

Published September 12, 2008 07:41 pm - Many who attended the final session of a regional water conference Friday urged the Tri-State Water Resource Coalition to invite Arkansas water interests to join, along with representatives from agricultural, residential development and recreation and tourism groups.

Water conference ends with calls to conserve, expand membership

By Derek Spellman

dspellman@joplinglobe.com

Many who attended the final session of a regional water conference Friday urged the Tri-State Water Resource Coalition to invite Arkansas water interests to join, along with representatives from agricultural, residential development and recreation and tourism groups.

The inclusion of Arkansas was suggested after coalition members said they have initiated discussions with the Beaver Water District in Northwest Arkansas about whether the district could supply water to the area. Coalition president Bob Nichols said the group so far has conducted “very, very preliminary discussions” with a few district officials.

“We just know they’ve got water, and we know we need water,” Nichols said.

The coalition has been exploring an additional water source for Southwest Missouri in the wake of a 2002 study that determined the area could face a water shortage during a drought if demand for water continues to increase. That study estimated such a shortage might be only 15 years away.

The coalition also has approached the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about conducting a study on reallocating water from Stockton and Table Rock lakes, although the corps has limited funding for such a study. An engineering firm hired by the coalition also is to narrow the list of potential sites for a reservoir by the end of the year.

The coalition also has looked into tapping Grand Lake in Northeast Oklahoma, although the state has a moratorium on out-of-state water sales.

Nichols said the coalition plans to have more discussions with the Beaver Water District about whether Beaver Lake could be a short-term or long-term water source for Southwest Missouri.

Alan Fortenberry, CEO of the Beaver Water District, attended the conference and said officials would continue to meet with the coalition.

“We have talked with them, and we are interested in talking with them some more,” Fortenberry said.

Beaver Water District currently has a supply sufficient to meet its needs for the next 25 to 40 years, but Fortenberry cautioned that water is still a limited resource and the district also has to keep in mind the growth in Arkansas.

In the intervening time, Nichols said the coalition would try to encourage water conservation in the area. The city of Seattle, for example, has been able to keep water demand under control despite a burgeoning population through conservation.

Arece Hampton, residential program manager for Seattle Public Utilities, told conference-goers during the first session on Thursday that it has promoted the use of water-efficient showerheads and toilets, oftentimes with vouchers or rebates.

“It’s not about sacrifice or hardship,” Hampton said, referring to how to encourage people to conserve. “It’s about using the resource wisely. It’s about reducing waste.”

Nichols, echoing that sentiment, on Friday said he thought people should start thinking of water conservation as more of water efficiency.

“That’s the cheapest water we will have,” he said of the existing water supply.