

Commissioners cannot justify costs to recycle

Posted: Monday, Aug 24th, 2009

BY: Mari Muzzi

Despite Sublette County residents' objections about recycling dissolving, the commissioners said they could not rationalize spending \$500 per ton to recycle in the county.

"I am not being responsible if I continue to write a check every year for that service," said commissioner chair Bill Cramer during Thursday's commissioners' meeting. "That is not a responsible use of tax payers' money."

Cramer said he recycles and will continue even if recycling is no longer available in the county.

"What it boils down to is that it is not cost effective in this county," he said. "We've had 12 years or longer to give this a go (and) people are not recycling at the level that makes it even feasible."

Marti Seipp, coordinator at the Pinedale recycling center, said the Pinedale recycling center receives about 5 to 6 percent of the total recyclable waste in the county, and according to Melanie Woffinden, the Marbleton recycling center gets a little less than that.

The commissioners decided to cut funding to the county recycling centers, allowing them to operate for the next few months and then close down once the money runs dry.

About 40 residents attended Wednesday's recycling board meeting at the Pinedale Library and voiced their outrage about recycling coming to an end in Sublette County.

"I think our government entities should lead by example and telling us to put our recyclable materials in the landfill is not leading by a good example," said Pinedale resident Mary Lynn Worl during the recycling board meeting.

Residents also suggested ideas for reducing recycling costs and keeping the program alive.

And several sent emails to the commissioners stating they want recycling to remain.

A group of residents also attended Thursdays' commissioners meeting to voice their concerns about recycling in the county.

They said they would have liked more time to develop ideas to help the recycling program before the funding was cut.

The commissioners disagreed, saying the recycling programs have been in operation for about 12 years.

"There's been plenty of time to get the public involved in recycling," Cramer said. "It's not like it's only been three months, we've had this discussion every year for 12 years."

He said the county's volume might not be enough to support a recycling operation.

"And I've always heard we are only (recycling) about 5 percent (of the) waste stream out of the landfill," Cramer said, explaining that's not enough to justify the amount of money the county is spending.

Pinedale resident Jen Burton asked the commissioners if they have received public complaints about spending too much on recycling.

"I understand that it's your job to decide how and where to spend money in this county...but has the public ever come and voiced concerns?" she asked.

The commissioners said they haven't received complaints; however, they agreed many people were unaware of how much money was being used for the recycling programs.

"You have to understand that we have a responsibility to spend your money wisely," Cramer said.

He said if residents want to continue recycling they can take their items to Jackson, which is what he plans on doing.

"You can make a choice to recycle, you don't need us spending \$500 a ton," Cramer said.

The commissioners also said they are open to cost effective ideas for keeping recycling in the county. They said they would only fund \$100 per ton to the recycling centers.

The commissioners also said they wanted the public to understand they are not opposed to recycling.

"I don't like this mentality out there saying the commissioners are shutting recycling down," commissioner John Linn said. "I support recycling, but we have to come up with a different plan."

Linn proposed having a recycling center located at the landfill in a July article in the Sublette Examiner.

Residents also discussed ideas to keep recycling in the county during the commissioners meeting. One idea was having a contractor take over the recycling center.

Another idea was to increase the fee at the landfill to include recycling; however, the commissioners said the fees are set low for a reason.

"There's an incentive to keep the cost low so that people will dispose of their trash properly," Cramer said, explaining otherwise trash would be all over the county.

Another idea was having volunteers work at the recycling center, but due to the style of work and insurance purposes, recycling board members said this wouldn't work.

Residents also expressed their frustration with recycling ending in the county.

Pinedale resident Tim Lingle said he has a difficult time understanding why the county funds certain items, but doesn't want to continue paying to recycle.

"How much does it cost to supplement each person who flies into the Pinedale airport, which 90 percent of the people cannot use," Lingle asked the commissioners.

Linn explained funding the airport board is important because life flights use the facility.

"We have certain central services that we take care of ... roads, bridges and those sort of things. Recycling is part of that, but the landfill (is needed). We have to have a place to go with our trash."

One resident mumbled loudly "that's just what is needed, more roads" as the discussion ended and the commissioners moved to discuss the next item on the agenda.