

Web posted **Saturday, June 15, 2002**
7:05 a.m. CT

Forum speakers tout importance of water to Panhandle's future

By Rick Storm
rstorm@amarillonet.com

Water will almost certainly play the largest role in shaping the Golden Spread in the 21st Century.

Perhaps Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District geologist / engineer Ray Brady said it best with a quote from Libyan dictator Mohamar Ghadafi: "Water is more valuable than oil; water is life."

Brady was joined by a number of area water experts at the Amarillo Civic Center on Friday evening for "Panhandle Water: Past, Present and Future," a program sponsored by Panhandle Alliance Inc.

Jarrett Atkinson, Panhandle Regional Planning Commission local government services director and Region A water planning coordinator for the Texas Water Plan, gave an overview of the Panhandle Water Planning Group, a 21-county area.

Counties include Dallam, Sherman, Hansford, Ochiltree, Lipscomb, Hartley, Moore, Hutchinson, Roberts, Hemphill, Oldham, Potter, Carson, Gray, Wheeler, Randall, Armstrong, Donley, Collingsworth, Hall and Childress.

Atkinson said that in 2000 the 21 counties used 1.7 million acre-feet of water. He said in the space of a football field, the water would extend 325 miles into the sky.

Atkinson said the PWPG stipulated that by 2050, 50 percent of the groundwater must still be available.

He identified agriculture as the biggest user at 89 percent, with agriculture use expected to see shortages by 2050. In addition, Dallam, Hartley, Moore, Potter and Randall counties were likely to experience shortage problems by 2050.

Brady stressed that exports of water didn't start with T. Boone Pickens' Mesa Water Inc. in Roberts County.

Brady said the city of Amarillo has been pumping water out of Carson County since the 1950s and the Canadian Municipal Water Authority had pumped water out of the Panhandle to Lubbock and other CRMWA member cities since the late '60s.

Kent Satterwhite, CRMWA general manager, gave an overview of CRMWA's project that has blended Roberts County groundwater with Lake Meredith water since Dec. 2001.

He said CRMWA's goal was to use only enough groundwater to meet state standards on chlorides and solid content.

However, drought has caused Lake Meredith to plunge to record lows. Satterwhite said that in 2001, 53,000 acre-feet of water flowed into the lake, with about 53,000 acre-feet lost to evaporation and 76,000 acre-feet pumped out of the lake.

He said that when the lake contains less than a three-year supply for CRMWA's 11 member cities, pumping has to be reduced 10 percent.

If the lake doesn't receive a major infusion of water through large rain events, that could happen this year, Satterwhite said.