

County, city spar about landfill

By Carole Cloudwalker, Cody Enterprise



Sanitation worker Les Field empties a load of garbage Tuesday at the landfill.

The city of Cody and Park County are at odds about whether the county dropped the ball on landfill planning.

Some city council members say the county should have done better planning at an earlier date, thereby being forewarned about high costs so they could seek grant funding to offset rising costs.

The county now is under the gun and will spend about \$3.2 million in the near future to line three cells at the Cody landfill during several years to meet a state/federal edict aimed at protecting groundwater from possible contamination by discarded household waste.

County officials counter that the rules were a moving target, and that they have been working hard for a long time to understand those rules.

"Did we drag our feet? Absolutely not," commissioner Tim French said of the criticism.

Of the current five commission members, French has served the longest and is most familiar with landfill issues.

He says City Hall critics are not telling the whole story.

"Of \$3.2 million, we put \$786,000 of county consensus money to the landfill," French said. "But the city has consensus money, too, and they didn't put any of it toward the landfill."

Consensus money is from a state fund providing allocations to counties for distribution, so long as the commissioners and governing bodies representing 70 percent of the incorporated populations in each county agree on its use.

In Park County, that includes Cody, Powell and the county itself.

In addition, French said, the county allocated \$1.7 million in federal stimulus money to the landfill project, as well as \$189,000 in county reserve funds.

"And even with the projected rate increase, we'll fall \$650,000 short," French added. "We will be picking that up."

Several years ago, the county learned from its landfill manager that landfills in Cody and Powell were filling rapidly.

"We looked at new land in Powell, and we looked at 65 acres of BLM land in Cody," French said.

The 65 acres are adjacent to the existing landfill in Cody and is the area where the new facility will sit, since it eventually was secured.

"That took years to do," French said. "Meanwhile, the state came up with the idea of lined regional landfills. We were two years into planning. We've had two processes going on for years."

They include:

- Planning and being prepared to have a lined pit in place in one year.
- Fighting the idea of a lined landfill, "because if we waited we'd be run out of town."

He said former landfill supervisor Dave Hoffert "brought to our attention that we were running out of room at Cody and Powell."

French said the county has been working hard for a long time on satisfying the state's changing requirements while searching for ways to pay for landfill needs.

"To say we haven't done anything is not true," French said.

Bucky Hall, who has been a commissioner four years, said since he's been in office "we've had meeting after meeting," and the city has sent representatives, from the late Mayor Roger Sedam to city staff members, to most sessions.

"Initially, we were fighting the Department of Environmental Quality," Hall said, adding that it was not easy to raise the tipping fee from \$50 to \$60, but at the time no haulers came to the meeting to object.

"There wasn't (much) participation," Hall added.

"For the longest time we intended not to line (the landfill)," he said. "We were trying to prove to the DEQ that we didn't need to line."

Hall said the emphasis on lined cells "is pretty much being driven by the feds."

He stressed that the new \$90 tipping fee "is a compromise," because the true cost is about \$120 per ton.

And with a higher tipping fee, "it's that much less the county has to borrow" to pay for the new cells, he said.

"It's not the county's money, it's the taxpayers' money," Hall added.

"We have kept (the city) in the loop as well as we possibly could."

Hall added that ultimately, "we want this to work and at the least possible cost."

He said recycling has not been the answer people hoped it would be, because in this area "it costs more to do that" due to long distances recyclables must be hauled.

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