

# MONTHLY NEWS REVIEW

Vol. 3, Issue 2, February 2003

Prepared by Mark Shafer, Oklahoma Climatological Survey

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### NATIONAL:

States' budget crisis worsens  
Deficit to increase to up to \$300 billion  
Appropriations cut to accommodate pork  
FY04 budget request to include a 4% increase  
Drought relief approved  
Administration split on dealing with science  
Panel says government needs overhaul  
Davis to push reorganization bill  
Agencies fail to track results  
Status of Legislation

### AGENCY NEWS

NRC report says NWS should keep forecasting  
NOAA Strategic Plan available for review  
E-government funds slashed  
Outsourcing requirements withstand challenge  
Portal for rules reviews introduced  
EPA considers adding bioterrorism sensors  
Bill would make EPA ombudsman independent  
Commerce's critical infrastructure chief leaves

### STATE / LOCAL

Oklahoma employment growth expected in 2003  
Rental rebates struck down  
Oklahoma may lose dam money  
Oklahoma releases energy plan  
Judge denies hog farm permit  
Aquifer bills introduced in Oklahoma House  
Water quality improvements could leave bad taste  
Secretary of Environment Tolbert seeks balance  
Secretary of State Savage emphasizes technology  
View from rural Oklahoma  
Oklahoma Legislation

### BUSINESS / ECONOMY

December sales worst performance on record  
Oklahoma obtained \$60 million venture capital in 2002  
Oklahoma could become top state for pecans

## WEATHER

Ocean temperatures linked to drought  
El Nino expected to persist through spring  
Western drought prompts concerns  
Missouri river nears record lows  
Arctic air moves southward  
South Asia cold snap among worst on record  
Fire forces NASA site offline  
Ice storm bills still unpaid

## CLIMATE

Mahoney testifies on climate change  
Gulf Stream has little effect on Europe  
Global pollutants offset each other somewhat  
NASA collaborates on international ozone study

## ENVIRONMENT

Administration wins battle on Clean Air Act  
Environmental lawsuits becoming last option  
Federal Government cuts California water  
Mexico releases Rio Grande water  
China embarks on river diversion plan  
Oregon watershed restoration national prototype  
New York to develop offshore wind farm  
Arkansas proposes changes in poultry regulations  
OWRB backs off on proposed wetlands rules  
Environmental fines at record level

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

President proposes funding for hydrogen-powered vehicles  
Chickasaw Nation gets computer grant  
Federal IT outsourcing on rise  
Pentagon seeks news sensors for aerosol attacks  
NCAR begins testing of new road management system  
Author persecuted for unpopular view  
Employees pose biggest threat to computer security  
Quantum computing becoming reality

SPECIAL: SNIPPETS FROM PARADE MAGAZINE “The Best & Worst of Everything”, 2002

---

*Monthly News Review* is prepared by the Oklahoma Climatological Survey. Its purpose is to provide a summary of weather and climate news or related issues that may help guide policy-makers in the Oklahoma Weather Center. Along with weather, climate, environmental, and science issues, the review includes issues on the national and state agendas and events that affect major businesses in Oklahoma that bear some relation to demands for weather-related information. The summaries and any opinions expressed herein are those of the author, and in no way reflect positions of the Oklahoma Climatological Survey or the University of Oklahoma.

## NATIONAL

**States' budget crisis worsens** (AP 1/27/2003) – State legislatures face a difficult year in finding funding for services. Already, states have cut services and cut staff levels, but there is no end in sight for the state crises. Much of the problem stems from over-spending during the late 1990s, when revenue growth was exceptional. Now, states have to come to grips with their promises and financial obligations. Many states used up their reserve funds last year, leaving few options but to engage in deeper service cuts. Twenty-four new governors are taking office, saddled with these tough decisions. Deteriorating tax bases, investment losses, and growing health-care costs have created enormous pressures on state budgets. The national Governors Association estimates a total shortfall of \$50 billion in the current fiscal year, ending June 30, and up to \$70 billion next year. California alone accounts for \$34.8 billion over an 18-month span of 2003-04. New York is looking at a \$12 billion deficit, while Texas' deficit is nearly \$10 billion.

**Deficit to increase to up to \$300 billion** (AP 1/16/2003) – Projections from President Bush's budget director place the deficit between \$200 billion and \$300 billion in the next two years. Mitchell Daniels, budget chief, noted federal shortfalls "for the foreseeable future," in contrast to earlier remarks that deficits would end by 2005. Daniels made his remarks to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

**Appropriations cut to accommodate pork** (AP/Oklahoman 1/18/2003) – Pet projects inserted into a \$390 billion spending bill, which includes every federal agency except defense, account for more than \$7.8 billion. In order to restrain overall spending, Republicans implemented a 2.9% across-the-board cut to allow for funds needed for drought assistance, education, Medicare, and modernizing election systems, which total \$11 billion. Ted Stevens (R-AK), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said: "take the members' accounts out of this bill, there'd be no across-the-board cuts." The bill combines 11 agency appropriations bills that were supposed to be completed by October 1, 2002.

**FY04 budget request to include a 4% increase** (GovExec.com 1/22/2003) – OMB Director Mitch Daniels said President Bush's 2004 budget request would include a 4% increase, or about \$30 billion in new funding over an assumed \$752 billion discretionary spending in FY03. The increase is much less than recent years, such as a 9% increase from 2002 to 2003. Daniels noted that the baseline budget is already "enormous", so a 4% increase presents a healthy infusion of new funds. Daniels would not elaborate on specific agency budgets.  
<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/012203cdam1.htm>

**Drought relief approved** (Washington Post 1/23/2003) – The Senate approved a \$3.1 billion assistance package for farmers suffering weather-related losses. The assistance includes relief for losses suffered as a result of drought, floods, hurricanes and other disasters. The aid is only about half that introduced by then-Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) last year. The measure provides for automatic payments to growers of staple crops in counties that have been declared disaster areas, whether or not the individual farmer has suffered losses. Those outside of disaster-declared counties have to show a loss of more than 35% of the value of their crop. The aid is in addition to \$5.2 billion previously made available to farmers.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30725-2003Jan22.html>

