

Water Needs Remain Unquenched

In other places, rivers descend from snow-capped mountains to water the plains below. Oklahoma rivers run out of semi-arid western prairies into low-lying eastern mountain counties.

That is the cause of a major political problem in the state. Until it is resolved, the claim that Oklahoma has ample water for our needs will remain only an unrealized dream.

The Legislature has packed up and gone home again without doing anything effective either to increase rainfall in drier areas or to transport unused water there from other parts.

The lamest of excuses have been offered by those opposed to such actions. One was that the Legislature didn't have time to study the matter. If true, what have members been doing?

Interim study reports made on request of the Legislature were delivered by the Water Resources Board in 1975 and in 1977. Gov. David Boren placed action to move ahead on conservation and utilization of water at the head of his legislative

list last January.

The last-minute bill worked out in conference committee could have helped finance local water needs, but it fell far short of being the action needed to meet the statewide water needs of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is in a dry decade. Two years ago our state was played up nationally under such headings as: "Will It Be a Dust Bowl All Over Again?"

Last summer Tulsa and McAlester were on a list of towns whose residents were asked to cut back on water. Oklahoma City consumed 111,599,000 gallons of water one hot July day to set a new record.

"So rapidly are Americans using water that even if the drouth were to be broken immediately, virtually every section of the country would be confronted with serious shortages of drinkable water in coming decades," said U.S. News & World Report in July.

Last year, Oklahoma received more than \$36 million under major federal loan and grant drouth aid

programs. Yet, the Oklahoma Legislature could not find \$2.2 million to finance a cloud seeding program for rainfall increase, as recommended by the Water Resources Board.

Legislators may have been confused by contradictory evaluations of weather modification provided by bickering meteorologists and researchers interested in prolonging their own studies.

Certainly, they could not plead poverty. The 1978 Legislature had \$103.5 million to spend over and above what was available in 1977. But the rain-increase program was stalled by referring it to an interim study committee.

As long as our rivers flow out of the plains and into the mountains of Oklahoma, we are likely to suffer periodic drouth.

And it appears that until a statesman rises up who is strong enough to persuade legislators to sidetrack petty politics in favor of an effective statewide program, most of the water in those rivers will run out of the state without being fully utilized.