



Beverly McGuire saw the warning signs before the town well went dry: sand in the toilet bowl, the sputter of air in the tap, a pump working overtime to no effect. But it still did not prepare her for the night last month when she turned on the tap and discovered the tiny town where she had made her home for 35 years was out of water.

"The day that we ran out of water I turned on my faucet and nothing was there and at that moment I knew the whole of Barnhart was down the tubes," she said, blinking back tears. "I went: 'dear God help us. That was the first thought that came to mind.'"

Across the south-west, residents of small communities like Barnhart are confronting the reality that something as basic as running water, as unthinking as turning on a tap, can no longer be taken for granted.

Three years of drought, decades of overuse and now the oil industry's outside demands on water for fracking are running down reservoirs and underground aquifers. And climate change is making things worse.

In Texas alone, about 30 communities could run out of water by the end of the year, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Nearly 15 million people are living under some form of water rationing, barred from freely sprinkling their lawns or refilling their swimming pools. In Barnhart's case, the well appears to have run dry because the water was being extracted for shale gas fracking.

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