

# Pickens group, CRMWA talk water contract

No agreement reached, but 'real possibility' exists for deal, official says

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T. Boone Pickens and Canadian River Municipal Water Authority members are talking water.

There's no water flowing, no agreement yet, but during a meeting Friday at Pickens' ranch in Roberts County, CRMWA Manager Kent Satterwhite made a formal proposal to buy all the water that Pickens' Mesa Water Inc. owns or controls.

Other Mesa officials and Anita Burgess, Lubbock city attorney, attended the meeting, some via conference call.

"There's a real possibility we can strike a deal in the near future," Satterwhite said.

The discussions resulted in a renewed spirit of cooperation, he said.

"Mr. Pickens pointed out he is concerned about the water supply of the Texas Panhandle and South Plains," Satterwhite said. "He's also concerned about his friends' and neighbors' property values."

After Friday's talks, Satterwhite said, "I'm very encouraged we'll be able to reach an agreement suitable to all parties."

Bobby Stillwell, Mesa spokesman and attorney, agreed.

"We were pleased with the meeting and that they wanted to have it," Stillwell said. "We've agreed to work together and see if we can work to solve our problems."

CRMWA has been searching for additional water rights to secure for long-term and short-term needs, Satterwhite said. Mesa's 110,000 acres would be good, he said, and the Roberts/Hemphill Water Group's additional 160,000 acres might also fit in future.

CRMWA's written proposal reiterates an oral offer made before and is based on the same structure used by CRMWA to purchase water rights on the Duncan Ranch, Stillwell said.

"They are proposing to purchase the water rights, but it is not our first choice," Stillwell said. "Our primary focus is on a delivered water contract. But we will look also at their proposal."

The talks Friday related only to property Pickens owned or controlled and did not include that of the Roberts/Hemphill group, Stillwell said.

While not committing to anything on behalf of that group, Stillwell said, Mesa Water's primary focus has been and still is to find a delivered water project for the water rights of both groups.

"We think we can make deliveries to CRMWA or to Lubbock, and we will get together with them to show them the numbers," Stillwell said. "Our engineers are working up the numbers now to see what it would take to deliver water to Lubbock."

Stillwell said he expects the group to meet again.

"They should keep in mind, though, that we have these other projects we're working on as well, and we'll see if we can work them in to being included in those projects," he said.

While CRMWA is looking to put the water into its pipeline, Mesa is looking at a possible system that would deliver to CRMWA or directly to Lubbock.

Mesa would maintain the water rights, along with a well field or a pipeline.

"If we did a delivered water (project) to CRMWA, it would be part of the process to pump it downstate," Stillwell said, adding the amount of water CRMWA could take for delivery would not justify the cost of building a pipeline.

Mesa Water is ultimately looking to sell water to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex area or San Antonio, he said. It would take a larger buyer to justify the cost.

Satterwhite said CRMWA is willing to consider anything at this point.

"We have to consider all of our options and look at the feasibility of it," Satterwhite said. "Certainly our preference is to buy water in place.

"This water we're looking to purchase from them would be for short-term and long-term needs. We would have the capacity in the short term for some water, but for any major use, it would require another pipeline.

"We're a long way from making any decisions on another pipeline project, but it is something we're considering."