



Oklahoma WATER ISSUES

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A Coal County landowner surveys damage from the 2011–2012 drought to a 70-year-old paper shell pecan orchard. The owner estimates he lost 40% of the orchard to the drought.

Photo by Pennie Embry



ORWP 14,000 and growing

By Pennie Embry

It began in the spring of 2010. A handful of citizens gathered in Antlers to oppose the transfer of Sardis Lake storage rights and 90% of the available water in Sardis to Oklahoma City. They wanted a local voice in local water issues. They wanted to protect their economic and environmental future. They wanted to protect their way of life.

Within weeks, that handful of concerned citizens grew to 400 and launched a kick-off water rally in Durant. Their goal was to protect Sardis Lake, promote awareness of the value of water as a precious resource, and ensure that Oklahoma's waters were

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Our water, our future

By Emily Robinson

I have heard people say, “Every generation lives a better, fuller, more prosperous life than the previous.”

Therefore, the following generations should live an even better one. But if we are stripped of our water rights, that will become virtually impossible. The fascinating allusion of water to life is that it is fragile, and yet constantly evolving and rejuvenating itself to become more of an inherent resource. The parallels between water and life are so strong it is not difficult to imagine why water represents life so often. Water can restore life into a plant seemingly overnight, or rehydrate cattle

in an instant. It is so intertwined in our daily lives that it is often overlooked and underappreciated.

Water affects our very quality of life, especially in Oklahoma. I grew up a rancher's daughter, so I learned at an early age to be a good steward of the land and be grateful for the plentiful resources that we have. Because of increasing outside interest in Oklahoma's water, there is an increased

need for young adults to become involved in water issues. There is no better opportunity to become involved in your community and state. The more immersed I become with Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy, the more I notice the lack of youth

participation in this group. I have yet to meet a fellow member under the age of forty, which simply astounds me.

Without generational transfer of power and commitment, societies fail. Leaders must have someone to pass on their position to, and most often it is to someone from the next generation. Young adults have been given an opportunity to halt the invasion of people who clearly

do not possess the good judgment to responsibly use water, and also to begin the process of acclimating ourselves to community leadership and activism. As the

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Cups

When I had my "light bulb" moment
I was totally in awe
of the incredible waste I saw
On a scale so vast, so unbelievable
It seems inconceivable.

You see, I had a vision of all the paper cups
Thrown into the trash at the movies every day
of the week.
And the parks, and the restaurants, festivals
and fairs

All across America, and worldwide as well
Cups tossed away, into the trash.
Sodas, tea, and coffees, drinks of all sorts.
Cups, not just empty paper or plastic,
But full of left-overs, other "stuff."

The other "stuff" you ask? What might it be?
Well, think about it for a minute
I think you'll get the gist,
The other "stuff" captured in those cups
Tossed into the trash without a fuss,
Water, ice, fluids made with water... precious
water.
Thrown away, tossed out without a thought.

The lids, they fit tightly, the paper is well
waxed.
Or if it's plastic, well so much the better
It won't leak onto our sweaters.
The cups we are holding
The lids tightly fitting
Into the trash. Gone from our sight.
Our hands free at last.

Not so fast...

Our precious water, it's all wrapped up tightly
To go into the landfill and begin a new cycle.
Future generations will be able to mine it
If they can find it.

Unbelievable you say? Can it really be true?
Tossing out water? Yes indeed, you've done it
too.
It happens daily
On a scale so vast that it's inconceivable.
I think when it hit me it was unbelievable!

Tossing out water? Unthinkable you say,
And yet it happens each and every day.
Held captive for eons in landfills around the
world.
Tightly bagged up even tighter
No escaping, no evaporating.

Do you see the dilemma?
How our paper and plastic cups deceive us
into thinking
That we're simply done with what we are
drinking.
How much water is held captive
Behind a simple cup? Picture it,
Now double it, and then square it up. Multiply
it by what number?
Exponentially astounding!

I'm hoping my light bulb moment will
Send waves around the world.
And the decisions we all make from here
tonight
Will be enough to shed some light
On something that's really been too long "out
of sight."

All of the paper and plastic cups throughout
the world
Hold gallons and gallons of precious gold, the
water of life.
Thrown out with the trash. Thoughtless
behavior.
Our eyes tightly shut like the lids on our cups.

