

SAND SPRINGS *oklahoma*

OUR WATER SYSTEM - A WONDER OF THE REGION

"River City Reflections" 2007-08-26

Our Water System - A Wonder of the Region

Most days, people in Sand Springs don't think about water. They really don't have to as it seems to be always there when they turn on the faucet. It's always safe to drink, and the supply always seems to be plentiful.

We take our water supply and distribution system for granted. That in itself is the envy of many areas of the country. Through water supplies at Skiatook and Shell Creek lakes, Sand Springs has enough water rights to accommodate growth well through this century.

Our distribution system covers about a 150 square-mile area – reaching into some very remote parts of western Tulsa County, northern Creek County and southeastern Osage County. People here can fulfill their dream of having room to stretch away from the city while having the most necessary of city services on tap, so to speak.

I am absolutely amazed at how our water system works. It's more than just pipes and pumps; it's about plans and partnerships. Through a unique joint venture, the cities of Sand Springs and Sapulpa draw raw water from Skiatook Lake and pump it about 17 miles south to a pair of large storage tanks near Highway 97-T. From there, the water flows down to the River City Park area where a line splits off to serve the Sand Springs treatment plant and another line continues south to Sapulpa.

Our two cities have been partners in this venture for two decades, and we are the envy of the region for it. Our supply needs are plentiful, and we cannot be held hostage in our growth endeavors by another entity refusing to sell us needed water. In short, we control our own destiny.

Through the years, our City officials have managed this treasured resource prudently. In the 1960s, they secured water rights to what was then a conceptual Skiatook Lake. In the 1970s, they asked voters to approve an ongoing penny sales tax funding source for water and sewer capital improvements. In the 1980s, they created the landmark Sand Springs-Sapulpa Joint Water Board and undertook the massive construction project to convey water from Skiatook Lake to the two cities. In the 1990s and in this decade, City officials have funded upgrades to the water treatment process to keep pace with customer growth and increasingly stringent water quality regulations. They have also funded improvements to the distribution system to boost flows and pressures in critical areas.

From my observations and through my conversations with officials in other cities, I've come to appreciate how valuable our water system is and the confidence our leaders and you, the citizens and customers, have shown in it over the years through the continued sales tax funding for capital improvements. With the proposed half cent sale tax vote for street improvements nearing, citizens can turn on a similar working model of success each time they turn on their faucet.

As most of you know, our system's reliability was put to the test a few weeks ago when a power outage shut down the pumps at Skiatook Dam. We faced the prospect of running out of Skiatook water within a few hours. What I saw unfold was impressive. The media was quickly alerted to ask customers to conserve water, and backup plans were implemented. Through water supplies at Shell Creek Lake and emergency links with the City of Tulsa, we had enough redundancy in the system to get us through the crisis.

The employees who managed this crisis were exceptional. We were very fortunate that a combination of conservation and repairs to the electrical system restored water to the system in about six hours. At no point was the good quality of our drinking water in question. Customers will be comforted to know that we would have kept an adequate amount of water flowing for drinking and bathing purposes if the power outage had been prolonged. Of course we learned a few lessons along the way. As in any untested emergency circumstance, there are always things that could have been done differently. However, it demonstrated that the investment we, as citizens and water customers, have made in the system are very worthwhile. Those quality investments will need to continue with all of our infrastructure needs if we are to expect quality results.

Think of that the next time you're thirsty. Our water is there for you, and your investment in the systems that bring it to you keeps it a wonder of the region. Thank you for your part in helping create it, and in keeping it such a success.