

Water merge

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Tuesday, 15 December 2009

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North End users choose to end up on Northwest Rural water

With few tenable choices, North End Water Users, Inc., presented its customers with a single option Saturday afternoon that called for merging with the Northwest Rural Water District.

The 75 or so North End customers present at the weekend meeting accepted the option amicably.

This solution may bring closure to a problem brewing since October 2008 when two of the three wells operated by North End east of Powell exceeded Environmental Protection Agency nitrate standards. Currently only one well is providing potable water to the 205 North End taps.

North End must take action, because the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality requires water providers to have a backup water supply. North End board members have explored a number of options.

“North End water board has chosen option one to hang our hat on,” said Tod Stutzman, president of the North End Water Board.

Of those five options, joining with Northwest Rural Water District is the best choice, Stutzman said.

For one thing, Northwest surrounds most of North End’s service area.

Northwest is also a taxable district, so it can pursue funding that North End, a private entity, cannot.

And Northwest is willing to repair/replace North End’s aging water lines, said Travis Conklin of Engineering Associates.

Conklin conducted a study to determine the most feasible options.

If North End integrates with Northwest, the cost difference would be a wash.

“It’s very comparable to what you’re paying now,” Conklin said to the audience.

According to Conklin’s PowerPoint presentation, the monthly base rate would be \$39.80 from Northwest, compared to \$46 for current North End customers.

“I would go with option one,” Conklin said.

According to Conklin, Northwest would take over complete control of the system and any of North End’s existing debts.

In a pinch, Northwest could supply North End customers with water in about two weeks.

However, barring an emergency, takeover would take longer.

“Within six months to a year we could be fine,” said Dossie Overfield, Northwest district manager, “at least to get water into the system.”

North End customers must sign a petition for inclusion and then the Park County commissioners must agree to the takeover, she added.

There may be a few flies in the transition ointment, although those issues may not surface until more details are

discussed.

“There’s a 1,001 details to work out,” Stutzman told an audience member, “if you’d like to help.”

North End has two employees, a water operator and a backup water operator. Their jobs would be secure, at least in the interim.

“We need their assistance, at least to start,” said Overfield. However, Overfield said she could make no long-term guarantees.

“Water operators aren’t exactly a dime a dozen,” Conklin said.

In order to make the transition, there will also be plenty of paperwork, Overfield said.

“But, we’re willing to do this,” she added.

North End’s board is not required to obtain its customer’s consent to seek alternative water delivery options, but Stutzman said the point of Saturday’s meeting was to notify its customers of the board’s plan and determine if customers believe the board is choosing the correct course of action.

Northwest’s board meets in January and at that time North End would get the changeover ball rolling, Stutzman said.

The downside is North End Users would relinquish complete control of their system, although Northwest does have a board of directors that they could be elected to, Conklin said.

North End has a moratorium on new taps, but there are around six floating taps out there. These are taps available that folks could purchase from the original tap owners. The taps don’t actually exist, but are a guarantee that in the future, the owner could tap into a North End pipe if a line is nearby.

There would likely be a grandfather period if Northwest takes over, Conklin said.

The other options included purchasing water from the Shoshone Municipal Pipeline or the city of Powell, drilling new wells or installing reverse osmosis units in user homes.