

Drouth Fans Cloud-Seeding Interest

NOW THAT the drouth has intensified and is setting records week after week, interest in cloud seeding is perking up.

For the simple reason that you have to find a cloud before you can seed it to stimulate rainfall, there isn't a chance right now. Oklahoma hasn't had a rain cloud big enough to cover a haystack since the rains laid off for wheat harvest in June.

With pastures dried up, gardens wilted and municipalities rationing water, it isn't easy to recall that only a few weeks ago our state was plagued by rains that delayed harvest and caused floods.

Fortunately, heavy rains of May and early June filled stock ponds and most municipal lakes. Cloud-seeding operations for the City of Stillwater, Oklahoma State University and for the Hitch ranch in the Panhandle were suspended after lakes and ponds were filled.

No relief is in sight for another month, says Dr. Irving P. Krick, California meteorologist who has conducted most of Oklahoma's cloud-seeding projects. In a telephone in-

terview, Krick said the first moisture is indicated around Aug. 19 and that will be no more than scattered showers. September and October will be dry, too.

"The earliest time that we can foresee when we could do any good for farmers would be November," Krick said. "This summer is a copy of the severe drouth of 1936, except that 1936 was a continuation of a string of dry years that had depleted both surface and subsoil moisture."

Krick said that 1936 and 1980 are in the "double sun spot cycle," which is roughly 33 years, give or take a year or so. There also are single sun spot dry cycles of about 11 years.

The problem is that an extensive high pressure area covers virtually the entire United States. It is static, preventing cold air from Canada from moving down across the plains and stagnating moist air that ordinarily moves into this area from the Gulf of Mexico.

The Legislature managed to spend all available funds again

without allocating money to help counties finance weather modification. Such a plan has been repeatedly recommended by the Water Resources Board because financing by voluntary contributions is inadequate. By the time funds are raised, opportunities to seed clouds may be past.

In the 1970s a dozen state cloud-seeding projects were financed this way. When the rains came contributions dropped off and projects were suspended. When the drouth returned nothing was ready.

If any areas of the state have notions about seeding those moist clouds Krick thinks may be around in November, sponsors need to get organized while the sun shines — literally!

Oh yes! It nearly always rains during the State Fair of Oklahoma. There might be a few showers this year, but the outlook is that they won't be heavy. If this drouth keeps on, a lot of folks might buy tickets to the fair just to see it rain, if fair President Sandy Saunders can arrange it!