

Ideal city water plan threatened

The drought is threatening the city's ultimate plan for providing San Angelo's future water needs, City Manager Stephen Brown said.

If the water supply continues to dwindle faster than rain and rivers can replenish it, San Angelo may be forced into a situation where the ideal plan must be set aside, he said.

The "ideal" plan involves the proposed Stacy Dam project, the Lake Spence reservoir and the city's water rights to the Hickory Sands Aquifer in McCulloch County.

Brown said he hopes the Stacy Dam project will get a favorable ruling from the Texas Supreme Court this fall. The Supreme Court heard arguments for and against the \$50.5 million project in the summer of 1983.

"We're trying to stretch out what we have in our lakes and Spence in kind of a waiting game for the Supreme Court decision," Public Works Director Cloice Whitley said.

The Colorado River Municipal Water District (CRMWD) plans to build a 554,340 acre-foot reservoir about 24 miles south of Ballinger to serve a 17-county area. Water would be sold to several West Texas cities, including San Angelo, Big Spring, Midland, Odessa, Robert Lee, Snyder and Stanton.

Opponents of the project, led by the Lower Colorado River Authority in Austin, want the Supreme Court to invalidate the CRMWD's permit from the Texas Department of Water Resources to build the reservoir.

An LCRA attorney argued the project would strip downstream customers of water that legally belongs to them.

San Angelo's 10 percent share of the project cost would be \$5 million and would entitle the city to 10 percent of the water supply.

By the time Stacy would be completed — late 1990 if construction begins in early 1985 — San Angelo's trust fund from its 7½ percent surcharge on water bills would contain enough to pay the city's share, Brown said.

The problem with waiting is that it would take at least six years to build the dam and reser-

voir, Brown said.

If rain fails to soak West Texas enough to generate runoff for the local reservoirs or Lake Spence between now and June 1985, San Angelo may not have the time to wait for Stacy's completion, he said.

The alternative is to issue \$39 million in bonds to finance the development of San Angelo's water rights in McCulloch County. Water bills would have to more than double to pay for laying the 56-mile pipeline, drilling 19 more wells and installing pumps, Brown said. And the debt would seriously harm the city's bond ratings, he said.

"By building the McCulloch line, we may preempt ourselves from the Stacy system," Brown said.

Under Brown's ideal plan, the city would buy into the Stacy project and wait until much later to develop the McCulloch County well field.

The pipeline from the Stacy reservoir to Midland-Odessa would cross the existing pipeline from Lake Spence to San Angelo, so San Angelo would not have to build and pay for its own pipeline from Stacy. A valving system could be installed to connect the Stacy and Spence pipelines.

Then, in later years, San Angelo could negotiate with other cities and the CRMWD to organize a cooperative effort to pay for developing the McCulloch County well field. A pipeline could be laid from the well field to Lake Spence to interlock all of San Angelo's outside sources of water.

Combined with San Angelo's three local reservoirs, the system would supply the city's needs for many years to come, Brown said.

"It (the well field) gives us an ace in the hole for bargaining with other cities and the CRMWD," Brown said. "But we may not have that luxury . . . I want to build it. There's no question we'll have to some day. But the best way is to wait until after Stacy is built.

"But if it can't wait, it can't wait and I'll lead the charge to build it," he said.

— Carol Daniel