I hope to awaken in each one of you
Something new, an awareness, a new vision,
a hope,
That the world will wake up and do what is
right.
Launch a campaign and open up eyes
To the outrageous behavior that's practiced
daily
Without a thought, tossed into the trash,
The very gift of life, water, just wasted.

I invite you to join me, spread the word, share
ideas, discuss possibilities.
Change your awareness, behavior, tell
everyone.

Precious water should never be tossed
Into the trash or bagged tightly away
But released from the confines of our cups
every day.
From our plastic and paper, out into the world.
Down a drain will do just fine
Or water the grass or a tree or a seed.
Set it free.
Every humans' responsibility.

— Debbie Leo

GROWING

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prudently managed to allow for environmental stability, economic growth and sustainable development well into the future.

Fast forward a tiny bit into that future — the fall of 2010. Oklahomans from all around the state were signing up to join us, growing ORWP to 5,000 strong. They were signing up at car shows and school sporting events. They were joining ORWP at chili cook-offs, pie suppers, bake sales, local festivals and even online. Who were those new members? They were you.

You told us Oklahoma's water and the need to protect that water was important to you. You told us you were worried about a drought, that you were concerned about the state water plan, and that you wanted sound water science in the form of independent studies behind any water policy decisions the state made.

Weeks later we had to stop saying we had 5,000 members because you had grown ORWP to 7,000 folks who were concerned about protecting Oklahoma's water and the future of our water. You, the 7,000 voices, were from not only Southeast Oklahoma, but from all across the state.

Seven thousand grew to 10,000, and your voices kept multiplying. By May of 2012, two short but intense years after that first meeting in Antlers, the handful of citizens who started Oklahoma's Responsible Water Policy had grown to 12,000. And then we kept growing.

Today we have more than 14,000 members — people from every county and every zip code in Oklahoma, people from many states around the country, and people from around the world — all who care about preserving and protecting Oklahoma's water and the life that surrounds water.

How did we grow from that handful of folks in Antlers to more than 14,000 members? We did it one membership card at a time. And we listened to every one of you.

From small town celebrations to the Oklahoma State Fair, every time one of you stood at our tables, every time one of you bent over a registration card, pen in hand, you talked and we listened.

You shared your hopes and concerns about Oklahoma's water with us. You recounted experiences with the ongoing drought, with dried up farm ponds and wells. Some told of long-time family ranching operations on the brink of shutting down.

Some talked of tourism shrinking along with your lakes and rivers. Who will come to waterfront cabins and parks when there is no water? What will happen to the jobs dependent on that water?

And then there is waste. Many of you are angry when you see water running off of your neighbors' lawns and down city streets. You know cheap, clean water will not always be here.

At this year's state fair, conservation was on the lips of those who came by our booth. Hundreds of you snapped up our handouts listing everyday water conservation tips, and

you shared a few of your own. We educated you and you educated us.

In the past, here in *Oklahoma Water Issues*, we've honored individual ORWP members who are making a difference by protecting Oklahoma's water. This month the list of honorees is much too large to print here, because that list contains more than 14,000 names. This month, we honor every single one of you, from the first folks who filled out cards in Antlers in the spring of 2010, to the person who signed up online and liked us on Facebook a few days ago. You are 14,000 strong. You are protecting Oklahoma's future. You are all Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy.

ORWP membership drive under way

Thanks to you, Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy now has **14,000** members. Those members come from every county in Oklahoma and also from several states.

Our goal is to reach **20,000** members by Spring 2013. Together we can do this, but we need your help. I am asking each and every one of our members to go online at **www.orwp.net** and sign up at least one new member before Jan. 1, 2013.

The more members we have, the stronger our voice. And the louder our voice, the better our opportunities to protect our water for all Oklahomans.

Don Faulkner
Chairman,

ORWP membership committee

FUTURE

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saying goes, “There’s no time like the present.”

As young people living in Southeast Oklahoma, there is clearly not an abundance of options when it comes to fun, but for those four amazing months of summer, we can go to lakes, rivers, or water parks and have a great time. Recreational state parks are a very important part of Oklahoma’s economy, and what is a park without a lake or river? Absolutely no fun.

