

CRMWA reviews pros, cons of buying water

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SANFORD - Interest exists on both sides, but the bottom line will be one of economics when it comes to any sale of Roberts County water rights to the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority.

CRMWA officials and potential water rights sellers met Tuesday at CRMWA's Sanford offices to discuss issues involved in any potential sale.

CRMWA manager Kent Satterwhite said the water authority is seeking data called "requests for proposals" - outlines of land available, water quality, quantity, distance from CRMWA's current facilities and price - through Sept. 8.

"Currently, we only need the 40,000 acre feet a year we have," Satterwhite said, but he added they are seeking approximately 100,000 more acres of water rights to prepare for the long term.

"How much more we need or want, I'm not sure," he said. "It depends on where and how good it is and the cost."

The cost could be a sticky factor.

CRMWA attorney Doug Caroom said the last open-market sale of water was Amarillo's purchase several years ago in Roberts County at \$275 per acre.

Steve Hale of Miami, a landowner in the Roberts/Hemphill Water Group, said the 100 landowners have approximately 158,000 acres in the Roberts and Gray counties, and another 32,000 in Hemphill County.

While they are interested in selling to CRMWA, Hale said, "It comes down to economics. A good price is more than what CRMWA is offering."

Hale said no individual landowner would be able to sell water without a group, so it is hard to say what the asking price might be.

He said there are many factors to take into consideration.

Roberts County landowner David Locke said CRMWA's draft contract doesn't address payment for surface damages when observation wells and the well field are drilled. The surface owner will incur damages similar to those with oilfield drilling, he said.

"We're concerned about signing onto a blanket easement without damages," Locke said. "It would determine what your proposed asking price would be if you have to figure in damages to the landowner."

Caroom said other factors could figure in to what CRMWA ultimately pays for water rights, including accessibility and volume.

Adjacent land to CRMWA's would be more valuable than that farther away because of costs involved in building a pipeline.

He said the 54-inch line recently built cost \$1 million per mile to build.

The city of Amarillo has about 72,000 acres of water rights in Roberts County. Satterwhite said it would make sense for CRMWA, of which Amarillo is a key member, to try to purchase those water rights that partially border current CRMWA water on the north and west.

It also would provide a corridor to other land and water rights owned by the Roberts/Hemphill Water Group.

Satterwhite said all proposals are due by Sept. 8 and CRMWA will make decisions on which of them to pursue by Oct. 9. CRMWA then will spend approximately three months conducting tests on quality and quantity before closing the purchase of any water rights.

"We're going to be interested in what comes in on the proposals," he said.