**Administration split on dealing with science** (Chemical and Engineering News 1/20/2003) – Some administration officials have expressed concerns about publication of “sensitive but unclassified” information in scientific journals. Speaking at a January 9 National Academies workshop titled “Scientific Openness and National Security,” Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director John Marburger III stated that, under policies set by the Reagan Administration, fundamental research was to remain unrestricted unless classified. But another OSTP staff member, Penrose (Parney) Albright, cautioned that research in life sciences could be used by terrorists and should be kept out of public circulation. Although no conclusions were reached at the workshop, there was general agreement on the need for dialogue with staff from national security agencies. [*Note: Thanks to John Cortinas for sending this article!*]  
<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/topstory/8103/print/8103notw6.html>

**Panel says government needs overhaul** (GovExec.com 1/7/2003) – The National Commission on the Public Service recommended an overhaul of government agencies. The commission, headed by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, recommended reorganizing departments along functional lines and implementing more flexible personnel systems. The report recommends combining agency operations that have a rational connection to each other, creating “super-departments” and then providing more autonomy to the manager to “get the job done.” Volcker said the commission advocated reducing the number of political employees, providing a broader career for federal employees to manage new departments, and to match Congressional committees along the lines of the new departments.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/010703t1.htm>

Commission Report: <http://www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/GS/CPS/volcker/report.htm>

**Davis to push reorganization bill** (GovExec.com 1/22/2003) – House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) plans to introduce legislation that would give the president broad authority to reorganize federal agencies. Reorganization and civil service system reforms are among the top priorities for Davis’ committee. Davis notes a good fit between the National Commission on the Public Service recommendations and President Bush’s “Freedom to Manage” initiative. The cornerstone of the civil service reforms is to provide more flexible pay scales and to link employee compensation more closely to job performance. Davis says that getting hired and getting fired are two of the most difficult things in federal government. Davis hopes to have legislation complete by August, but notes that it will encounter resistance.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/012203t1.htm>

**Agencies fail to track results** (GovExec.com 1/30/2003) – An Office of Management and Budget (OMB) review showed that half of 234 federal programs analyzed could not demonstrate results. The OMB reviewed 20 percent of all federal programs and found that 30% were effective or moderately effective, 14% were adequate, and 5% were ineffective. The remaining 50% of programs could not identify outcomes. Instead, they tended to focus on outputs such as number of people served or number of brochures printed. The OMB assessment looked at program purpose, planning, management, and results. It used both agency documents and outside reviews to assess effectiveness. The review is the beginning of an ongoing process in which 20% of all programs will be reviewed each year.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/013003w1.htm>

**Status of Legislation** (newly added to report; action noted; legislation passed; legislation failed):

- Appropriations Bills: H.J. Res. 2 continuing resolution amended by Senate with 11-agency omnibus appropriations bill; in conference committee.
- HR 238: “Energy Research, Development, Demonstration, and Commercial Application Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/8/2003 by Rep. Boehlert; Referred to House Resources and Science committees; supports energy research, reduce consumption from imported sources, improve energy efficiency and supply, reduce environmental impacts, aid domestic production, and stimulate markets for advanced energy technologies.
- HR 460: “Wildfire Prevention Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/29/2003 by Rep. Hayworth; Referred to House Agriculture and Resources committees; establishes Institutes to conduct research on the prevention of and restoration from wildfires in the interior West.
- S 17: “Global Climate Security Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/7/2003 by Sen. Daschle; Referred to Committee on Environment and Public Works; initiates federal actions to reduce risks from climate change to the economy, the environment, and quality of life (contains major provisions of climate change amendments to Energy Policy Act of 2002).
- S 139: “Climate Stewardship Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/9/2003 by Sen. Lieberman; Referred to Committee on Environment and Public Works; provides for scientific research on abrupt climate change, establishes greenhouse gas emissions tradeable allowances that could be used interchangeably with passenger fuel economy standard credits, limits greenhouse gas emissions in U.S., and reduce dependence upon foreign oil.
- S 194: “National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Registry Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/17/2003 by Sen. Corzine; Referred to Committee on Environment and Public Works; establishes and inventory of greenhouse gas emissions and encourage voluntary reductions in emissions.
- S 118: “Emergency Warning Act of 2003” – Introduced 1/9/2003 by Sen. Edwards; Referred to Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; provides for development of an all-hazards public warning system.
- S 212: “High Plains Aquifer Hydrogeologic Characterization, Mapping, Modeling and Monitoring Act” – Introduced 1/23/2003 by Sen. Bingaman; Referred to Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to cooperate with the High Plains Aquifer States to conduct a hydrogeologic characterization, mapping, modeling and monitoring program for the aquifer (originally introduced in House in 2002).

## AGENCY NEWS

**NRC report says NWS should keep forecasting** (National Academies of Science 1/30/2003) – A recently released report by the National Research Council concludes that despite potential competition with private-sector companies, the National Weather Service forecasts provide a vital service that should continue. Several companies argue that many local National Weather Service offices still provide specialized forecasts, despite formal policies that prohibit such forecasts. The report urged that data collected by the National Weather Service be made freely available, that the NWS should cooperate more closely with private industry, and that the NWS should discontinue specifically prepared forecasts that are typically provided by the private sector. Under a 1991 agreement, the NWS collects weather data, provides general forecasts, and issues hazardous weather information. The committee suggested that the 1991 policy should be replaced with one that emphasizes processes for interaction between the NWS and private companies, to lessen confusion about which types of forecasts are public or private purview.

