

Key water supply sinking to new lows
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How low can it go?

Lake Meredith is 12 percent full and at record-low levels, continuing a slide that has been downhill almost all the way since June. That was when the lake hit its peak for the last 12 months, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

"We never dreamed we'd be where we are today," said Kent Satterwhite, general manager of the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority.

If the lake falls another 10 feet, CRMWA may have to put a floating pump near the intake pipe for the water system that feeds its member cities, including Lubbock. As the lake went down from there, the pump would lift water from the lake and into the pipe.



Associated Press

Acting Chief Ranger Paul Jones and general equipment mechanic Robert Rodriguez dump rocks at the end of the temporary boat ramp near the marina at Lake Meredith Friday October 5, 2007. The rocks are placed to keep silt from eroding away from the end of the ramp and keep boat trailers from getting stuck. It's the boat motors that cause the silt to be pushed away from the ramp.

"That would be quite a way off if it happens," Satterwhite said.

Meredith holds about half of what it did at its record height of 102 feet in 1973. And every day without rain, it sinks to another low.

"A quarter-inch rain a day for several days is quite a bit different from 4 inches in one day, and that's what we need - a hard rain," Satterwhite said.

The falling level should slow as CRMWA makes its seasonal adjustment in how much lake water it mixes with groundwater from the John C. Williams Wellfield in Roberts County.

"We use more lake water in the summer because we can pump more of that more quickly," said Chad Pernell, CRMWA deputy general manager. "To serve peak use, the system uses more lake water and (Amarillo's) wells."

But the security of a fuller lake could be elusive. It has tracked lower since 2000 when it was at more than 400 feet, or better than 75 percent full, according to the Texas Water Development Board.

"I guess it goes without saying, it really depends on if it rains," Pernell said. "It's hard to understand. There's been so much rain just to the south and east."

Runoff in that direction does not go to the lake.

Ute Lake in Logan, N.M., and upstream from Meredith on the Canadian River, is doing better.

"It's not full, but it's right on the fringe," Satterwhite said. "If it gets above a certain level, they have to release water into the river."

And that water flows toward Meredith, with some losses to evaporation and absorption by the soil. There is a delta of silt just above where Meredith receives water from the Canadian that concerned CRMWA earlier this year.

However, readings from the flow gauge at the river bridge on U.S. Highway 287 correspond to the rise in Meredith's level, indicating the water is getting to the lake by washing over the delta in sheets or by seeping through under the surface, Satterwhite said.

Area lakes are also facing shortfalls, from Palo Duro Reservoir at 2.6 percent full to Lake Greenbelt at 40.5 percent full.

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