

Scientists study ways to safeguard water

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U.S. researchers say the smartest way to safeguard a reservoir's water is to let it drain into the ground.

That discovery came during local water shortages in Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, all of which say scientists could be microcosms of water shortage issues looming across the Western United States.

Tom Brikowski, a University of Texas-Dallas hydrology professor, says in three cases -- at the Cedar Bluff Reservoir in Hays, Kan.; the Optima Lake Reservoir at Guymon, Okla. and the Storrie Lake Reservoir at Las Vegas -- water losses from evaporation are so high they can accelerate water supply emergencies for farms and cities.

In the Hays, Kan., case the trouble starts 20 miles upstream at the Cedar Bluff Reservoir, said Brikowski. That reservoir gets only half the inflowing water it did when built in 1949, losing 75 percent of its inflow to evaporation.

"You get to the point where you can't afford to lose that much water," said Brikowski, "and your only other alternative is to store it underground."

Brikowski and Wayland Anderson, a Denver engineer, are presenting their study this week in Longmont, Colo., during a Geological Society of America conference.

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