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## Parched Southwest cast envious eye at Midwest

By Tim Martin  
Lansing State Journal

Folks are flocking to Nevada faster than any other state. And if the pace continues, there might not be enough water for all of them.

Wells are running dry near Pahrump, a desert town 60 miles west of Las Vegas, as residents withdraw water faster than nature replenishes the supply. Some of the region's wells are flowing with just 5 percent as much force as a few decades ago.

Nevada and other portions of the Southwest - the fastest-growing region in the nation - are the shortest on water. There could come a day when the Great Lakes region - with 20 percent of the world's fresh water supply - comes under pressure to share the wealth.

"I see that happening, somehow, sometime," said Tom Buqo, a hydrologist based in Blue Diamond, Nev. "Demographers say the people are going to keep coming. We'll have to get the water from somewhere."

Nevada's population grew 66 percent in the 1990s, dwarfing the U.S. average of 13 percent. Pahrump, a town of about 25,000, uses about 9.8 billion gallons of water each year - about 10 percent more than is naturally replaced by rainfall.

It'll get worse before it gets better. Pahrump's population could quadruple in the next 50 years, urban planners say.

The town already is planning ways to tap water supplies 30 miles away. But the hunt is complicated because some available water might be on federally protected lands, or worse, located near an old nuclear weapon test site that scientists expect will sooner or later contaminate possible drinking water supplies.

Buqo says hydrologists are literally searching for the last drop of water in Nye County.

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Colorado, Southern California and West Texas are among the other sites ranking as the thirstiest in the United States.

States are studying how to better distribute their own water supplies within their borders. Texas A&M researchers, for example, say the state should have enough water to supply its own population for another 50 years.

"It's just not in the right places," said Charles Gilliland, a university researcher.



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The western half of Texas is the most needy, researchers say. State officials have debated ways to tap the Mississippi River region for extra water, but those efforts have stalled.

Nevada and Southern California want bigger portions of water from the Colorado River for its populations.

Other states likely would tap the Missouri and Ohio rivers before directly tapping the Great Lakes because they are closer to the neediest areas.

And while not as severe, there are potential water shortages in communities closer to Great Lakes shores.

The city of Akron is involved in a court fight to sell some of its water to suburbs lying just outside the Great Lakes plain.

Last month, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission reported 12 townships could face water shortages by 2020. The rapidly growing region, including much of Kane County, is just outside the Chicago region already served by Lake Michigan - a network including 200 communities and private utilities.

Use of the water is limited by a Supreme Court ruling and an agreement between states bordering the Great Lakes. But as the population climbs and the available water supply drops, pressure to tap the world's largest fresh water reserves will grow.

"We want your water," Buco said of the Great Lakes' bountiful supply. "We're running out in lots of places."

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