

# Park may get new sewer plant

Stimulus could fund work on Yellowstone's deferred-project list

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A new wastewater treatment plant in Yellowstone National Park may not sound sexy, but it fits the bill for funding from the \$750 million allocated to national parks in President Barack Obama's economic stimulus bill.

"We certainly believe we have a number of eligible projects that meet the criteria that could be put out to contract for bid," said Al Nash, Yellowstone's chief of public affairs.

But other than the treatment plant at Madison Junction, Nash was unwilling to detail projects the agency submitted to the Department of Interior for consideration.

"There are more than 390 National Park Service sites that will all have the same story, and competitive projects," he said. "We certainly know we will receive some of that funding."

Another \$170 million has been set aside for national park roadways under the plan. Last year, the National Park Service's entire construction budget was \$90 million.

## Shovel-ready

The Madison wastewater treatment plant was constructed in 1959. The plant serves the 292-site Madison Campground with its 14 restrooms. An environmental analysis was completed for the project four years ago with construction planned to begin in 2006, but with budget constraints the estimated \$8.6 million project never got off the ground.

Yellowstone's latest figure for its deferred maintenance needs is \$750 million.

Nash said the plant would meet the criteria of the stimulus bill - repairing infrastructure while contracting with local companies to do the work and purchasing construction materials locally.

"It's a brick-and-mortar-type of project," Nash said. "This is not about hiring additional federal employees. This would benefit the park and park visitors, but the money would go directly into the economy to purchase materials and hire private-sector employees."

## Fast pace

The federal government is moving at "lightning speed" to vet projects for the stimulus package, said Jeffrey Olson, a spokesman for the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. Projects are to be submitted for consideration to the Department of Interior within 30 days of the bill's signing. At the end of 90 days, the contracts are to be let for bid so money can start flowing.

"Our goal is to quickly provide jobs and economic activity in the local community," Olson said. "We have to do it faster, we have to be accurate. I think I've heard the word 'unprecedented' used. It's exhilarating."

About three years ago, the Park Service did an inventory of its assets, giving the agency a good idea of what it has and what shape it is in, Olson said. Prioritizing projects in need of funding shouldn't be too difficult, he said, based on the criteria of creating lasting value, job creation and projects that are key to health and public safety.

In Yellowstone alone, Nash said, there are 1,541 buildings, 900 of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. The park also has 466 miles of roadway and eight wastewater treatment plants.

"Yellowstone, while known for its natural wonders, has a great deal of infrastructure, much of which visitors don't see or aren't aware of," Nash said.

**Other projects possible**

Montana could stand to benefit from \$310 million the stimulus bill has targeted for construction work on Bureau of Indian Affairs roadways, as well.

"You're going to see a lot of roadwork in Montana," Olson predicted.

Funding for other agencies in the Department of Interior include \$1 billion for the Bureau of Reclamation, \$500 million for the BIA, \$320 million for the Bureau of Land Management, \$280 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and \$140 million for the U.S. Geological Survey.

As Yellowstone looks forward to future projects, work on the new Old Faithful Visitors Center is on track for completion in 2010, Nash said. Two dozen carpenters, electricians and plumbers are working on the interior of the building this winter. Construction began last summer.

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