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News

Drought continues but recent downpours have helped lake levels

By THOMAS JENKINS Staff Writer

Recent rainfall may have protected the Howard County area from the necessity of water rationing for the next two years, but the war against the ongoing drought in West Texas is far from over.

Colorado River Municipal Water District General Manager John Grant said the Lake J.B. Thomas reservoir has benefited the most from recent rainfall, with its level rising approximately a foot during the past month.

"We did see some inflow from the recent rains," said Grant. "Lake Thomas is 9.7 percent full right now and is currently holding 19,400-acre-feet of water. Overall, the level of the lake is up about a foot right now because of the recent inflow."

While Lake Thomas has benefited greatly from recent rainfall, Grant said the water district's other major reservoirs, Lake Spence and Lake O.H. Ivie, have only managed to break even.

"Lake Spence is at 6.5 percent capacity with 33,700-acre-feet of water, while Ivie is at 30.1 percent capacity with 172,600," said Grant. "Both lakes have held their levels since we received the rain, so the amount of inflow has equaled what we've lost to evaporation and usage."

Grant said these numbers should keep the water district out of any kind of supply problems for a while.

"We should be fine for the rest of this year, and we've received enough inflow to carry us through next year if we don't get any more rainfall," he said.

Grant said water deliveries to the cities CRMWD serves, which include Big Spring, Midland, Odessa, Snyder and Stanton, have been down during the last month, something he attributes to the cooler weather that has come and gone in the area.

"Water consumption will decrease when it's not quite so hot," said Grant. "I believe that may be one of the reasons we've seen a fall in distribution over the past month. We got some rain in early July and recently, and that will also knock water usage down. People just don't use as much."

While CRMWD is looking at smooth sailing for the coming year, Grant said it's important not to lose sight of the overall problem -- a drought that has plagued West Texas since the fall of 1992.

"I hear a lot of people talk about the drought West Texas experienced in the 1950s," said Grant. "A lot of people think that was the worst drought we've had in this area, but I think the drought we're in now is definitely worse."

"We're in a position where we shouldn't have to worry about any type of water rationing for the rest of this year and all of next year, but it's still important for people to remember where we live, which is on the edge of a desert."

Grant said there's hope for the area -- unfortunately, it's likely to come with the same age-worn patience that the drought had when it first began.

"It took us quite a while to get into this drought, and it's going to take us quite a while to get out of it," said Grant. "If a hurricane system from the coast settled in over us or we had a low system move and bring moisture, we might fill our reservoirs but we would still be in a drought."

"We're going to have to start getting some normal rainfall patterns before we can really begin to recover. The ground is going to have to get wet throughout so we can get some runoff into our lakes. It just takes time."

CRMWD reservoirs currently hold more than 220,000 acre-feet of water. Moss Creek Lake is currently at 77.36 percent capacity with 2,662 acre-feet of water.

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