

County to raise fees \$10 at landfill

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Tipping fees at Wallowa County's Ant Flat Landfill will increase by \$10 a ton beginning July 1, according to a decision by the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners at its meeting Wednesday, Dec. 15.

"We've been thinking about this for a while and we had some different thoughts at the last meeting," Commissioner Todd Nash said. "I still think we should probably be looking at increasing that to \$60 and putting it out there to the first of July, having six months to message that and everybody being able to adjust. That puts us still at the lower end of the spectrum of a tipping fee for our adjoining counties. It's appropriate that we monitor it going forward where we need to adjust. That's my recommendation, but the discussion's open."

He said at the board's Dec. 1 meeting that Solid Waste Manager Ed Gomes offered comparisons with landfills in Northeast Oregon. Gomes said Baker County charges \$57 a ton, Union County charges \$64.40 a ton and Pendleton charges \$66.30.

The fee increase is for large disposals and won't directly affect the \$10-per-barrel fee many individuals pay, Nash said.

Gomes and the other commissioners each considered incremental increases until reaching the \$60 level, but they ended up agreeing with Nash.

"I think, and this is my own opinion, to just rip the Band-aid off and getting it up there to where it needs to be," Nash said. "Rather than muddy the waters with incremental increases, I think it's more responsible for us to just raise it to \$60 and we're still at the lower end of the spectrum of our adjoining counties of Baker, Union and Umatilla counties."

"I stated earlier ... that the rate at which we're filling this new pit is fairly alarming due to construction. ... I don't think it's going to have a big impact on citizens — maybe contractors will be busy, certainly Rahn's (Disposal) will have to make some adjustments that will impact individuals as they have to increase their fees for using their service."

Commissioner John Hillcock agreed.

"It's wise that we do this because we did not have enough money in our budget to dig the hole (for the new pit) when we had to dig it," he said. "We had to shuffle things around to make that work. ... The Road Department took it on and we leased heavy equipment to do it ourselves. It came out a really good project, but still there wasn't enough money. We need to charge enough money to pay to dig a new hole as well as the crew's expenses."

But there was another issue at stake.

"The big elephant in the room is the closure of the landfill in the future," Nash said. "None of us will probably be around to see that happen, but need to make sure there's enough money to close the landfill."

Commissioner Susan Roberts said there's more than just closing the landfill.

"It's not so much covering it up," she said. "It's monitoring it for 20 years for all the gas emissions — that's what



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Peter Ferre, of the Friends of Wallowa County Recycling, gives an update to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners on the county's recycling efforts during the commissioners' meeting Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021.

you have to plan for. Even if we closed it next year, we're on the hook for 20 years of monitoring."

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Peter Ferre, of the Wallowa County Friends of Recycling, gave an update to the commissioners with slide show on what the group has been able to accomplish during 2021 and its ongoing efforts.

"So far in 2021, we as a county have diverted 1,242 tons of waste to recycling," Ferre said. "About 200-plus tons of that came from the recycling center and the other roughly 1,000 tons came from the landfill."

He said the recycling efforts generated nearly \$87,000 in revenue for the county recycling program — \$72,778 from mixed metals and more than \$14,000 from cardboard, paper, plastic, tin and aluminum.

"We expect there will be another \$3,000-\$4,000 that should come in before the end of this fiscal year for the recycling center."

He put that in perspective to recent years.

"The biggest deal about that is that it was an increase in tonnage and dollars from 2020, and 2020 was an increase over 2019," he said.

Ferre, too, was interested in the future of the landfill.

"Of the 1,242 tons of waste that was diverted, it's a big deal to help the landfill have a longer life cycle. That's a lot of waste; that's a lot of stuff that would've been sitting in the landfill," he said. "Second, and this is something I'd like to remind us all of, is that 1,242 tons of waste is really 1,242 tons of raw materials to create new products with minimal additional inputs. That just something I want us to remember as we export that metal, that cardboard, that tin, that aluminum, that plastic, it's going to create new products that are going back into the cycle."

Recycling also protects the environment, Ferre emphasized.

"Three, is something I mentioned in a column that I wrote is that every pound of stuff you keep out of the landfill helps our air quality and our water quality," he said. "We don't like to talk about it, but the stuff that does emit gas and it does leach, and the more we keep out of here and reuse, the less

of that is going to happen."

