Alternative water supply explored for city of Ada

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ADA - Should Ada have an alternative water supply in case of a major catastrophe? Newly-elected Ada City Council member Barbara Young says yes.

"We're not in a panic situation," said Young, who has served previously as a council member and mayor of Ada. "We have time to investigate, study and develop available sources," she said.

"It is intelligent to plan for the future. So, if your sole source of water is threatened in any way, you should be planning for an alternative supply.

"We don't have a lot of earth tremors, but we are susceptible," Young said. "It's always been a concern to me since I've lived here. Could it cut our water off if we had a major eruption?"

Young believes that even if a major catastrophe (such as an earthquake) were to take place in the Ada area, Ada wouldn't be without water immediately.

"Even if it happened, our wells are very deep and could probably deliver water for a couple of years," she said.

Dr. Randall Ross of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Robert S. Kerr Environmental Research Center in Ada, says he doesn't share Young's concern about an earthquake. "If a quake should hit the aquifer, the water is going to find a way out," Ross said.

However, Ross says a terrorist attack or man-made contamination could impact the water supply.

"If the city is forced to use the wells, there is no reason the wells couldn't produce water for a long time," Ross said, indicating they could even produce longer than the two years suggested by Young.

Ross said an extended drought is the most likely natural phenomenon that could affect Ada's water supply. "Drought is beyond our control and could extensively impact our water supply," he said.

"Also, if people in the Oklahoma City Area could pump 60 million gallons a day from the Arbuckle-Simpson Aquifer, that could affect water users downstream from Ada where we would have to pump our wells," Young said.

"This could be helped by Oklahoma legislators finding a way to protect the aquifer and the water and by determining how much can be safely taken out of the aquifer."

Young said all alternate water sources would be much more expensive than Ada's existing source.

"It would involve having to build a water treatment plant (which could cost $5 million to $6 million), plus the cost of creating a new source."

Young said during her previous tenure on the city council, other sources were considered.

"We talked before of a possible pipeline from Atoka Lake or McGee Creek Reservoir in the Atoka area to Ada. These sources deliver water to Lake Stanley Draper in the Oklahoma City Area."

Young pointed out, however, that piping water from Atoka Lake or McGee Creek Reservoir, would also involve building a water treatment plant, because of the raw water coming from the area.

She said another possibility would be drilling more wells outside the area where Ada's wells are now located. Ada now has three wells south of Byrd's Mill Spring. Ada acquired Byrd's Mill Spring in 1911 and has piped water by gravity flow from the spring since that time.

"But, again that (drilling more wells) would be very expensive - and that would be a gamble, because we wouldn't know the quality of the water we would get," Young said.

"In past years, there has been talk of building Parker Reservoir, mostly as a recreation area, but that would be so far away and would be costly to bring water to Ada. It would also be a long-term project.

"Other talk is to go west of Ada to the Sandy Creek area and attempt to build a lake or reservoir for a secondary source of water.

"We should look at every option we have and try to do a feasibility study as we can afford it, then deliver the information to the residents and let them decide what they might want to pay for, or if they want to just sit and gamble that Byrd's Mill Spring will continue to flow."

Young says the quickest solution might be to purchase water from the Atoka Lake pipeline.

"It depends on what people want their secondary water source to deliver. If they want just drinking water, the solution would be to try the Atoka Lake pipeline, or drilling additional wells. If they want a second source to be a water supply and recreational lake, we need to look in a different direction. We would certainly be looking at a greater cost, Young said."

Parker Dam and Reservoir was designed by the Army Corps of Engineers, authorized by Congress for construction, but never built. It would have been located southeast of Allen in Hughes and Coal counties. Envisioned as a component of a three-reservoir system with McGee Creek Reservoir and Lake Atoka, it would have provided water for Oklahoma City and cities and rural water districts along the transmission system.

It would have yielded 42 million gallons per day and had a storage capacity of 237,000 acre feet.

The Atoka Reservoir is located on North Boggy Creek in Atoka County, north of the city of Atoka. Constructed by the Oklahoma City Water Utilities Trust for municipal and industrial water supply, the water is pumped through a 60-inch diameter aqueduct to a discharge at Lake Stanley Draper near Oklahoma City.

It's municipal and industrial water supply yield is 90 million gallons per day through the aqueduct (65,000 acre feet per year). It's permitted water rights are 64,336 acre feet per year.

Atoka is part of a reservoir system that includes McGee Creek Reservoir.

McGee Creek Reservoir is on Potapo and McGee creeks in Eastern Atoka County. McGee Creek was constructed for the Oklahoma City Water Utilities Trust as a municipal and industrial water supply project. It contains significant recreational and wildlife conservation areas. It has a yield of 71,800 acre feet per year. Construction was completed in 1988.

Scissor Tail Dam And Reservoir, with a surface area of 4,250 acres would have been located on Sandy Creek west of Ada. It's annual yield would total 37,000 acre feet and it would have had a storage capacity of 74,000 acre feet per year.