By relinquishing water rights to lakes such as Sardis, we initiate a domino effect that could eventually involve other lakes as well. All it takes is a single motion to begin a cataclysmic chain reaction.

“Water is essential to life. Without water there is no life.” A phrase ORWP often refers to in an effort to bring understanding to the minds of the previously uninformed or simply unaware citizens.

Once we concede to losing our water rights, we begin a journey down a road that could lead to epic disaster. If we give up on protecting our water

rights, what is next? What other area will be in the sights of greedy developers and businessmen who suffer from tunnel vision? There is no way to tell, but standing our ground and not giving in on the water battle will make a statement. That statement obviously being, “You cannot take what does not belong to you. We will fight.”

Many times in life, people are comfortable to remain complacent and let others take charge in harrowing situations such as this, but our water issue is not a problem that can simply wait for people to step up. Change needs to happen now. This battle is not one that will recede over time or simply fade away. As Napoleon Hill once said, “Effort only fully releases its reward after a person refuses to quit.”

For every challenge we face and overcome, there is sure to be an even greater one thrust upon us in the future; the only difference will be is that you have the previous experience to aid you. Even when our current water issue is resolved, it will not be the end. There is sure to be another, more aggressive battle for our resources in the future, but we will at least have this experience to aid us, and hopefully, a larger army of young people to help.

Calling all youth with the ‘write’ stuff

For the second time this year, *Oklahoma Water Issues* is focusing on Oklahoma’s youth and their involvement in water. In our Summer 2012 issue, we featured FFA speeches on Sardis Lake by two Southeast Oklahoma high school students, Taylor Pratt of Broken Bow and Bryce Livingston of Wilburton.

In this issue of our paper, Emily Robinson, a junior at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, writes about the need for Oklahoma’s youth to become involved in preserving and protecting Oklahoma’s water.

Robinson is currently majoring in criminal justice, and also has a double minor in business and political science.

With all of Robinson’s focus on public service and public policy in her course work, it should come as no surprise that after graduation she hopes to attend law school at University of Oklahoma.

If you think you’re noticing a trend in our paper, you’re right. Some young Oklahomans are contributing their ideas and creativity to Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy. And ORWP wants these contributions to continue in the form of a dedicated youth page in our newspaper, *Oklahoma Water Issues*.

So now, we are calling on **you**, our Oklahoma youth, to contribute to our youth page for each and every issue of our newspaper.

Are you an FFA member already working on the 2013 speech contest, and would like to write about Oklahoma’s water? Have you been inspired by the state’s new water conservation, reuse and recycling bill and want to write about that? Are you part of a youth group that has cleaned up around one of our lakes or rivers, and you have some great photos to share or a story to tell about that experience?

Have you taken some photos of or written an article about the drought or any of Oklahoma’s other water problems for your school paper? Do you have some great memories of recreating along Oklahoma’s beautiful rivers or lakes, and perhaps put these memories in a poem, story or essay?

Are you an Oklahoma teacher who has seen some of these essays, poems, stories, articles or photos, and would like to showcase the efforts of your talented students?

If the answer is yes, please email your youth page submissions to **pennieORWP@gmail.com**. Please include a phone number where you can be reached during the day or evening, and if you are under 18, the name and contact information of a parent or teacher.

We look forward to you helping us make our youth page a success.

ORWP president named to State Water Advisory Council

When Speaker Kris Steele’s Water for 2060 Act was signed into law earlier this year, Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy applauded the ambitious water conservation legislation.

The bill establishes a goal for Oklahoma to use no more fresh water in 2060 than is used today while at the same time allowing for economic growth in the state.

It also creates a 15-member Advisory Council appointed by the Governor, House Speaker and Senate President Pro Tempore to make recommendations

to the Governor and legislature on water conservation practices and incentives to assist in achieving this goal.

Steele recently announced he was appointing long-time water warrior and ORWP President Charlette Hearne to the Advisory Council.

Hearne’s career as a water leader began more than two decades ago when a commercial group wanting to build a water park on Broken Bow Lake challenged Corps zoning restrictions. Hearne and other water activists took on that commercial group.