<http://www4.nationalacademies.org/news.nsf/isbn/0309087465?OpenDocument>

**NOAA Strategic Plan available for review** (NOAA 1/17/2003) – Public comments on NOAA's draft strategic plan for FY 2003-FY 2008 are being sought through February 14, 2003. The planning process included a series of stakeholder meetings at several locations across the country, beginning in August 2002. The plan outlines four overarching goals, dealing with coastal and ocean resources, understanding climate variability, providing weather and water information, supporting safe and efficient transportation. The plan also identifies six core capabilities, consistent with the President's management agenda: integrated observation and data management systems, environmental literacy, state-of-the-art research, international collaboration, homeland security, and organizational excellence. Comments can be submitted through the web at <http://www.osp.noaa.gov>.

<http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/releases2003/jan03/noaa03007.html>

**E-government funds slashed** (GovExec.com 1/24/2003) – Appropriations bills in both the House and Senate provide \$5 million for e-government projects in Fiscal Year 2003. Forty million dollars were cut from the original earmark in the Senate. E-government is part of a Bush Administration initiative to make providing government services more efficient and more accessible. Ongoing efforts include free tax filing from the IRS and an "e-training site" for federal workers. An original bill, authored by Sen. Lieberman (D-CT) and embraced by President Bush, authorized \$345 million over four years for interagency technology initiatives. The original bill authorized \$45 million for FY03, \$50 million for FY04, \$100 million for FY05 and \$150 million for FY06.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/012403a1.htm>

**Outsourcing requirements withstand challenge** (GovExec.com 1/24/2003) – Under new OMB regulations, agencies must compete or outsource 15% of their commercial jobs, a total of 127,500 jobs, by October. Efforts in the Senate to remove numerical targets fell short. OMB officials had threatened to require that all federal commercial jobs be competitively bid if the 15% quota by October 2003 had been struck. The rules apply only to work done directly by federal employees; it does not include contract jobs.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/012403p1.htm>

**Portal for rules reviews introduced** (Washington Post 1/23/2003) – The Bush administration launched a new website, [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), that makes it easier for individuals to comment on proposed changes to the federal registry. The site provides a list of every federal regulation that is open for comment, with an opportunity for readers to submit their views. The Internet has already helped increase public comment on rules; the Department of Transportation receives twenty times more public comments than they received three years ago. More than 4,000 new rules are made each year by 160 federal agencies. Some caution that the easier access will not necessarily change the process. Advocacy groups can flood an agency with comments from their membership, analogous to an electronic version of postcards.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30469-2003Jan22.html>

**EPA considers adding bioterrorism sensors** (AP/Oklahoman 1/23/2003) – The Environmental Protection Agency is considering adapting 4,000 environmental monitoring stations to include the ability to detect smallpox, anthrax, or other deadly airborne germs. The system currently monitors air pollution. Any detection would be sent to national laboratories for DNA analysis confirmation within 24 hours of detection.

**Bill would make EPA ombudsman independent** (GovExec.com 1/14/2003) – Several representatives and senators, from both sides of the aisle, introduced bills to increase the autonomy of the EPA's ombudsman. Critics have long argued that the ombudsman comes under pressure from EPA officials during reviews of Superfund cleanup decisions, while administration officials believe critics use the office as a means to embarrass the EPA. The bill would separate funding and staffing decisions from the EPA, creating an independent entity within the organization. In 2001, EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman moved the ombudsman from the Superfund office to the Office of Inspector General, raising complaints from then-Ombudsman Bob Martin that the reorganization was designed to silence criticism within the EPA. Martin's congressional allies introduced similar legislation in the last session of Congress, but it did not pass the House.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/011403cd2.htm>

**Commerce's critical infrastructure chief leaves** (GovExec.com 1/16/2003) – John Tritak announced that he will not seek a position in the Homeland Security Department. Tritak, director of the Critical Infrastructure Assurance Office, was responsible for coordinating and implementing the "National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure Protection" and Project Matrix, which federal agencies use to assess their reliance on critical infrastructures. The position will be absorbed into the Homeland Security Department in March.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/011603td2.htm>

## **STATE / LOCAL**

**Oklahoma employment growth expected in 2003** (Oklahoman 1/23/2003) – Oklahoma State University economists say Oklahoma should experience a 1% increase in employment during 2003, up from 0.44% in 2002. Although last years employment growth was anemic, Oklahoma ranked 11<sup>th</sup> nationally in overall job growth, one of only twenty states to experience a net gain from November 2001 to November 2002. National job growth is projected at 0.93% for 2003. Original projections for 2003 were a 0.73% job growth. Services and financial sectors are expected to post the strongest gains, while manufacturing and energy should continue to decline. State and local government employment is projected to remain flat, although some federal sector hiring is possible. Oklahoma City is projected to lead with a 1.2% growth, with Tulsa up 1%.

**Rental rebates struck down** (Oklahoman 1/6/2003) – The Oklahoma Attorney General determined that recent “rental adjustments” of lease rates in three Panhandle counties were in violation of state law. The Commissioners of the Land Office decided in October to grant some relief to ranchers in the drought-stricken counties, believing that the drought was more severe than in the 1950s, when the Attorney General struck down a similar adjustment to contracts. As a result, promised rebates will not be issued, angering many who had planned on the checks. Commissioners have been watching the impacts of the drought, limiting cattle on some lands and withdrawing other parcels from future bidding to allow time for grass to recover. Some feel the state got caught in a tough position: “Dry weather and a poor market makes the state a bad boy.”

**Oklahoma may lose dam money** (Oklahoman 1/27/2003) – Oklahoma must raise more than \$3 million in order to obtain \$9 million federal match for repair of aging flood-control dams. Oklahoma has 59 small dams that are at or beyond their design life. The farm bill included funds to replace aging structures, with a 35% state match requirement. Last year Oklahoma received \$2.5 million of the \$10 million total allocation, and is allocated \$9 million of the FY03 \$45 million allocation. The flood-control projects, many of which were built across western Oklahoma in the 1940s and 1950s, are being described as an infrastructure crisis. Advocates of the program point toward potential disasters that have been avoided because of the presence of the retention structures, however the tight state budget this year makes finding matching funds a challenge.