Other benefits

In his slide show, Ferre told the commissioners how his group had received a \$38,000 grant to be used to create a recycling program at the schools in the county.

"What's going to happen, starting in January, a mobile recycling program will provide a recyclable materials pick-up service for Wallowa, Enterprise and Joseph schools," he said.

The grant also will create a part-time job to assist Mike Grover, operator of the recycling plant.

"Mike takes Saturday, Sunday and Monday off," Ferre said. "If you've been into the recycling center on Saturday or Sunday and the volunteers haven't been there, you know what happens when you open up the cardboard door — literally, a whole pile of cardboard falls on top of you. So this person will be able to help work that and pull that stuff back first thing Monday morning. They will also operate the schedule going to the schools and pick up their recyclables. Currently, most of that recyclable material's going into the trash from the schools."

The Friends group also has helped with reporting requirements and outreach.

"We distributed 150 informational flyers (according to the slide show.) I think that number is off because I know that I bought like 400 informational flyers. We reached 1,545 people via 55 messages on Facebook about recycling and what can be recycled and what cannot, hours, Earth Day, etc. We sponsored an Earth Day event that generated 75 public contacts. We also had our first-ever Earth Day art contest. One of our many friends, Judy Wandschneider, won it this past year with a recyclable doll made with recyclable materials that she'd collected from the recycling center. We're going to make that an annual event. In addition, we did a fall outreach where we made 80 public contacts and got more than 15 volunteers who helped clean up the recycling center."

There's also printed media.

"We also published six newspaper columns and sent out nine newsletters to the 160-plus people on our mailing list," Ferre said. "If any of you guys want to be on that

newsletter mailing list, email wallowacountyrecycling@gmail.com. Email us and we can put you on our volunteer list. We also had an event at the (Wallowa Valley) Senior Living Center with five members of the group and generated \$150 in donations.

Watching legislation

Ferre told the commissioners about Oregon Senate Bill 582, the Recycling Modernization Act, that he's been keeping an eye on.

"It passed; it's going into law Jan. 1," he said. "It'll create a shared responsibility between producers, consumers and local governments. The systemwide update will make recycling easier for the public, expand access to recycling services, upgrade facilities that sort recyclables and create benefits while reducing environmental harm such as plastic pollution. The new law becomes effective Jan. 1, but a lot of the rubber hitting the road's not going to come into play until 2025. That's because of all the time it's going to take to get some of these things into play."

He said the bill also will directly affect rural counties.

"The state is going to create a statewide collection list: Here's what you can recycle, whether you're in Bend or in Wallowa County," Ferre said. "The inequities throughout the recycling system have affected us in Wallowa County. In La Grande, it's a lot easier to recycle than in Wallowa County because of our rural nature and our lower population. In this bill, they very definitively identified rural communities as a place where focus is going to be energized with as far as investment in infrastructure to help us, which is a big deal."

Salvage?

The commissioners thanked Ferre and his group for the work they do, as well as county employees working in the Solid Waste Department, particularly Solid Waste Director Ed Gomes.

"Those are thankless jobs," Nash said. "People who go to the landfill are not in a good mood to begin with. Everybody complains about everything. ... Ed does get underrated because of the accumulation and management of that steel and iron that accumulates up there, and he's watching the mar-

ket. It was \$80,000 a while back he liquidated a bunch of that."

Roberts noted the rapidity with which the landfill is growing.

"Five trucks went out and the next week, the pile was almost as large," she said.

The commissioners agreed the accumulation at the landfill is largely because of increased construction waste.

"One of the things that we're seeing with all the construction that's taking place is we're getting a lot of construction material that's going in the landfill there," Nash said. "I don't know if any of it is reusable at all. I'm not familiar enough to know."

Ferre asked if the board would like the Friends group to look into the possibility of salvaging some of that waste.

"If you're interested, and I think you are, you could take an overview of that," Nash said. "If there's two-by-fours or whatever that can be pulled out and John would know better than me what goes in there, but we are filling up our new pit exponentially faster than what we thought we would because of the construction going on."

"We have some ideas on some ways — some more expansive ideas that the Recycling Modernization Act funds could help with that might help lower costs," Ferre said.

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