Hearne’s group stopped Corps zoning laws from being changed for Broken Bow Lake, a change that could have been precedent setting and detrimental to the zoning of protected shorelines all across the United States.

Shortly afterwards, Hearne joined the Southern Oklahoma Water Alliance, a group organized to stop the out of state sale of water to Texas. In 2010, she became one of the founding members and also president of Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy.

“I am honored to be appointed

to this committee,” Hearne said. “I look forward to the opportunity to help protect and preserve our precious water resources through conservation and through exploring the options of water recycling and reuse.”

The Advisory Council will:

- ◆ Recommend incentives to encourage improved irrigation and farming techniques, more efficient infrastructure, use of water recycling/reuse systems, promotion of “smart” irrigation techniques, control of invasive species, artificial recharge of aquifers, and increased use of

marginal quality and brackish waters;

- ◆ Make recommendations regarding the expansion of education programs that modify and improve consumer water-use habits; and


- ◆ Enhance existing, or develop new, financial assistance programs that encourage Oklahoma water systems to implement leak detection and repair programs that result in reduced loss and waste of water, as well as encourage consolidation and regionalization of smaller systems in order to utilize limited resources most efficiently.

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Pennie Embry • Editor
Bryan M. Richter • Graphic designer and paginator

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CONSERVATION VS. PIPELINES

Stewardship vs. a pipedream



BY PENNIE EMBRY

More than 50 years ago, Oklahoma City built Lake Atoka in Southeast Oklahoma. Families who had lived and ranched in the Boggy stream systems for decades lost land to eminent domain, to the lake and to the pipeline constructed to ship Southeast Oklahoma water to a sprawling urban area 100 miles to the north.

Often referred to as “the mud hole” by local residents, Lake Atoka is not the broad expanse of blue imagined by those who agreed to the deal, or as it was pictured on a 1964 Atoka Dam postcard. Instead, the lake is long stretches of unsightly brown and grey — dead trees and stumps protruding from shallow, murky water, empty rusted-out fish habitats, not submerged as they should be, but yards from any water. Add to that the poorly-managed shoreline strewn with debris, and you begin to understand why Southeast Oklahomans are fighting tooth and nail to keep Oklahoma City from taking Sardis Lake.

Despite “the city’s” promise to manage Sardis Lake even as they would be pulling out untold amounts of water to supply Oklahoma City, Southeast Oklahomans are more than a little skeptical. They know their history.

A June 1964 editorial in the *Coalgate Record-Register* written by George Hill as an open letter to the Oklahoma City Council took that group and others to task for misleading Southeast Oklahomans about the Lake Atoka project.

“Local citizens want you to keep the commitments that were made when you were persuading Atoka and Coal county citizens to help you get the land for Lake Atoka. Investments have been made and lost because of your erratic handling of your promises,” Hill stated.

Advertising and articles found in back issues of the *Coalgate Record-Register* support claims by Hill and others that economic commitments and promises were made to sell the lake deal. A series of large ads from 1958 hawked vacation lots along “the scenic shores of Lake Atoka.” These ads implied hunting, fishing, boating, family fun and even inspiration would abound.

Family fun was short-lived. By 1964, Oklahoma City had restricted access to the lake, and later fought to close the lake to fishing, boating and other recreational activities. Fast-forward a



couple of decades and the lake became the eye-sore and “mud hole” no one would ever consider a destination. The reality of Lake Atoka is nothing like the promise.

Lake Atoka was built in a time when water planning focused on finding new supplies, not managing demand. Those times have changed for other states surrounding Oklahoma, and now it is time for Oklahoma to change.

Lake Atoka is more than simply an unsightly problem. It is emblematic of all that is wrong with depending on interbasin transfers to solve water needs.

Interbasin (IBTs) transfers hurt donor basins and receiving basins

◆ IBTs come with significant social, economic and environmental costs, and promote unwise and unsustainable urban and irrigation development.

◆ The receiving basin is lulled into a false sense of secu-

rity. It continues to grow based on the resources of other areas, rather than turning to water conservation, reuse and recycling to properly manage demand.

◆ The donor basin is robbed of much needed assets, and there are a host of adverse impacts that cannot be foreseen.

