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## LEVEL CONTINUES TO DROP



STEPHEN SPILLMAN : AMARILLO GLOBE-NEWS FILE

**RECORD LOW:** Rocks are tossed to form a temporary boat ramp at Lake Meredith in October. The record-low lake level was brought on by drought conditions as well as an invasive plant sucking up water. The shortage is forcing cities to look at other water-supply options.

## WATER ALLOTMENT

Here's a look at cities' water allotments for 2007 and 2008 from the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority. One acre foot equals about 325,800 gallons. (All figures in acre feet.)

### ■ Amarillo

2008: 31,427  
2007: 33,280

### ■ Lubbock

2008: 29,646  
2007: 31,499

### ■ Borger

2008: 4,439  
2007: 4,716

### ■ Pampa

2008: 3,948  
2007: 4,307

### ■ Plainview

2008: 2,952  
2007: 3,137

### ■ Levelland

2008: 2,232  
2007: 2,371

### ■ Brownfield

2008: 1,758  
2007: 1,868

### ■ Lamesa

2008: 1,743  
2007: 1,852

### ■ Slaton

2008: 1,260  
2007: 1,339

### ■ Tahoka

2008: 368  
2007: 391

### ■ O'Donnell

2008: 222  
2007: 236

# Low lake means 11 cities in Texas to get less water

## ■ Conservation in Panhandle urged while alternate sources are sought

By **BETSY BLANEY**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**LUBBOCK** — West Texas officials are cutting the 2008 water allotments to 11 cities because Lake Meredith is dangerously low.

The record-low lake level at one of the region's major water sources was brought on by brutal drought conditions in two of the past three years as well as an invasive plant sucking up water. **And the shortage is forcing cities to look at other options.**

"As the level of Lake Meredith drops, that does emphasize the need for Lubbock to continue the development of its water supply," said Tom Adams, deputy city manager.

The Canadian River Municipal Water Authority provides water from the Panhandle lake as well as groundwater wells in Roberts County. For the third straight year, the cities will get 5,000 fewer acre feet of water, down to 80,000 acre feet. One acre foot equals about 325,800 gallons.

About 30,000 acre feet from the allotment will come from the lake, which on Monday reached a record low of 50.73

feet. The remaining 50,000 acre feet will come from Roberts County wells. When the lake opened in the mid-1960s, the annual allocation was 126,000 acre feet.

"The cutbacks are proportional to their allocations," said Kent Satterwhite, the authority's general manager.

The authority supplies water to Pampa, Borger, Amarillo, Plainview, Lubbock, Slaton, Tahoka, O'Donnell, Lamesa, Brownfield and Levelland.

If the level continues to drop, officials may need to consider costly engineering options, like installing pumps to get water that the current infrastructure wouldn't be able to reach.

Even though last year's allotment of 85,000 acre feet was more than the cities used, the cutbacks have forced some cities to realize their water supplies are finite.

Amarillo is buying its own water rights and adding wells in Potter and Carson counties, Satterwhite said.

In Lubbock, planners warn that continued dips in the lake could trigger drought restrictions in 2010.

The city also is using wells in nearby Bailey County and has accelerated plans for a costly concrete pipeline from Lake Alan Henry, about 60 miles to the southeast. Once built, that lake could provide Lubbock half its annual total, Adams said.

Lubbock, the authority's second largest customer city, also is urging conservation. A city report Wednesday said Lubbock set a record for lowest daily consumption per consumer, at 144 gallons. The previous low came in 2004, when each resident used 160 gallons per day.

"That is a significant reduction," Adams said. "Setting a new low like that is a showing that the conservation is working."

The cost of water to customer cities has risen in recent years because the authority has purchased additional water rights, is developing other well fields and must pay to pump water from the Roberts County wells.

Cutbacks have come because of drought conditions in 2005 and 2006. Authority officials also point to water being sucked from the lake by salt cedar trees, an ornamental yet invasive plant brought to the U.S. decades ago to help diminish wind erosion.

"If we got the rains we could overcome the salt cedar issue," Satterwhite said.

An acre of mature salt cedar can suck as much as 14 acre feet of water annually. One mature tree can produce as many as 500,000 seeds a year, making elimination nearly impossible.

Nearly \$1.3 million will be spent next year to spray more than 7,800 acres of the plant.