

Sweetwater talks trash



Changes could come to the Green River landfill, seen in this 2007 file photo, if local solid waste managers decide to move to a regional landfill system in southwest Wyoming. (Jeff Gearino/Star-Tribune file)

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ROCK SPRINGS -- Junk dealers have long known there's often money to be made from other people's trash. That old axiom works on the landfill level as well.

A better, more cost-effective way to get rid of trash in Sweetwater County may be to turn the Rock Springs landfill into a regional facility that would serve a host of southwest Wyoming communities, a garbage consultant said.

A regionalization project could help the county offset the economic impacts associated with rising disposal costs, engineers said, by lessening the per-ton costs of disposal for the Sweetwater County Solid Waste Disposal District No. 1.

Regionalization could also generate substantial revenues -- as high as an estimated \$1.8 million each year -- that could help pay for the high cost of a state-ordered requirement calling for the installment of leak-proof liners at the landfill to protect the environment.

"Rock Springs has a very large landfill, plus the district owns a significant chunk of land -- about 320 acres -- right next door for future expansion," said Ken Schreuder, a senior engineer with the Trihydro Corp., a Laramie-based consulting firm.

"The landfill is ideally located for being a regional landfill. ... It makes sense for you to consider being that kind of 'hub' for this part of the state," Schreuder told a handful of residents and water officials during a meeting Wednesday night.

"You have an opportunity here as (disposal) costs go up ... to look at possibly solving a problem for more people and making your operation much more efficient and cost-effective at the same time," he said.

But some residents were wary of any plan that would bring more trash to the county and deplete the anticipated life

of the Rock Springs landfill.

"If we take garbage from other areas ... I worry our landfill won't last very long," resident Judy Peterwell said. "And if we take that waste, won't additional dollars be needed to handle that additional waste?"

Fill up quicker

In 2007, the Sweetwater County district -- which includes Rock Springs, Reliance, Superior and Point of Rocks -- partnered with the cities of Green River and Wamsutter, the Eden Valley Solid Waste Disposal District, the Baggs Solid Waste Disposal District and the Upper Platte River Solid Waste Disposal District to map out efforts to improve the management of garbage disposal in the region.

The group hired Trihydro to help draft an integrated solid waste management plan to help meet new legislative requirements that call for the preparation of the plans by all the state's landfill operators.

The Sweetwater district plan looks at the current and future solid waste needs in southwest Wyoming, where the natural gas boom is fueling high population growth.

Wyoming has 51 licensed and operating landfills. The Sweetwater district operates the Rock Springs landfill, which is currently unlined and has approximately 30 years of life remaining, officials said.

The draft plan identified two management alternatives. It also included an option that recommends the construction of a new recycling facility to replace the city's existing recycling center.

The first alternative calls for lining the existing Rock Springs landfill and maintaining the district's current service area.

The second alternative also calls for lining the existing landfill, but with an expanded service area that would include municipal solid waste from other entities in southwest Wyoming.

\$21 per ton

Schreuder said the cost to operate the Rock Springs landfill is directly related to the size of the facility and the amount of waste it manages. A large landfill facility and more trash translates into lower costs per ton to manage, he said.

Currently, it costs about \$21 per ton to bury trash at the Rock Springs landfill, according to district figures.

"That's pretty cheap compared to most landfills in the state and incredibly cheap compared to the rest of the nation," he said.

"But the reality is the more trash that comes over that landfill gate each day, the cheaper it is to bury each ton each day," Schreuder said. "In the end, the total costs will come down because you're handling more material with a regional landfill."

Schreuder estimated the additional costs of lining the landfill will cause the cost of waste disposal to eventually reach about \$47 per ton at the Rock Springs facility.

"If you adopt the second alternative, it could take that cost from \$22 per ton to only \$37 per ton or so," he said.

Regionalization "could also generate about \$1.8 million in revenues each year -- if you capture the maximum amount of waste that may be available out there -- which could be used to offset the costs to local residents," Schreuder said.

"Yes, your landfill will fill up quicker (with regionalization) and if you double the amount of waste, that would cut the (landfill's) life of 30 years probably in half," he continued. "But that's not really a critical issue for you because there's that 320 acres ready for expansion. The bigger question is, where do you get all that waste?"

Schreuder also recommended the district segregate construction and demolition waste from the main waste stream at the landfill.

He said the segregated waste can be buried in the unlined portions of the landfill, thereby extending the life of the more costly lined portions.

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