◆ A Texas Tech Law Review of that state’s famous water legislation, SB 1, pointed out that when water is transferred from a basin, so goes economic development, growth, tourism and recreation, and the donor basin is left with environmental degradation.

Don’t increase supply, rather manage demand

◆ Conservation is not optional, it is a key variable in the water management equation. Studies show that saved water is cheap water.

◆ A Lower Colorado River Authority study estimated that water yielded through conserva-

tion measures cost about \$400 an acre-foot, while water from pipelines and new reservoirs cost about \$2,000 per acre-foot.

◆ In other words, water via a pipeline from another basin will cost you 4-5 times as much as conserved water. What would your water bill look like if multiplied 5 times?

◆ Texas water planners estimate the amount of water that could be saved through conservation is more than the water that would be generated by building 26 new reservoirs.

Other cities conserve

◆ Since 1993, **San Antonio** reduced its per capita water use by 30%, down from 213 gallons to 149 gallons per capita per day. San Antonio’s goal for 2030 is 132 gallons per person per day.

◆ **El Paso** reduced water use by 30% — from 220 gallons down to a daily per capita use of 155 gallons. El Paso also has a goal of 132 gallons per person per day by 2030.

◆ **Norman** lowered water use from 142 gallons per person per day in 2000 to 125 in 2010.

◆ **Oklahoma City** citizens use 166 gallons per person per day. What can we all do to encourage Oklahoma City to establish strong conservation practices rather than take Southeast Oklahoma assets?

The ground beneath their feet: a water source closer to home.

◆ Oklahoma City sits on top of the Garber-Wellington Aquifer, a water source covering almost 3,000 square miles.

◆ Norman, Edmond, Mustang, Noble and other central cities use water from the Garber-Wellington as part of their public water supply.

◆ The Central Oklahoma Water Resources Authority (COWRA) is exploring the use of local groundwater for its water supply, and is also looking into desalination as a means of treating that water.

◆ Oklahoma City does *not* use the Garber-Wellington. How can we encourage the use of this local water source?

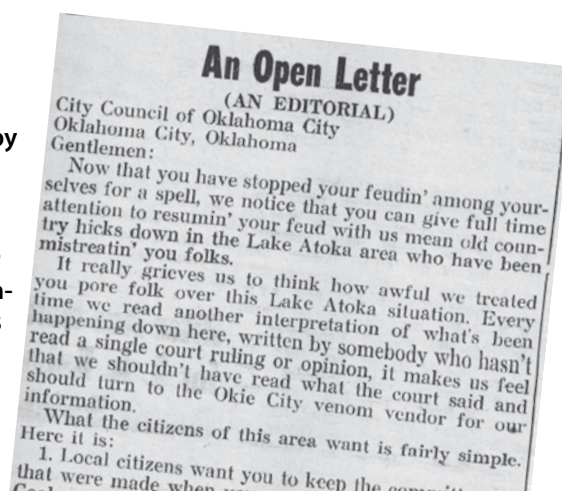


Save water with these conservation tips

- ◆ Turn off the water while you brush your teeth and save 4 gallons a minute. That’s **200** gallons a week for a family of four.
- ◆ Grab a wrench and fix that leaky faucet. It can save **140** gallons a week.
- ◆ Collect the water you use for rinsing produce and reuse it to water houseplants.
- ◆ If your shower can fill a one-gallon bucket in less than 20 seconds, replace it with a water-efficient showerhead.
- ◆ Run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full and you could save **1,000** gallons a month.
- ◆ Time your shower to keep it under 5 minutes. You’ll save up to **1,000** gallons a month.
- ◆ Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway or sidewalk and save **80** gallons of water every time.
- ◆ Next time you add or replace a flower or shrub, choose a low-water use plant for year-round landscape color and save up to **550** gallons each year.
- ◆ Direct downspouts and other runoff towards shrubs and trees, or collect and use for your garden.
- ◆ Use a hose nozzle and turn off the water while you wash your car and save more than **100** gallons.
- ◆ Support projects that use reclaimed wastewater for irrigation and other uses.

Tips courtesy
www.wateruseitwisely.com

A June 1964 editorial in the *Coalgate Record-Register* written by George Hill took the Oklahoma City Council and others to task for misleading Southeast Oklahomans about the Lake Atoka project.



