

Study: Facility upgrades costly

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Wastewater treatment plant improvements total \$15.5 million

SANDPOINT -- Millions of dollars may be required to patch the city's aging wastewater treatment plant and keep it up to snuff for at least another decade.

A study evaluating the current condition and performance of the Ella Street facility -- as well as the potential for a regional plant -- calls for improvements totaling \$15.5 million critical for maintaining its operational longevity.

"I'm not sure if we need to do all of the upgrades the study identifies," said Mayor Ray Miller.

Funding would come from user-facility fees, which were recently raised in anticipation of future improvements, and possible bonds, Miller added.

The five-year project does not include the cost of a westside interceptor to accommodate for an explosion of new growth that could run as high as \$8.8 million.

Increased population and expansion of service into the area of city impact is expected to swell from 6,829 to 37,171 at build-out levels, according to the study.

Released last month by J-U-B Engineers, the report contends high volume of inflow and infiltration currently exceeds the plant's biological capacity during severe storms.

"The plant is at the end of its useful life and is in need of substantial improvement," it says. "In the existing plant site, it is not adequate for future flows or to add unit processes required to meet upcoming permit conditions.

"As a result, the existing plant site is considered near to its capacity."

Built in the late 1940s and equipped to handle a capacity of about three million gallons per day, the timeworn pipes at the city wastewater treatment facility are becoming a more of a concern to handle high-water flows from heavy rains and snow melts with each passing year.

J-U-B's study recommends the city consider funding significant upgrades in fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

"These projects are necessary immediately," it says.

Though the study acknowledges that the plant is no longer adequate, it also concedes that it will take about 10 years to purchase property, obtain funding and construct a new one that could be utilized as a regional-wide facility.

Serving Sandpoint, Dover, Schweitzer, Southside and Kootenai-Ponderay water and sewer districts, the new wastewater regional plant is estimated to cost \$30 million. Funding would most likely come from a combination of grants and a possible city-wide bond.

The report also calls for a \$13 million upgrade 10 years after the facility is up and running.

"As a result, some improvements must be completed in the near term to maintain effluent quality from the existing facility," the study maintains.

However, if peak flows continue to be treated at the city's existing plant, the report stresses that overall costs can be significantly lowered.

"If the city is able to reduce infiltration/inflow by more than 50 percent, the treatment can be reduced in size," it asserts.

But to meet that higher reduction rate, the city will have to embark on an aggressive removal strategy that includes employing a system of sump pumps and private sewer laterals, the study points out.