern Oklahoma will have no claim to it and will be unable to retain it and use it.

For years, estimates of 35 million acre-feet, 55 billion gallons per year, have been cited to show how much water we are letting get away from us. Oklahomans need this water.

Many counties are short on water and municipalities face periodic water crises. By good management, we could irrigate more farmland and attract more industries to the state.

Greed and misunderstanding have been blamed as causes of opposition to water transportation plans. Phase I, developed by the

water resources board nearly two years ago under legislative authorization, has not been acted upon and Phase II is not yet completed, possibly taking two more years.

These studies are only preliminary, but they could be used as structures for Oklahoma to lay claim to water we need.

Possibly some members of the lawmaking body are peeved because of defeat of a gigantic pork barrel water financing and transportation plan that was presented in 1973.

That bill deserved to be killed, and it was, because it would have usurped authority of local governmental entities over their water resources and would have opened the way for legalized graft.

The idea of transporting water from plentiful areas to shortage areas should not be allowed to die, however. Allegations that western Oklahoma and large cities are trying to rob eastern Oklahoma of its water are not founded on truth.

No legislation is contemplated that would transport water from

any area until requirements have been provided for in the basin of origin.

Proposals call only for transporting a portion of the water that now runs out of state, mainly via the Arkansas River. This is water Texans are planning to pipe to the High Plains.

We should make no mistake about this: Federal agencies already have authority delegated to them by Congress to allocate unused water resources. Once they give this Oklahoma water to Texas, we cannot reclaim it.

Federal courts have ruled on this question in the long fight among western states over water from the Colorado River.

The only way for Oklahoma to retain and utilize our water resources is for official action to be taken at once.

If proposals remain in a state of limbo until next year, there might be very little unallocated water running in our streams. Once it is gone, we may never get it back!

Senate Affirms Water Rights

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A resolution designed to protect Oklahoma's right to water flowing out of the state was approved Monday by the Senate and sent to the House.

A committee substitute for Senate Joint Resolution 7 was approved after Sen. Gilmer Capps, D-Snyder, warned off a plan under which Texas would import water from Arkansas, by-passing Oklahoma.

Oklahoma streams flow into Arkansas or into the Red River which for a short stretch becomes the border between Texas and Arkansas.

The resolution affirms the state's prior right to 10.2 million acre feet annually of the unused water flowing out of the state. The Oklahoma Water

Resources Board has estimated that amount of water would meet the state's needs for the next 100 years.

The resolution points out Phase I of the state comprehensive water plan shows the need for development of additional water supplies to meet the future needs of the state.

"A stateside comprehensive water plan can only be developed and implemented if water within the state can be incontestably allocated at or prior to the time of implementation of the plan," the resolution says.

Capps said the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld action by California appropriating unused water from Arizona.