**Oklahoma releases energy plan** (Oklahoman 1/8/2003) – Outgoing Energy Secretary Robert Sullivan Jr. unveiled a 25-year strategy for Oklahoma’s energy industry. The plan includes increasing incentives, marketing resources, and developing renewable energy resources. Sullivan pointed to the declining oil and gas production in the state, which peaked in 1967 and 1990, respectively. Major initiatives include aggressive research to reduce the costs of production, streamlining regulation processes, implementing a national marketing plan to open new markets, and developing renewable resources such as wind, solar, and biomass. Sullivan believes the key to successful implementation lies in building partnerships between the universities and industry.

**Judge denies hog farm permit** (Oklahoman 1/28/2003) – For the first time, an administrative law judge struck down a hog farm permit. The permit, requested by Land O’ Lakes for a facility in Beaver County, was found to be “plagued with errors” with no guarantee that waste could be safely disposed without jeopardizing nearby water resources.



**Aquifer bills introduced in Oklahoma House** (Oklahoman 1/27/2003) – Representatives Danny Hilliard (D-Sulphur) and Paul Road (D-Tishomingo) filed bills in the Oklahoma legislature to limit withdrawals from state aquifers. House Bills 1083 and 1421, respectively, would limit withdrawals for water for use outside of the basin and would place a moratorium on temporary permits until new rules are issued to protect groundwater quality.

**Water quality improvements could leave bad taste** (AP/Oklahoman 1/14/2003) – The Army Corps of Engineers is considering measures to improve water quality and reduce flood damage in the Verdigris River basin, which includes Lake Oologah that supplies half of Tulsa's drinking water. Tulsa officials worry that cleaning up the water may allow more sunlight to penetrate the water, leading to an increase in algae that gives water a bad taste and smell. Lake Oologah has a higher concentration of phosphorus than Eucha or Spavinaw, the feature of battles over water quality between Oklahoma and Arkansas, but due to its turbidity, little sunlight penetrates the surface, keeping algae growth in check. The Corps would like to reduce the suspended solids in the watershed.

**Secretary of Environment Tolbert seeks balance** (Oklahoman 1/20/2003) – Miles Tolbert, Oklahoma's new Secretary of the Environment, wants to balance environmental protection with business growth and development. Tolbert faces a number of challenges to Oklahoma's environment, including a \$300 million bill for the cleanup of the Tar Creek superfund site, issues related to hog waste in western Oklahoma and excessive phosphorus in eastern Oklahoma rivers. Tolbert holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Stanford and a law degree from Harvard. He worked in the Oklahoma Attorney General's office from 1996-2001, including being the lead environmental attorney for four years.

**Secretary of State Savage emphasizes technology** (Oklahoman 1/21/2003) – Former Tulsa mayor Susan Savage is looking toward streamlining delivery of government services as she takes office as Oklahoma's new Secretary of State. Savage believes that technology can be better employed to improve efficiency, making state government services more "technology-reliant." Savage is best known as the longest-serving Mayor in Tulsa's history. During her tenure, the city made major strides in infrastructure and road improvements and in protecting the city's water supply. The Reason Public Policy Institute of Los Angeles ranked Tulsa 3<sup>d</sup> nationally in delivery of services.

**View from rural Oklahoma** (Oklahoman 1/11/2003) – A new report by the Office of State Finance and Oklahoma Department of Commerce reviews rural communities, issues, and their concerns. The report, "The View from Rural Oklahoma," summarizes business, government, and life in general in 233 towns. It noted no substantial differences in issues and challenges between eastern and western Oklahoma. Population loss was a major concern common to most communities. The report is based upon 2-hour sessions during a one-year period, held with community leaders, business owners, newspaper editors, and political leaders in each of the communities.

## **Oklahoma Legislation:**

HB 1038: requires hydrologic surveys before setting maximum annual yield for a groundwater basin; requires hearing before issuing permits.

HB 1051: “Oklahoma Carbon Sequestration Enhancement Act”; develops plan to quantify carbon sequestration activities; creates advisory committee to Conservation Commission; identify opportunities to participate in marketing & credits.

HB 1082 / SB 800: shell bill; “Government Reorganization Act of 2003” / “State Agency Consolidation Act of 2003”

HB 1083: sets criteria for determining maximum annual yield for aquifers, based upon a minimum basin life of 100 years; restricts permits for use outside of counties overlaying the aquifer

HB 1421 / SB 304: places a moratorium on temporary groundwater permits until Water Resources Board develops rules to protect groundwater quality.

HB 1512: “Oklahoma Emergency Management Act of 2003” – sets requirements for emergency management offices and personnel; requires emergency preparedness plans; defines makeup of advisory councils; defines hazard mitigation and management programs.

HB 1610: creates continuing, revolving funds in Corporation Commission to respond to emergency situations of leaking storage tanks; funds received from federal government, state match, and private sources; expenditures recovered from entity responsible for tank.

HB 1626: commissions a study by the Joint Electric Utility Task Force to examine issues relating to restructuring the electric utility industry; bill appears identical to one submitted in 1997 session (deadlines reflect milestones in 1997-2002).

HB 1636: “Oklahoma Net Metering Act”; establishes criteria for net metering (the sale of excess electricity from small energy systems to utilities).

HB 1660 / SB 222: exempts farm ponds, wetlands not under federal jurisdiction, and waste treatment systems from “waters of the state” definition, which defines bodies covered in Clean Water Act.

HB 1679: creates Statewide Water Policy Planning Commission; moratorium on sale of waters outside of Oklahoma.

HB 1728: requires all environmental agencies to create Water Quality Standards Implementation plans with review every 3 years; adds regulations on nonpoint sources for high quality or sensitive water supplies; encourages the development of studies and public education.

HB 1763: creates Agricultural Policy Legislative Advisory Committee to offer recommendations to increase the viability of agriculture in Oklahoma.

HJR 1024: Amend Oklahoma Constitution to authorize a program for beneficial utilization and protection of natural resources; dedicates revenues for programs, mitigation, and liability.

SB 309: Prohibits new or expanding poultry feeding operations within a one-hundred year flood plain or within one mile of state waters.

