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State Should Claim, Use Its Water

GASOLINE rationing has not been in effect since World War II, but last July, 37 communities in Oklahoma, comprised of almost 200,000 people, adopted rules rationing water.

In opening the 1978 session, Gov. David Boren told the legislature that a solution to the state's long-range water problems probably is the most important business it faces.

Gov. Boren requested \$300,000 for a revolving fund to help towns throughout the state get started on water projects. Ultimately, the plan calls for the state treasurer to buy as much as \$10 million in water bonds from Oklahoma communities.

Although eastern Oklahoma has an abundance of water, it has been estimated that one-third of the people in that part of the state are inadequately supplied.

A point of contention regarding transportation of water has been that eastern Oklahoma communities lack finances to bring water to

their people and farmers are unable to connect to nearby lakes for irrigation or other purposes.

The proposed plan is intended to make all counties eligible for aid on water projects on the same basis.

The legislature has not yet acted on recommendations presented in comprehensive water studies on water transportation in 1975 and 1977. The governor's plan has been called a step in that direction, providing financial help with safeguards.

Glenn Sullivan, chairman of the natural resources committee of the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce, said financing of projects, as called for in the proposal, was one of the major recommendations of a statewide water conference last April.

Guy N. Keith, chairman of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Water Development Council, has forwarded to Gov. Boren a resolution approved by Chamber officers. It said the governor's proposal represents a significant first step in the long-term comprehensive develop-

ment of Oklahoma's water resources.

One phase of the \$6 million High Plains-Ogallala aquifer study authorized by Congress in 1976 calls for water to be transported from Arkansas across Oklahoma to Texas and New Mexico or Kansas. If built, the same facilities might also serve Oklahoma.

"Texas will get our water, if we don't use it," said Edward L. Gaylord, president of The Oklahoma Publishing Co. "And I don't blame them. Texas ought to have it, if we can't figure out how to use it ourselves. That's another reason why Texas is growing faster than Oklahoma. They're more aggressive."

The legislature has its work laid out. Oklahoma has the water we need, but it's not in the right places. Unless initial steps are taken soon to claim it and use it, we may be standing with parched lips as Oklahoma water is pumped to other states.