

California town representative of unrelenting drought's travails. Would biotech have helped?

By ACSH Staff — March 10, 2014



Few regions of California have escaped the malign influence

of the months-old droughts. Lake of the Woods, a small mountain town, is no exception. Though the lake after which the town is named dried up 40 years ago, there are five wells under the dry lakebed that constitute the community's total water supply. Unfortunately, the dire conditions brought on by the drought have left only two of the five wells able to provide water. Typically snow from winter supports the water supply of the wells in time for spring. However, not only has mother nature failed to sustain water levels, methods of water conservation have also failed to remedy the situation, jeopardizing the town's most basic needs drinking water.

Adam Nagourney's [article in the NY Times](#) ^[1] describes many unfruitful attempts of Lake of Woods residents to preserve water stores: So far, nothing has seemed to have helped: not the yearlong ban on watering lawns and washing cars, not the conscientious homeowners who clean their dishes in the sink and reuse the gray water on trees, not even the three inches of rain that soaked the area last weekend. Three attempts to drill new wells, going down 500 feet, have failed. At this point, the town is scrambling for new alternatives because state officials predict the existing water supply no more than three months.

The topography making up the town by nature makes drilling even more difficult. David A. Warner, a senior community development specialist from a local nonprofit group that has been assisting residents during the drought, says It's different in the San Joaquin Valley: You can drill and find water. Up here in the mountains, it's much harder. Farmers need water. Cities need waters. Everybody is lining up for a driller. We had a bid for test wells, and the driller said he won't be able to be out there until April.

The drought has left residents facing uncertainty about the future, and unforeseen challenges: flushing toilets, taking showers, brushing teeth. Town resident Greg Gustafson says, It's not a nice feeling knowing that your town could be completely turned into a ghost town because they don't

have a water supply.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross said, This is truly a dire situation. While periodic droughts are certainly expected, this is historically unprecedented. This event might prove a useful wake-up call as far as crop yields and food supply are concerned. While as yet no such shortages are reported, the development of GMO crops that can withstand severe water deprivation would be an insurance policy against weather-related shortages, although clearly this is more of a concern in those areas where a dry rainy season can spell outright famine.

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[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/us/a-dry-california-town-struggles-to-save-its-water-supply.html?hpw&rref=us>