SB 316: Amends Oklahoma Water Quality Standards; provides federal standards shall be used for groundwater until OWRB creates such standards.

SB 342: Funding for the Oklahoma Wind Power Initiative at EVAC.

SB 387: Requires OWRB to do a hydrologic study of groundwater and its relationship to surface waters before issuing permits; to not exceed a one-hundred year life of the basin; prohibits permits for use outside of basin in most cases.

SB 429: Tax credit for new ethanol production facilities.

SB 547: Modifies appointment of state climatologist; requires the Oklahoma Climatological Survey to maintain and operate the Oklahoma Mesonet network.

SB 556: Creates Oklahoma Telecommunications Authority to “plan, promote, coordinate and develop a communications infrastructure that will provide a seamless delivery system for voice, data and video capacity throughout the state”.

SJR 8: Voluntary goals to promote renewable energy; creates the Renewable Energy Panel.

*Also of note (you will only see these in this February edition!):*

SB 341: Requires cloth napkins be used when eating barbeque (Sen. Ben Robinson, now term-limited, is filling a decades-old promise to a campaign donor...)

SB 719: Prohibits use of aluminum bats in public schools

SB 790: Requires OU and OSU to play Tulsa in basketball each year

HB 1759: Defines when it is appropriate for vehicles to make a left turn at intersections.

HJR 1008: Rescinds previous calls for a federal constitutional convention.

HJR 1028: Calls for an Oklahoma constitutional convention (OK Constitution requires a vote by the people every 20 years; last call was in 1970).

## **BUSINESS / ECONOMY**

**December sales worst performance on record** (AP/Oklahoman 1/10/2003) – The short holiday season contributed to a poor showing in sales, as even traditionally strong merchants such as Wal-Mart, Kohl's, and Target failed to meet earnings expectations. November-December same-store sales (those stores open at least one year) grew only 0.5% from the same period a year ago, the lowest since same-store records began being collected in 1970. The November-December sales period grew 2.2% in 2001. The period accounts for nearly 25% of retailers' annual revenues.

**Oklahoma obtained \$60 million venture capital in 2002** (Oklahoman 1/8/2003) – In a year when many venture capitalists held tightly to their wallets, Oklahoma scored its second-best year ever in acquisition of funds. The nearly \$60 million total was surpassed only by the \$71.7 million raised in 1999. Six of the eight funds investing in Oklahoma were first-time investors in the state, an encouraging sign for future funding. Recipients included companies from medical, educational, and information management businesses.

**Oklahoma could become top state for pecans** (Oklahoman 12/15/2002) – Oklahoma consistently places in the top 5 of six among pecan-producing states, but the Noble Foundation notes that Oklahoma is underutilizing its potential for pecan crops. Pecan trees adapt well to Oklahoma; ninety percent of those in the state grew without assistance. Specialists at Oklahoma State University note that one third of the crop is lost to wildlife. With a little attention, the state's 17 million pounds of pecans that are harvested could be increased substantially. Among the items needed to boost production is a local sheller; right now, all commercially-shelled pecans must be shipped out-of-state.

## WEATHER

**Ocean temperatures linked to drought** (AP/Oklahoman 1/31/2003) – NOAA climate scientists have found a link between sea surface temperatures in the Pacific and ongoing drought in the United States, Europe, and Southwest Asia. The study, which appears in *Science*, found persistent cold sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific and warm temperatures in the western Pacific and Indian oceans. Using three different climate models with varying starting conditions coupled with actual observations, the researchers were able to simulate the droughts. Martin Hoerling, with the Climate Diagnostics Center, noted that the warm waters of the western Pacific are unprecedented in the last 150 years. He said he was surprised at the strength of the relationship. The warm waters pushed the jet stream further north, reducing the amount of precipitation available across a broad mid-latitude band.

**El Nino expected to persist through spring** (AP/Oklahoman 1/10/2003) – The Climate Prediction Center reported that El Nino is in its mature stage, but are uncertain how long conditions will persist. Effects attributed to El Nino include drier than average conditions across the Ohio Valley and northern Rockies, increased precipitation in the South, and above-normal temperatures across the northern tier of states. Increased storminess along the West Coast is also often a feature of El Nino winters. The dry weather across the northern states has contributed to worsening drought conditions in the Great Plains, upper Midwest, and northern Rockies states.

**Western drought prompts concerns** (NOAA 1/17/2003) – The Climate Prediction Center's latest outlook shows continued dryness in the Midwest, northern Plains and central Rockies states for the next several months. Improvement is expected in the Southwest and central Plains. The continued drought is likely to have significant impacts on water supplies, which in western states are determined principally by wintertime snowpack. Rivers in Montana and Wyoming are expected to be less than one-half of their normal flows.

<http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/releases2003/jan03/noaa03008.html>

**Missouri river nears record lows** (Kansas City Star 1/23/2003) – An ongoing drought in waters that feed the Missouri River is leaving its effects on Missouri and Kansas. Drought across the region last year and two consecutive years of well below normal snowfall in the Rockies have left upstream reservoirs hurting, and less water to flow downstream. Unless spring rains can turn things around, many farmers in Missouri and Kansas will be forced out of business. Ironically, the 1993 Mississippi basin floods exacerbated the problem. The fast-flowing waters scoured the river channel, lowering the water level comparable to intakes. Navigation along the Missouri could also be impaired this year, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers considering closing barge shipping season a week earlier in autumn. [*Note: the Missouri Climate Center was a source for some of the information in this article.*]

<http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/local/5009032.htm>

**Arctic air moves southward** (AP/Oklahoman 1/24/2003) – An Arctic air mass, which has been gripping the East and Plains for weeks, began moving southward. The air mass brought a rare snowfall to North Carolina's Outer Banks and had Florida farmers hurriedly preparing for a freeze. The barrier islands received as much as nine inches of snow, whipped by 40 mile-per-hour winds. The high winds also hampered freeze-protection measures in Florida. The winds inhibited the ability of fruit growers to spray their crops, allowing the water to freeze and maintaining an internal temperature just above the freezing point. Florida Governor Jeb Bush temporarily suspended weight limits on trucks so that as much produce as possible could be harvested in advance of the freeze.

