

Water Plan Worth Whatever It Costs

EVEN BEFORE the legislature met, objections to enactment of a state water development plan were bubbling up faster than an artesian well.

Legislators, citizens and groups with special interests are working hard to block actions which might affect them. Supporters of a water plan are pushing hard, too, but it always is easier to derail progress than it is to act constructively.

"The future of the state hinges upon adequate water supplies and distribution at all levels," said Gov. George Nigh in rating water at the head of his program for the 1982 legislative session.

A well-attended public water conference held in December gave the governor these essential points for water development:

1. Action on water problems is needed immediately;

2. The most critical need is money;

3. The primary source of money should be rapidly-growing oil and gas gross production tax revenue;

4. Additional funds should be con-

sidered;

5. Conservation should be a viable part of water strategy.

"Let's do something, even if it's wrong," said Gerald L. Borelli of Kingfisher, chairman of the state's Water Resources Board. It appears to be inevitable that if anything at all is done somebody will insist something is wrong with it.

Procrastinators will try to delay action because recent rains have pretty well filled our lakes and ponds, ignoring the fact that 360 Oklahoma communities had to impose water rationing in 1980.

Legislators are reluctant to appropriate funds for purposes which might not yield them immediate political benefits.

Federal assistance for building water structures is certain to be less and some take the attitude that if Uncle Sam can't pay for it, don't do it.

Although bills to be introduced in the legislature specifically provide for loans to finance water storage and distribution for smaller cities and towns, the objection is heard

again that "the big cities will get it all." Even if true, funds available would fall far short of their needs. Metropolitan areas still will have to come up with most of their own water development financing.

East vs. West is another major obstacle to resolution of the water situation. Eastern counties have surplus water but are afraid of any plan to distribute it elsewhere. Western counties have oil and gas but are apprehensive about proposals that call for tax revenue from it to be spent on any new projects.

Numerous reasons and excuses are being advanced as to why the legislature should not act now to help solve the state's water problems. There are also overwhelming reasons why the legislature must act, and the big one is that water is absolutely essential.

It will cost money — lots of money — to conserve our water and build distribution systems so that it can be used. Water is worth what it costs because without it all else is worthless!