

**Authority digs deep for water plan
July 2006**

Water users in the Panhandle and South Plains will be more dependant on well water as drought-battered Lake Meredith continues to empty.

Canadian River Municipal Water Authority directors voted Wednesday to rush four to seven new wells into operation within nine months. The wells, to be located in the authority's Roberts County well field, will pump a total of more than 3.2 billion gallons of water each year. Each well could cost up to \$1 million.

In addition, directors approved changing the mix of water for the authority's 11 member cities, from Borger and Amarillo to Lubbock and Slaton, from 55 percent lake water to 45 percent lake water.

The authority has been waiting to tap more of its groundwater until it completed water purchases and trades. However, the record-low lake levels pushed it to move now.

The well field is operating "wide open now," providing all the water it can, said Kent Satterwhite, CRMWA general manager.

The plan was to locate wells to spread out the effect of pumping on the Ogallala Aquifer. However, the new plan is to put the first wells close to the existing wells to more easily and cheaply hook into existing pipelines.

"We have plenty of water," Satterwhite said. "It's a transportation problem."

After getting the first new wells into production, CRMWA will add another four to seven farther away from the existing wells.

Despite declining lake levels, the board did not change how much total water is supplied to member cities. It will reconsider that in October if rain does not begin to fill the lake. At that time, the board may choose to act on staff recommendation to change the total allocation of water from 29.3 billion gallons per year to 22.8 billion. The change would go into effect in January.

Representatives of the city of Lubbock suggested starting a gradual reduction of the allocation now to get consumers to take conserving water seriously. Lubbock Mayor David Miller also suggested a severe cut in October might hurt economic development.

"To the outside world, it sends a message West Texas is drying up," he said.

Action plan to conserve water

Canadian River Municipal Water Authority directors voted Wednesday to:

Change ratio of lake water to well water from 55 percent lake to 45 percent lake;

Rush up to seven wells into production at a cost of up to \$1 million each;

Keep total water provided to cities the same until at least January.