**South Asia cold snap among worst on record** (AP/Oklahoman 1/21/2003) – A long-lasting cold snap gripped much of south Asia during January. Temperatures in New Delhi dipped into the 30s, in an area where the average temperature is 58 degrees. The cold impacted an area fraught with poverty, affecting those least able to deal with the cold. More than 1,600 deaths are attributed to the cold in India and other south Asian nations. The cold also triggered a spike in pneumonia and bronchial infections, and medical treatment for many is not an option.

**Fire forces NASA site offline** (New Scientist 1/21/2003) – Australia's fires forced a temporary shutdown of NASA's Deep Space Network facility, the only one of its kind in the southern hemisphere. The brush fire was contained at the fence line, but the satellite dishes were pointed upward to prevent catching burning embers or damage from high winds. The facility is used to track and control unmanned spacecraft, including the Mars Rover scheduled for landing in January 2004. A nearby observatory, the oldest in Australia, was not so lucky; it was completely destroyed by the fires.

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99993289>

**Ice storm bills still unpaid** (Oklahoman 1/30/2003) – Several Oklahoma counties are still awaiting payment for debris removal costs associated with the Oklahoma ice storms of December 2000 and January 2002. Kay County has appealed a FEMA decision on its contract for cleanup costs. The county contracted for debris removal at \$16 per cubic yard, but the lowest bid was \$7.95 per cubic yard, which is what FEMA used for its reimbursement basis. The county has appealed and expects a final decision from FEMA soon. The county owes the contractor an additional \$1.1 million, which is being sought from FEMA. Kingfisher County also has an outstanding bill of \$261,000. Two appeals are still pending for the December 2000 ice storm – McCurtain County's \$1.2 million bill and \$310,000 for debris removal in Haskell County. Total state and FEMA costs related to the two events are \$157 million and \$94 million, respectively. In contrast, the May 3 tornado government costs were \$42 million. Ice storms are some of the most expensive disasters, because of the area affected.

## CLIMATE

**Mahoney testifies on climate change** (NOAA 1/8/2003) – NOAA’s deputy administrator James Mahoney, director of the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, testified recently on the status of climate change science. Mahoney noted that evaluation is essential before embarking on the nation’s largest-ever investment in environmental management. Also cited were efforts in an integrated global climate and ecosystem observation and data management system, which will be the subject of a Summit to be sponsored by the Bush Administration in summer 2003. Mahoney said the goals of the system are seamless acquisition and long-term storage of data on Earth’s physical, chemical and biological cycles to meet multiple demands, including climate analysis and prediction, natural resource management, and better understanding of ecosystems. The recent U.S. Climate Change Science Program’s Strategic Plan Workshop drew 1,300 participants who commented on provisions of climate science and the needs of the research community.

<http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/releases2003/jan03/noaa03002.html>

**Gulf Stream has little effect on Europe** (EurekAlert! 1/22/2003) – Researchers at Columbia University found that the Gulf Stream does not affect the wintertime temperature contrast between North America and Europe to the extent previously believed. Their findings, published in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society, showed that atmospheric circulation is far more important than ocean circulation. A simple model of ocean heat storage in summer and gradual release in winter provides heating to the lee side of the warm water. However, the magnitude of this warming is insufficient to explain observed variations. Instead, the researchers concluded that the Rocky Mountains act as an island in the atmospheric circulation, creating a persistent wave in the winds downstream. The wave transports colder air southward across North America and warmer air northward across Europe. In model simulations, the presence of the Gulf Stream had little effect on temperature variations, but when the Rocky Mountains were removed, North America warmed and Europe cooled. These findings are significant to climate change models, which emphasize the role of oceanic heat transport.

[http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2003-01/teia-crr012203.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2003-01/teia-crr012203.php)

**Global pollutants offset each other somewhat** (EurekAlert! 1/6/2003) – Carbon dioxide and hydrocarbons emitted by trees offset each other somewhat in an air pollution study by the University of Colorado. Commercial “Agriforests”, consisting of trees such as poplars, Eucalyptus, and Acacia, emit large amounts of hydrocarbons, a major component of surface-based smog. As carbon dioxide levels increase, however, hydrocarbon emissions are reduced.

[http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2003-01/uoca-tgp010603.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2003-01/uoca-tgp010603.php)

**NASA collaborates on international ozone study** (NASA 1/6/2003) – NASA researchers are among more than 350 scientists engaged in a month-long project to assess ozone and atmospheric gasses. The second SAGE III Ozone Loss and Validation Experiment (SOLVE II) runs from January 8 through February 6, 2003 in Sweden. The project is aimed at better understanding processes related to ozone loss in the Arctic and to validate satellite measurements.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

**Administration wins battle on Clean Air Act** (New York Times 1/22/2003) – New regulations regarding modernizing aging coal-fired plants will go ahead as planned, after the Senate voted down a measure to delay implementation by six months. The new plans, which allow plants to offset emissions increases with other antipollution devices, are the subject of protests and lawsuits by several northeastern states, where impacts are likely to be greatest. The amendment to the omnibus appropriations bill was defeated 50-46, although an alternate proposal was accepted by a vote of 51 to 45. The alternative allows the rules to move forward, but commissions a study by the National Academies of Science to review potential effects.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/23/politics/23SPEN.html>

**Environmental lawsuits becoming last option** (Washington Post 1/27/2003) – Environmental organizations are turning to the courts more often in an attempt to prevent implementation of new EPA rules. Environmental groups once used their close connections with Congress to block administrative changes, but their influence has dwindled since 1994. Consequently, they are turning to the courts. While courts generally defer to federal agencies when considering proposed rules, they do scrutinize new rules that overturn previous policies.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A46885-2003Jan26.html>

**Federal Government cuts California water** (AP/Oklahoman 1/6/2003) – California officials were unable to reach an agreement with their federal counterparts on a plan to reduce use of surplus water from the Colorado River. Until such a plan is submitted, the federal government ordered the state to turn off three of the eight large pumps at Lake Havasu. The pumps divert water into California's irrigation system. State officials are still trying to get agreement amongst local water districts to transfer water internally from water-rich areas to areas where demand is higher. The pumps shut-off does not affect current water use, but it does impede California's development of new water storage for use in future droughts.

