

Rural water board searching for project operator

By Jessica Tharp, *Staff Writer*

WORLAND — Washakie Rural Improvement and Service District board members discussed an immediate need for an operator and preparing for future growth at Tuesday's regular meeting.

Board members are currently in the process of looking for an operator to share duties as the Big Horn Regional pipeline operator because so many of the lines outside Worland are intertwined. However, board members discussed the possibility that Washakie Rural (WR) may need its own operator.

Ted Coyer of the Wyoming Water Development Commission reminded the board that there are really two positions that need to be filled; one for an operator and one for a manager. Coyer said there are instances in smaller districts where one person can do both.

WR Chairman Larry Hill said hiring a person separate from Big Horn Regional would raise WR rates considerably, which would not be good for WR customers. He said it could cost the district up to \$140,000 per year.

"It's pretty expensive to hire somebody because they're in short supply," Hill said.

WR Office Manager Julie Sinn said Big Horn Regional has been advertising for someone to operate both systems, and so far only two applications have come in, and the work is piling up.

"There's things that need to be done right now," Sinn said. The former WR manager resigned earlier this year.

Hill said he feels two applicants are not enough to choose from.

Project engineer Theresa Gunn said her professional opinion is that WR needs a manager as well as an operator, or one person qualified to do both.

Should WR enter into an agreement to share an operator, the person should have the knowledge to determine what projects are higher priority, regardless of which system needs work, Coyer said.

Board members agreed to be specific about the contract wording to protect WR interests and see what input Big Horn Regional board members have at tonight's meetings.

The board also discussed preparing for future growth and having policies in place for things like subdivisions.

Gunn said the WR system, when completed, will have about 55 miles of pipe and 400 users, but it's designed to supply 600. She said an operator will also be able to help the board design policies to fit WR needs.

In other board business, board members tabled a discussion on the Big Horn Regional Second Amended and Restated Joint Powers Agreement.

They also approved a motion to take over the water lines for the Diamond Bar Subdivision. Sinn said all lines are in place and have been inspected and paid for.

A motion was approved to accept a change order for phase five of the project for approximately \$372,000, involving work with the airport pressure sustaining valve, the computer monitoring system and work on Lane 15, according to Gunn.

The next Washakie Rural meeting is scheduled for Jan. 15 at 5:30 p.m.