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Lubbock's Water Crisis: Sources and Costs

In our last report we told you city leaders recently purchased enough water for the immediate future, but getting water already purchased to your tap is a huge and expensive challenge because each source is at least 65 miles away. Deputy City Manager Tom Adams says, "After you've identified the sources, you need the engineering and the projects to bring the water to Lubbock. Now that's when it gets time for some serious decisions and it gets time for some serious expenditures." Councilman Gary Boren adds, "If we don't have the vehicle to carry that water from its source to our citizens, it sounds good on paper, it sounds good in a media interview, but when you need it and its not there we have not done our job."



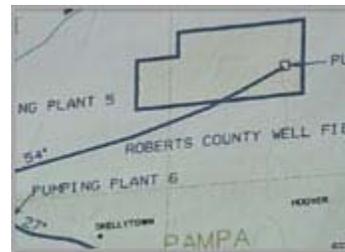
Every option available to boost Lubbock's water supply means water rates will go up. Let's start at the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority. The Authority provides 70% to 80% of Lubbock's water from Lake Meredith and wells in Roberts County. Lubbock just bought more water in Roberts County, but to get it here, hundreds of miles of new pipeline must be laid. Adams says, "Right now we estimate the second line for CRMWA to be anywhere from \$200 million to \$300 million which is a very expensive project."



Expensive for what could be a short term fix. That water will run out someday. So how about bringing it in from Lake Alan Henry? The lake is 65 miles away, but it is a *renewable* source. A pipeline, pump station and treatment plant at Lake Alan Henry still are not cheap. They would cost \$135 million, plus a few million each year for electricity to pump that water. Councilman Jim Gilbreath says, "Do you build a pipeline where there's lots and lots of water that's not really recharging at a very fast rate or do you build it from a lake? Lake Alan Henry doesn't have the capacity to take care of all or our needs."



Realizing that every drop is precious, Lubbock will spend money to save money - reducing water wasted within its aging city pipeline system. Water Programs Manager Sherry Stephens explains "Council has approved a small line change out program, a comprehensive program where we're going to see if we can get a private company to come in and replace about 44 miles of two inch pipeline." A major line with frequent leaks along 34th Street will also be replaced and \$800,000 has been allocated for new valves. Stephens says, "Those three projects alone should save us a significant amount of money."



The city is also saving money and water in ten city parks. 21 wells will provide usable but undrinkable water to irrigate those parks. Although the project costs close to \$400,000, it will save 120 million gallons of drinkable water per year.

Another option for the city: find a better way to use the water that's already here. In other words, the water you flush down your toilet could be cleaned up and someday end up in your glass. Chief Water Planning Engineer Ches Carthel explains, "To some extent it's already

happening here. It's just on a very small basis. The city of Amarillo has a wastewater plant on the north side of town that intermittently discharges treated wastewater into a tributary, the Canadian River which goes into Lake Meredith."

Lubbock has just one wastewater treatment facility. Water from your sink and your sewer all come go there. A series of clarifiers remove the waste and the water is discharged to one of three places: the city's land application site, a fork of the Brazos River north of Slaton, or the Jones Power Plant where it's used for industrial cooling. Carthel explains, "We're in the process of going through the design phase of an improvement to that facility that will allow all of the effluent to be discharged into the north fork of the Brazos River if we so choose." Lubbock Water Advisory Commission Chairman H.P. Bo Brown Jr. adds, "You take that water and you blend it 30% with water from another source (70%) and you run it through our potable water treatment plants and then it's perfectly safe to drink."

Lubbock is actually one of few large cities in the nation to still rely solely on well and lake water. Councilman Gilbreath jokes, "I'll drink the second glass." Councilman Boren adds, "We'll let the mayor go first, and if he doesn't fall over, mayor pro-tem next." Carthel says, "As an engineer, we joke amongst ourselves that we can design a treatment plant to take everything out of the water but the thought."

It's not likely we'll be drinking our own wastewater anytime soon, but we will use it for other uses like watering crops after \$62 million worth of upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant over the next 5 years. With costs like that, some help from Austin would come in handy. Lubbock Senator Robert Duncan says, "We have started introducing and developing and debating legislation that would create a fund from which communities could draw to leverage federal dollars."

Senator Duncan says the state cannot afford to fund those costs fully, but he hopes to see courageous moves toward solving a major problem. Ask him where water falls on his list of important matter for West Texas and he says, "I think as far as the future, it's number one because we can't grow. You can't grow Texas Tech, you can't grow industry without water. If we don't conserve that water and use it wisely, we'll run out before our time... in our lifetime."

<p>11/14/05 Lubbock's Water Crisis: Supply At Hand Just a couple years ago, no one would have believed it if you said Lubbock's water supply will run out within a decade. But today city leaders are trying to solve a very real threat. NewsChannel 11 wanted to know exactly what they are doing to keep the water running. In the first of a three part series, Darcy Tucker brings you the results of her three month investigation.</p>
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