

## **Recycling could disappear**

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BY: Mari Muzzi

Recycling may come to an end in the county with the Sublette County commissioners' July 21 decision to cut funding for the recycling centers.

Last year, the Pinedale recycling center received about \$210,000 from the county but in 2009 it just receive \$43,200.

Marti Seipp, coordinator at the Pinedale recycling center, said that's only enough to operate for about three months.

She said high operating costs and the low percentage of people recycling led to the commissioners' decision.

"It just isn't cost effective – we had to draw the line somewhere," Commissioner John Linn said, explaining it's cheaper to bring items to the landfills than to the current recycling centers. It costs about \$550 per ton to recycle at the Pinedale recycling facility compared to \$30 at the landfill.

Melanie Woffinden with Tri County Recycling was unaware of the Marbleton recycling center's budget cut until the Sublette Examiner contacted her.

She hoped the center could continue to operate; however, she said the new budget of about \$18,000, as compared to \$116,834 received last year, would probably force the facility to shutdown.

"It kind of sounds like they are giving us enough money to wrap thing up and close down," Woffinden said on Friday.

Seipp said the Pinedale recycling center is expensive to run and brings in little revenue due to the economy.

"I don't know how we could break even – a lot is contingent on the economy," she said.

The struggling national economy and China's economic issues have taken a toll on the value of recycled commodities.

Both Pinedale and Marbleton recycling centers sell cardboard to China but with Americans buying fewer items from China, the Chinese are purchasing less recycled cardboard.

Woffinden said the Marbleton recycling center used to sell a ton of cardboard for \$2,100 but now receive about \$300.

Seipp said this year the Pinedale center received about \$15,000 for 400 tons of materials as compared to several years ago when 370 tons brought in \$42,000.

The Pinedale center used to gain about \$90 for every ton of cardboard commodities sold and today it's about \$30 or less.

"It changes with every loan," Seipp said, explaining the prices had dropped.

Compounding the costs to run the recycling facilities and economic impacts is the lack of public interest in recycling.

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

"It should be much higher," Seipp said, explaining roughly 80 percent of what people throw away can be recycled.

"That's an indication of the interest and desire of the people," she said. "(The commissioners') thoughts were if the people in Pinedale really wanted to have a recycling facility they would have recycled more."

Seipp said if more people recycled, the volume of items coming in would increase and this could bring in more funds to the Pinedale recycling center.

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 percent of the people would have to be really good recyclers and they would need to bring it down (to the center themselves)," she said, explaining another cost issue is the Pinedale recycling center's pick-up and delivery of materials.

"That's very expensive, but the people want that level of service," she said, adding it's also a concern because it shows the public isn't proactive about recycling.

"If it comes down to them having to bring it down here, it goes into the trash," Seipp said.

But there is a group of devoted recyclers in the Pinedale who bring in about 150 tons of materials a year.

"That really speaks highly of the community, especially about that core group," she said.

Seipp said even if recycling is no longer available in the county people should continue the cause because it benefits the environment.

"I think people who are really committed to (recycling) will take (the materials) to Jackson or Rock Springs," she said, explaining those who recycle glass items are currently doing this because glass can't be processed at the county recycling facilities.

Seipp said it is difficult to say what will happen in regard to county recycling. There is a public meeting planned for Aug. 19 at 5:30 p.m. at the Pinedale Library to discuss the future of recycling in the county.

That future, prior to the budget cuts, included hopes of expanding Marbleton's recycling.

In early July, the Marbleton center requested a budget increase for improved lighting and a trailer to transport materials to Evanston. Woffinden said having a trailer would provide more space in the facility for recyclable materials and reduce costs.

"I wished we could have had a meeting to discuss funding," Woffinden said. "If they would have let me have the opportunity to decrease our budget we could do that."

Woffinden said by transferring materials to Evanston the center would only spend around \$40 in gas, versus \$500 to have a company pick up some recyclable items.

"People have to understand the cost of recycling is never going to be acceptable in Sublette County," Linn said.

Linn's idea for making recycling cost-effective is to have a recycling center located at the landfill.

He said it would be beneficial because most of the trash is going there.

Seipp said she understands the commissioners' decision and if recycling should disappear in the county she believes it would return when the public is ready.

"I think that we will learn to do better with time," she said.

Recycling has had a long history in the county starting in the '70s with residents recycling cans. Seipp said she would like to see the recycling center at the Pinedale transfer station.

"I think the transfer station is a much better solution, because it's more accessible," she said.

She said time is needed in order for residents to take an interest in recycling.

"(Recycling) has been a really good thing for the county but just not enough people are ready to make the effort yet," she said.

She explained Sublette County is not prepared to recycle yet, but when it is the residents will take action.