Kentucky Water District Declares State of Emergency

The district is facing critically low drinking water reservoir levels and water loss due to leakage

Drinking water reservoir runs low in Kentucky

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The Martin County, Ky., water district has declared a state of emergency due to critically low drinking water reservoir levels. The district’s intake pump, which transfers water from the Tug Fork river to the reservoir, failed. Since the failure, the district has continued to take water out of the reservoir, without replenishing it, causing the water level to drop, as reported by the Kentucky Herald-Leader.

While the district has spent approximately $100,000 in attempts to fix the pump, the attempts were unsuccessful, according to water board Chairman Jimmy Kerr. As a temporary fix, the district is renting two pumps to replenish the reservoir and transfer water from the reservoir to the treatment plant. However, the cost of renting the pumps exceed $18,000 a month and is forcing the district into debt.
“Without reliable raw water pumps, the district will not be able to supply adequate water to the reservoir and treatment plant, ultimately requiring restrictions of water use and risking significant water outages in Martin County,” the state of emergency resolution said.

Beyond pump failures, the district faces more than $1 million in debt, a water loss rate of more than 70% and a lack of resident trust regarding water quality. Numerous residents have reported taste and odor concerns, leading some residents to question the quality of water the district provides.

The district is considering a rate increase of 18% to cope with the necessary repairs, however, this increase would be on top of an already-implemented 18% emergency rate increase. Hope remains for word on two potential grants, one from the federal Abandoned Mines Lands program for $3.4 million and another from the Appalachian Regional Commission for $1.2 million. If funded, the grants would go towards a new intake pump, upgrades to the water treatment plant and repair of leaking service lines.

“In the meantime, the threat of a looming crisis is very real to the people of Martin County and the district is sinking farther and farther into debt as it spends more and more unbudgeted money on withdrawing raw water from the river,” said Mary Cromer, an attorney with Appalachian citizens’ Law Center.