

## Lake Meredith unlikely to get water soon from New Mexico

**August 21, 2003**

AMARILLO, Texas- The water level in Lake Meredith on Thursday dropped to 62.9 feet, the lowest it's ever been, and no help will be coming from New Mexico, which is under contract to release water from Lake Ute near Logan, N.M., whenever it has adequate supply.

Kent Terry, Ute Dam caretaker, said it's been dry there also, the Amarillo Globe-News reported in its Friday editions.

Until the current dry spell, the record low level for Lake Meredith was 63.36 feet, achieved in May 1981.

Kent Satterwhite, manager of the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority, said the past two years have been the worst ever for Lake Meredith in terms on water inflow. A drought contingency plan will be put into effect if good rains don't come soon, he said.

Under the Canadian River Compact between New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, the state of New Mexico must release water whenever it has 200,000 acre-feet of water, minus about 6,500 acre-feet of incidental water in some smaller reservoirs. An acre foot is enough to flood an acre of land a foot deep.

Doug Murray, interstate Stream Commission project manager in Santa Fe, N.M., said Ute Lake has only 176,089 acre-feet of water. The mandated release level is approximately 5 feet below spillway level and the lake is about 10 feet below the spillway, Murray said.

No draws are made from Ute Lake for irrigation or drinking water, Terry said. The lake was built for municipal use, but is now being used for recreation.

Not since March 2000 has New Mexico released water to Lake Meredith. At that time, water was released for about a month and a half at a rate of 325 cubic feet per second.

Satterwhite said he doesn't think the lack of release from New Mexico has been significant in the declining water levels at Meredith.

"There just hasn't been rain in the right spots," he said. "We need intense rains in the watershed."

The Lake Meredith watershed is basically outlined by Interstate 40 to Tucumcari, N.M., on the south and Dalhart to south of Dumas on the northern edge, Satterwhite said.

If projections indicates there is less than a three-year supply of water in the lake, CRMWA will reduce deliveries by 10 percent to its member cities. In the second phase, less than a two-year supply, the reduction is 15 percent, and third, 1-year supply, 20 percent.

"If we kept having like the last two years over and over again, we would go to zero supply in three years," Satterwhite said.

"In October, there's a chance we will go to drought mode. We have a proposed plan in place. It's going to be close, and it kind of just depends on how conservative the cities want to be," Satterwhite said.