

## Regional site gaining steam

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SANDPOINT -- A plan to create a regional wastewater facility that would serve the rapidly growing population and commercial growth stretching from Ponderay to Dover is beginning to gain momentum.

Driven by excessive infiltration and inflow into the collection system of city's aging facility equipped to handle a capacity of about only three million gallons per day, the Public Works Committee unanimously recommended applying for a federal grant to study the idea of a regional plant in the Sandpoint city limits.

If built, the facility would serve Sandpoint, Dover, along with the Southside, Schweitzer and Kootenai-Ponderay water and sewer districts.

The study would also encompass regional land use planning that would include reviewing natural treatment systems and collection ponds along with traditional facilities.

"We recognize that there is a unique opportunity with wastewater regionalization that would carry us for a long ways into the future," said Tim Clausen of the Kootenai-Ponderay Water and Sewer District. "We can continue to keep making short-term improvements into our present system, but regionalization offers tremendous opportunities."

Outfitted with roughly 25 miles of sewer mains and a system of 11 sewage lift-stations, it's no secret that the city's present treatment plant requires either extensive modification, or needs to be rebuilt in a new location many believe could function as regional treatment facility.

The proposed grant -- which Steve James of J-U-B Engineering said ranges from \$100,000 - \$400,000 -- would be administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The application would be sent to the Idaho Congressional delegation of senators Mike Crapo and Larry Craig.

"The chances of getting it aren't that super," said James. "Because of the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina, federal money is shrinking daily. But the opportunity for the grant is there."

Showing regional involvement by the five entities participating in the facility may cast more chances for landing the grant, said Mayor Ray Miller.

High water flows that come into the city's aging pipes in the Ella Street facility during heavy rains and snow melts are becoming more of a concern with each passing year.

Coupled with anticipated population growth and a future effluent requirement expected to be imposed in about 10 years, a regional treatment plant would be a huge plus for the area. It would provide both better treatment and lower the costs by spreading it among the five participating entities.

It would also be a tremendous benefit to the Southside Water and Sewer District, which has issued more sewer permits than it can honor, forcing the district to implement a ban on new hook-ups until it has the ability to serve them. Last year, it proposed pumping effluents into Murphy Bay to augment its existing system.

"At some point in time, we have to conduct a study for the treatment facility," said councilwoman Helen Newton. "It's almost like a necessary prerequisite for funding."