How much rain fell in your backyard?

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, or CoCoRaHS, is a non-profit, community based network of volunteers who take daily measurements of rain, hail, and snow in their backyards.

Volunteers post their daily observations on the CoCoRaHS website, making rain amounts immediately available for the public, forecasters, emergency responders and researchers to use.

These observations supplement existing networks and help paint a picture of just how much rain falls at various locations.

If you have an interest in water and would like to help your local community, as well as scientists and others interested in water, then CoCoRaHS is for you. It only takes a few minutes a day and gives you the chance to participate in hands-on science.

For more information or to join the network, visit www.cocorahs.org or contact Oklahoma CoCoRaHS coordinator Cindy Luttrell at cocorahs@mesonet.org or 405-310-9137.

Every drop counts.



E-mail us your drought photos and stories

We may feature them online and in this publication

charlette@pine-net.com
texaschoctaw.rsa@gmail.com

WATER LEGISLATION 2013

New water bills are in the works for December filing

The next state legislative session won't begin until February, but two Southeast Oklahoma legislators are already busy drafting new water bills they plan to file in December.

Bottom-up water planning

Getting a Regional Water Planning bill passed was a top priority for Rep. Brian Renegar (D-McAlester). He and former Rep. Phil Richardson (R-Minco) crafted a bipartisan Regional Water Planning Group bill and then hammered out a compromise on that bill with the Governor's office.

The Richardson-Renegar Regional Water Planning bill, HB2914, evolved into SB1327. It was passed by the Oklahoma House, made it to Senate Conference Committee, but was never heard there.

"I'm going to refile the Regional Water Planning bill in December," Renegar said. "It will have language similar to that in the bill we filed last year, and will create water planning advisory committees, one in each of nine different water regions in Oklahoma.

"I feel very, very strongly that Oklahomans in all nine regions of the state need to have their say in what happens to the water in their own areas. Even though these committees won't be regulatory, it will at least be a beginning for a true local voice in local water issues. I look forward to passing it through the legislature this coming year."

Stream adjudication: fixing a bad law

In February, the state, through the OWRB, launched a general stream adjudication in three stream systems in Southeast Oklahoma. Only weeks earlier, District

15 Rep. Ed Cannaday (D-Porum) had filed legislation to amend the existing section of Oklahoma water law that gives the OWRB broad powers in initiating such a suit against its own citizens. Cannaday's bill was never heard in committee, and he plans to refile the bill for the 2013 legislative session.

Generally speaking, a stream adjudication is a complex lawsuit conducted in either federal or state court under specific law to determine who has rights to the use of water in a defined water system (*e.g.*, a watershed, river, tributary, *etc.*) Suits of this type often spawn massive legal action, launching decades-long, generational battles. Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy believes this stream adjudication will pit Oklahomans against Oklahomans and cause thousands of Oklahomans to hire lawyers to protect private property rights they already have.

Current water law allows the state to file a suit to determine all rights to the use of water in a stream system. By law, the costs of the suit, including the state's costs, fall on the water permit holders in the stream system being adjudicated.

Cannaday's new bill — like his previous bill — will protect property owners from being *forced* to become parties in a state-initiated lawsuit over water rights and permits.

"My proposed legislation would amend current water law

to set conditions that must be met before this incursion into property owners' rights can happen," Cannaday said.

These conditions are as follows:

- ♦ The OWRB must provide notice of possible suit to all persons in every county of the stream system;

- ♦ Explain to all such persons who receive notice the reasons for this suit in its view and in the interests of the persons claiming rights in the stream system;

- ♦ Consider impacts to the natural resources of the area and groundwater flows;

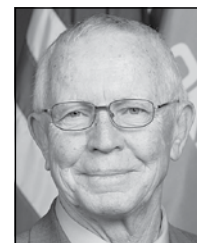
- ♦ Hold a public hearing and allow a reasonable period of public comment on any planned adjudication; and

- ♦ Fully and adequately respond to all comments received.

If a majority of persons claiming a right to use water in a stream system under consideration for stream adjudication objects to this action by the Board, the Board shall be prohibited from initiating the suit. In addition, OWRB authority shall be restricted to only one defined stream system at one time.

