

Landfill closure cost in millions

*By Kevin Huelsmann, Jackson Hole, Wyoming
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Teton County commissioners are contemplating several options, including a new sales tax, to come up with the funds they expect they will need to close the valley's old landfill in Horsethief Canyon.

Commissioners have not yet decided how they will clean up the site, but preliminary guesses about the cost of the work — which is driven by a state mandate — have ranged from \$2.5 million to \$6 million.

"One way or the other, the community has a significant expense," County Commission Chairman Ben Ellis said Friday. "We're going to have to start discussions about how to address that."

Town councilors and county officials are expected to take up the issue during a Feb. 6 joint meeting. Ellis said the meeting should give members of both entities a chance to get all of the options out on the table.

During a retreat earlier this month, county commissioners talked about funding options. They mentioned adding another penny of sales tax, raising property taxes, hiking tip fees, issuing revenue bonds and using state grants.

The conversation is being driven by a state requirement that the county's landfill be closed within the next several years. Staff from the state Department of Environmental Quality expect to set a deadline of 2016 or 2017.

County staff stopped putting trash in the landfill in the late 1980s, but it has never been closed officially. The site was capped — a layer of clay soil several feet thick was packed on top of it — but county staff have continued to use a small portion of the landfill to dispose of dead animals. County staff also stockpile and compost some materials on top of one portion of the protective layer of soil, which might be damaging the cap, county engineer Sean O'Malley said.

County officials also are considering several options to clean up the landfill. One course of action would require another cap on the site and moving trash disposal and recycling operations elsewhere. This option could, however, carry with it a difficult permitting process and expensive land costs. It also would disturb another site.

Ellis and several county staff members have said excavating the site seems to be a more appealing alternative. That option likely would be cheaper, they said, and it would let county staff address lingering environmental concerns that could come with capping the site again.

"It might be the prudent thing to do from an environmental point of view, but it may not be financially viable," O'Malley said of the second option.

County staff currently are looking for a consultant to sift through the options and to help craft a plan. Whomever is hired is expected to take samples from the landfill to determine how deep and dense the site is, an attempt to clarify how much work will have to be done to properly clean up the site.