



**From: Kelli Williams, Chief Communications Officer
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Date: February 25, 2016

For release: February 28, 2016

Bartlesville water needs: past and present

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Water. It is arguably the earth's most precious resource and a topic ever on the minds of the City officials and staff members tasked with finding it, treating it, billing for it, storing it, conserving it and distributing it. The City of Bartlesville provides water not solely to Bartlesville residents, but to the entire region, including the cities of Dewey, Ramona and Ochelata, as well as the Bardew Water Association and seven rural water districts in Washington, Nowata and Osage counties.

This is a huge undertaking, and one that the City of Bartlesville takes very seriously — from the City Council, which must oversee routine items such as water-related agreements and contracts to more unpleasant tasks, such as implementing rate increases when needed — to the Water Department technicians who treat our potable water and monitor it at every point from intake to delivery.

Bartlesville's water systems have changed greatly over the years, beginning shortly after the city was founded, in 1897, when water was utilized from the Caney River, then the city's sole water supply. The Bartlesville Water Company constructed a dam on the Caney River — where the present State Highway 123 road crosses the river — to impound water and supply the water needs for the growing community. In 1914, the dam was raised by two feet and, finally, in 1937, an additional three feet brought it to its current height.

Water needs during these early years ranged somewhere around 1.2 million gallons of water per day (mgd) being pumped to water customers, according to Bartlesville Area History Museum records — far less volume than today's annual average of 6 mgd. (This average is about 2 mgd less than past years, as use has fallen steadily since peaking in 2006-07.) During peak usage, or the warmer, dryer summer months, that average more than doubles, at around 12-13 million gallons of water used per day.

Records indicate the City of Bartlesville took over water distribution for the community around 1940, and that it was around that time that local and state officials began working with the Corps of Engineers to build Hulah Lake as a federal water resource project. In addition to Hulah Lake, the City of Bartlesville commissioned and built Hudson Lake, located northwest of Bartlesville, in Osage County. Hudson Lake was completed in 1949. In 1953, the City secured additional water rights for Hulah Lake, and the remaining rights were secured in 2010.

Construction of Hulah Lake provided a new source of water, but it accomplished much more than this. The lake also provided flood reduction to the Bartlesville community, which was greatly needed at the time. Multiple flooding events in the late 1930s and '40s proved an urgent need for flood control — a need that was eased with the construction of the new lake as flood reduction benefits from the lake greatly reduced downstream flooding within the Bartlesville community.

Shortly after Hulah Lake was completed, in 1957, Bartlesville signed a water supply storage contract for 15,400 acre-feet, or 9.6 mgd. Smaller water supply storage agreements were also signed in 1970, for 2,200 acre-feet, or 1.4 mgd, and in 1980 for 2,100 acre-feet, or 1.3 mgd.

With Hulah Lake as the primary water source and flood control for downstream communities, the area's water needs were largely met for several years — until severe drought conditions in 2001-02 prompted the City of Bartlesville to begin seeking alternative/additional water sources. Multiple studies, including the extensive Corps of Engineers Planning Assistance to States (PAS) study, were conducted to identify the most feasible options, and City leaders sought legislative assistance to obtain affordable water rights to Copan Lake, located north of Bartlesville.

In the end, the City's existing water sources, Hulah and Hudson lakes and the Caney River — in addition to water rights (to be acquired) at Copan Lake — were identified as the most viable options to sustain the area's water needs for the next 50 years. But while some temporary water rights were granted in the wake of the drought to help meet immediate needs, the federal government has yet to intervene on the City's behalf to provide additional water from Copan Lake at a rate affordable to taxpayers.

City Council members and staff agree: The cost to acquire water rights for Copan Lake at the current rate, in addition to constructing water lines and pump stations needed to pump the water to the City's water treatment plant, located northwest of Bartlesville, would place an unreasonable burden on the citizens of Bartlesville and the City's larger water customers.

As such, we continue to explore other, more viable options to meet the community's water needs into the next 50 years — and beyond. The City Council, staff and volunteer committee members remain dedicated to finding solutions for this very real and pressing problem and look forward to more discussion about these issues in the near future.

But until solutions are found and implemented, we encourage all methods of conservation and ask water customers to remain diligent in curbing their water use when possible. For more information on how you can conserve water and make the most of this resource, visit the city's website, or contact the Water Utilities Department at 918-338-4116.

To learn more about the City of Bartlesville, visit www.cityofbartlesville.org or call 918-338-4132. City Council meetings are held the first Monday of every month at City Hall, 401 S. Johnstone Ave., and are open to the public. Special meetings are called as needed.