**Mexico releases Rio Grande water** (AP/Oklahoman 1/11/2003) – Mexico has made a firm commitment to release 350,000 acre-feet of water from the Rio Grande basin for use in the United States. Under a 1944 treaty, Mexico is to provide 350,000 acre-feet annually to the U.S. from the Rio Grande and the U.S. provides 1.5 million acre-feet to Mexico from the Colorado River. Mexico has withheld water in past years due to a lingering drought, making it 1.5 million acre-feet in arrears on the treaty obligations.

**China embarks on river diversion plan** (New Scientist 11/26/2002) – The Chinese government has approved a Mao-era plan to divert water from the Yangtze River to the Hai, Huai, and Yellow Rivers in northern China. Three channels will be constructed, each over 1000 kilometers long and carrying 48 billion cubic meters of water annually. The project will provide water to the two-thirds of China's 600 major cities that suffer shortages, alleviating losses of about \$14.5 billion per year. Beijing, which will benefit from the channels, suffered its worst water shortage since before 1949, affecting about 33 million people.

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99993107>



**Oregon watershed restoration national prototype** (EurekAlert! 12/3/2002) – Oregon's Watershed Stewardship Education Program (WSEP) has become a national prototype. The program, in collaboration with Oregon State University Extension, helped train people in communities on techniques for restoring salmon habitats. The Sea Grant Program involves organizing local restoration work, landowner education, and university resources. The training program consists of eight modules, each of which has an indoor and field portion. Participants include watershed council members, teachers, farmers, foresters, and other individuals. The new training manual seeks to help people use the best available science and additional resources, and focuses on group processes such as decision-making, conversational skills, conflict resolution, and meeting management.

[http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2002-12/nsgc-bso120302.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2002-12/nsgc-bso120302.php)

**New York to develop offshore wind farm** (New York Newsday 1/23/2003) – The Long Island Power Authority is seeking developers for a wind project off Jones Beach. The \$150 million to \$200 million project would construct 25-50 windmills, capable of generating 100-140 megawatts, in an area three miles offshore, just outside the state's territorial waters limits, which eases the permitting process. The project meshes with Governor Pataki's call for 25% of energy in New York to be produced from non-polluting resources by 2013.

<http://www.newsday.com/news/local/longisland/ny-lilipa233099796jan23,0,5549904.story?coll=ny%2Dtop%2Dheadlines>

**Arkansas proposes changes in poultry regulations** (AP/Oklahoman 1/17/2003) – The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission has proposed new legislation that will track the production and application of poultry litter. The new legislation would mandate registration of growers with more than 2,500 birds and would limit the use of poultry litter and other nutrients as fertilizer in areas of the state where pollutants jeopardize watersheds. The measure is designed to decrease phosphorus runoff into the headwaters of rivers in eastern Oklahoma, which have been a source of contention between the two states for more than a decade. Oklahoma officials have not commented on the proposed regulations.

**OWRB backs off on proposed wetlands rules** (Oklahoman 1/15/2003) – The Oklahoma Water Resource Board revised changes to water quality standards, after hearing extensive criticism about proposed new standards. The changes in question affected regulation of wetlands. Because much of the federal wetlands regulations are mired in litigation, the Water Board tabled those proposed changes.

**Environmental fines at record level** (AP/Oklahoman 1/20/2003) – Oklahoma's Department of Environmental Quality issued \$2.6 million in fines in 2002, citing more companies than ever in its history. The 210 fines are a nearly tenfold increase over previous years. The department resorts to the fines as a final measure; much of the ten years since the department was formed in 1993 focused on working with violators to voluntarily clean up practices. At this point, most voluntary measures had run their course, leading to the upsurge in fines. In addition to the fines, \$16.7 million in supplemental environmental projects was obtained. Supplemental projects are requirements to improve the surrounding area.

## **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

**President proposes funding for hydrogen-powered vehicles** (AP 1/29/2003) – In his State of the Union address, President Bush proposed spending \$1.2 billion over an unspecified period to speed the development of hydrogen-powered zero-emission fuel cell vehicles.

**Chickasaw Nation gets computer grant** (Oklahoman 1/26/2003) – Microsoft is providing \$15,000 from its Technology Enriched Community Grants to the Chickasaw Nation Computer Literacy and Distribution program. The program refurbishes old computers to run Windows 98, Microsoft Word and Excel. The refurbished computers are provided to Native Americans. Fifty four percent of Americans own computers, but only about eight percent of Native Americans are on the Internet. Individuals, businesses, or other organizations wishing to donate to the program can contact Cliff Jones, program manager at (580) 421-7876 or cliff.jones@chickasaw.net.

**Federal IT outsourcing on rise** (GovExec.com 1/8/2003) – Outsourcing for information technology is projected to increase 18% annually, to about \$15 billion by 2007, according to the National Journal's Technology Daily. The figure is more than a 150% increase from the \$6 billion outsourced by federal agencies in 2002. Administrative pressure to competitively bid services and agencies' difficulty retaining and replacing qualified personnel are key factors in the increase. Current or planned IT initiatives also contribute to the demand.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/010803td1.htm>

**Pentagon seeks news sensors for aerosol attacks** (GovExec.com 1/8/2003) – The Defense Department launched a major initiative to develop sensors that can rapidly identify biological agents dispersed in aerosol form. The initiative, part of the Biological Defense Homeland Security Support Program, is soliciting proposals from qualified corporations, research centers, and universities to develop a system to defend population centers from germ warfare. A bidders conference will be held March 5 with selection in April.

