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Well woes

■ The City of Jal hopes to correct its water well problems before the hot summer days arrive

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With summer fast approaching, Jal Mayor Claydean Claiborn has started feeling a bit anxious.

Summer weather doesn't make the mayor particularly nervous, but the thought of running out of water when demand peaks in August does.

Two of Jal's five water wells have become either unusable or unreliable, forcing the town of about 2,000 to look at drilling new ones. And quick.

"We want to be prepared for the hot summer months," Claiborn said.

She added that the situation does not threaten the city's water supply right now, but as the hottest months of the year approach, the city could suffer shortages.

"August is the month that really wipes us out on water," Claiborn said.

While she doesn't know when the work will start, or finish, Claiborn hopes the city can complete drilling the new wells before the end of July.

Installing two new wells, however, won't come cheap.

Because Jal draws from a particularly deep aquifer, drillers must

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extend more than 500 feet down. In addition, says Roy Miller a Hobbs-based civil engineer, the sand in the soil forces the city to use more expensive casings to filter out the ultra-fine sand.

All of those factors, combined with state regulations, could push the cost to \$145,600 for each well — and possibly \$180,000 each.

Currently the City of Jal has \$75,000 on hand for the water wells, but with the total price tag approaching \$300,000 or more Claiborn knows that won't cover their costs.

The two wells in need of replacement have largely become victims of simple old age.

Fred Seifts, Jal's public works director, said the city installed the two wells that need replacement sometime in the 1960s.

Seifts said well No. 2 has reached the point it is no longer producing water, and No. 3 has become marginal and unreliable.

No. 3 would still pump, though unreliably, but produced too much sand. Seifts

attributed the well's condition to simple old age and deterioration, but said he suspected the No. 2 well's casing might have corroded or collapsed.

Seifts and others with the City of Jal consider the wells beyond repair.

To help with the anticipated cost, the city has begun investigating various funding sources — especially loans.

Iona Kemp, with the City of Jal, said she had found a low-interest loan program through the Environment Department.

The City of Jal has also

explored possibly drilling two wells at once, because it would cost less to install them at one time instead of doing them in succession.

Even if installing them both at one time saves some money, the cost for the project will still take a serious bite out of Jal's finances.

"That's why we're looking to loans," Kemp said.

Regardless of where Jal finds the funds, those in city government agree something must happen before the summer months come around.