"It is my view and that of others that, if left without these amended changes, the existing statute will be used by the OWRB to force the state's property owners into prolonged and expensive suits," Cannaday said. "These property owners will become unsuspecting defendants as their property values are marginalized for them and their descendants.

"The sad aspect of this issue is that it could have been resolved through mediation recommended by the federal judge overseeing the current suit between the state and the Chickasaw and Choctaw tribes."



ED
CANNADAY

Cannaday's new bill will protect property owners from being forced to become parties in a state-initiated lawsuit over water rights and permits.



BRIAN
RENEGAR

Renegar says he will refile his water planning bill, which made it to committee last year, but was never heard there.

Is a desalination plant coming to Oklahoma?

The Central Oklahoma Water Resources Authority (COWRA) is exploring the possibility of building a desalination plant in Canadian County.

Desalination is the process of treating salty or brackish water — in this case, groundwater — so that it can be used as a source of drinking water.

In an Oct. 23 story, the *Mustang Times* reported that COWRA had hired engineering firm Guernsey to begin evaluating whether Canadian County groundwater resources met both quantity and quality needs well enough to move forward into a pilot project phase.

Mustang City Manager Mike Rutledge said the desalination project has been in the works for some time.

“Our goal, the goal of COWRA, is to provide a sustainable water source for member cities,” Rutledge said. COWRA mem-

bers currently include Calumet, Mustang, Okarche and Yukon, along with representatives from Canadian County.

“Currently we, like a lot of other cities in this area, augment our public water supply with water we buy from the Oklahoma City Water Utilities Trust,” Rutledge explained. “We are always looking at other alternatives. In the past, we looked at getting water from the Arbuckle Simpson Aquifer, and we’ve also explored the possibility of getting water from Sardis Lake.

“But we wanted to turn the page, to look at other resources. We wanted to think outside the box. At one time, we had looked at the Garber-Wellington aquifer under Canadian County as a source of water. So we decided to look again. We felt it would be foolish not to explore desalination, because around the world it is used so much.

“These days, just about anybody in the military flying over a third-world country has dropped a mobile desal unit out of the back of a C130 to help people on the ground have fresh water.”

Rutledge and other COWRA members have been talking with area legislators and also with the Oklahoma Water Resources board and the state Department of Environmental Quality about the possibility of a desalination plant in Canadian County. In addition, they have traveled to other states — specifically Texas and Arizona — to learn more about the desalination process.

“There are groups around the world and right here in this country that have done so much of the hard work. They have the desalination process honed to the finest detail. So there’s no reinventing the wheel here, the trial and error has been done by other

people. We would be taking proven technology and applying it to our needs.”

One hurdle Rutledge concedes COWRA will have to face is dealing with the by-product of desalination.

“Plants in coastal areas like the one in Harlingen, Texas can dispose of their saline by-product in the sea,” he said. “But we are not near any ocean. So we went to the Goodyear plant near Scottsdale, Arizona, to see how they dealt with the problem; being in the desert, they are more similar to us. They were running their by-product through a sewage treatment plant.”

But before COWRA members can think further about saline by-product, they have to get past the initial exploration stage. Rutledge confirmed the group would be drilling into the Garber-Wellington aquifer.

“Right now we’ll be determining the nature of the water in the Garber-Wellington, how deep we have to go. There has been a lot of (energy) drilling over the years in the area. Logs exist that will give us some of the data we need. Guernsey will help with that.”

“At some point though, we will probably have to drill a test well,” Rutledge said, reiterating that the desalination project is one he hopes to see to fruition.

For the desalination project to come together, it will take a lot of cooperation among several entities, including COWRA, the OWRB, the state DEQ and others, Rutledge said.

“But I see this as a huge opportunity for COWRA to be the poster child for desalination for the rest of the state. Others are doing it and doing it well. It’s time for Oklahoma to get on board.”

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CONTACT US

Spokesperson
Charlette Hearne
President
P.O. Box 1061
Antlers, OK 74523
charlette@pine-net.com
580-743-1259 cell
580-420-3040

Rebecca Arnold
Vice President
P.O. Box 1061
Antlers, OK 74523
texaschoctaw.rsa@gmail.com
580-927-6543

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