<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0103/010803gsn1.htm>

**NCAR begins testing of new road management system** (UCAR 1/23/2003) – The National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) announced a new decision-support tool to aid highway managers in weather-related decisions. The new system, called the Maintenance Decision Support System, allows managers to couple forecast information with scenarios for management of weather-related problems, such as ice and snow. The system allows managers to run through a scenario of taking maintenance actions or not, and view the projected outcomes of each. It also allows managers to investigate the projected effects of chemical applications, and to optimize their use of chemicals. The system can also be used in good weather conditions to schedule repair and maintenance. The system uses forecasts for three-hourly intervals, up to two days in advance. It is being tested this winter at several centers in Iowa.

<http://www.ucar.edu/communications/newsreleases/2003/mdss.html>

**Author persecuted for unpopular view** (Oklahoman 1/25/2003) – Danish author Bjorn Lomborg endured a six-month investigation by the Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty for his views expressed in his 1999 publication “The Skeptical Environmentalist.” Lomborg, a former Greenpeace member and college professor, argued in his book that environmental problems are overstated; that energy is more abundant, food is more abundant, and most forms of pollution are exaggerated or transient. The Committee concluded that the book displayed “systematic one-sidedness,” but stopped short of finding an intentional misleading that could have cost him his job.

**Employees pose biggest threat to computer security** (Oklahoman 1/19/2003) – Routine actions by employees pose larger threats to company security than even the most prominent hacker attacks. E-mails prompt lawsuits, web pages open holes for hackers, and theft of intellectual property costs companies nearly \$24 billion annually. The American Society for Industrial Security claims that 74% of computer breaches come from within an organization, and virtually every company is at risk regardless of security procedures. A study conducted by the Computer Security Institute and Federal Bureau of Investigation found that 90% of companies reported security breaches within a 12-month period, including 85% reporting receiving computer viruses, 40% attacked through the Internet and 78% had employees who abused Internet access privileges. The study highlights the need for computer security policies as the basis for stopping breaches; without clear policies, employee actions open holes for hackers. One of the emerging threats comes from “drive-by hacking,” where hackers can connect to a company network via wireless networks. Home computers also create risks. While they allow employees to do company business outside the office, those same computers are used for other activities, including children using computers to play on-line computer games. These can also open access into company networks. Firewalls, changing passwords, and random audits of employee systems are some of the methods useful to secure company information.

**Quantum computing becoming reality** (New Scientist 11/29/2002) – Researchers in Australia and Austria have made breakthroughs in the new area of quantum computing. Unlike standard computers which use binary digits, quantum processors use qubits, which can have multiple states simultaneously. One of the more formidable barriers is the phenomenon on “decoherence”, where ions leak quantum information to the outside world. That barrier may have been surmounted by the development of a silicon chip containing phosphorus atoms, which are known for their long-lived quantum states. Until these new finding were unveiled, quantum technology was widely believed to be decades away.

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99993114>

## **SPECIAL: SNIPPETS FROM PARADE MAGAZINE'S "The Best & Worst of Everything", 2002**

**Best New Hue** (From The Washington Post) – A pair of astronomers who determined the color of the universe have now named that hue: Cosmic Latte. Karl Galzebrook and Ivan Baldry of John Hopkins University selected the name from among e-mailed suggestions, including Astronomical Almond, Skyvory, Univeige and Primordial Clam Chowder. The pair settled on Cosmic Latte, saying it was interesting because *latteo* means “milky” in Galileo’s native Italian. *When you wish upon a Starbucks...*

**Worst Vibrations** (From the Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Tenn.) – It started as a low hum, barely noticeable. But within months, the endless throbbing was like a corkscrew twisting into Diane Anton’s temple. The walls of her home in Kokomo, Ind., vibrated. Her bed shook. Nausea, short-term memory loss and hand tremors followed. “The noise was so penetrating,” she said. “It was just not getting better.” Anton took disability retirement, moved out of her house and fled. She was the first person driven out of the city by what’s come to be known as “the Kokomo hum.” As many as 90 people in this industrial city of 47,000 have complained about the low-frequency hum. While most residents don’t hear a thing beyond the typical sounds of factories and busy roads, the city council approved a \$100,000 study of the mysterious noise, often compared to an idling tractor trailer’s diesel engine.

**Worst Live Wire** (from The Dallas Morning News) – Bad news for people hoping that someday we can all sit around sipping margaritas while robots do the work. Scientists at the Magna Science Adventure Centre in England are programming 12 robots to think for themselves and to compete with one another. But Prof. Noel Sharkey said that when he turned his back on one of the robots for just 15 minutes, it escaped. The robot, named Gaak, went out the door to the parking lot, where it was almost run over by a car. The professor said he was surprised by Gaak’s initiative, but insisted there was no reason to worry. *The other robots decided to vote Gaak off for his lack of artificial intelligence.*

**Worst Obstruction of Justice** (from the Richmond Times-Dispatch) – The citizens of Sausalito, Calif., have been debating whether to build a new police station since a 1995 flood destroyed their old headquarters. The new building’s design has opponents who have complained about its size, aesthetics and, worst of all, its lousy *feng shui* (the art of harmonious arrangement that pays attention to how physical surroundings affect spiritual energy, or *chi*). According to Mayor J.R. Roberts, “There are energy forces we can’t see out there.” Critics say the proposed design would block the positive flow of energy through town. Feng shui expert Nancy Bennett testified that it would “cut off the mouth of chi” and create “arrows of sha.” The cops wonder if they’ll ever get their new building. Pessimists say, “Not in this lifetime.” To which the optimists reply, “But maybe in our next one.”

**Worst Drifters** (from the Rocky Mountain News, Denver) – A woman in Montbello, Colo., was trapped in her home by 3-foot tumbleweeds after high winds blew them into the yards of 20 homes. “We’ve never seen anything quite like it,” said Lt. Angela Cook of the Denver Fire Department. “We probably moved 200 tumbleweeds, and there were thousands there. We barely made a dent.” *From the next reality TV series "When Plants Attack..."*