

# Lawmakers Should Study Water Woes

OKLAHOMA has more nearly empty ponds and lakes than ever before, not because it never has been so dry before, but because we have more ponds.

It makes little difference how many we have if they're empty or nearly so. We will soon be out of water when hot weather arrives.

This is so obvious that it seems unnecessary to mention the fact. Yet, it appears the Legislature is going home again without doing anything effective to provide water for Oklahoma's future.

One Capitol observer explained the lawmakers' apparent indifference thusly: "They can't see how they can get votes for re-election by enacting water laws that won't produce visible results for five, 10 or 50 years." How shortsighted and self-centered can we get?

If the Legislature had enacted a proposal from the Water Resources Board to finance local cloud-seeding projects early in this session we might be reaping benefits from it now. A few localities have raised funds by voluntary contributions and have been wringing more rain

from the stingy storm fronts.

Legislators seem to have been taking advice from meteorologists who may be more concerned about obtaining research grants than they are in getting more rain for crops, pastures and city reservoirs.

Probably every one of these highly educated scientists has seen cloud seeding produce visible, measureable results. Still they say: "We don't know enough to use what we know. Send us more money!"

Another piece of legislation would have used part of the increase in gross production taxes to create a "Capital Reserve Fund" to serve as collateral to help cities and towns borrow money to build needed storage, pumping, purification and distribution facilities.

The long-discussed water transfer plan is still in limbo. Gov. George Nigh timidly suggested that eastern Oklahoma might swap some surplus water for more of western Oklahoma's gross production taxes to improve schools. Nothing has happened.

As Ed Montgomery wrote in The Sunday Oklahoman recently,

"Somebody, some time is going to have to decide whether to build the state water conveyance system or any part of it."

Statements have been made that Oklahoma has plenty of water but it should be general knowledge that much of this isn't situated where needed or where it may be used.

In the High Plains Study Council, several states are talking about redistribution of water from where it is to where it is needed. Unless we start using our surplus water, we may find it has been allocated to other states. Neither side of Oklahoma will have it.

The public isn't excited about solving water problems because the water was there when folks turned the taps this morning. People will become excited when the flow becomes a trickle.

Legislators who can't see how more water will help them be re-elected might get excited, too, if lack of water causes people to boot some out of office!

From here, it looks like another long, dry summer.