

Wastewater plan staying on track

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NEWS-SUN

The wheels of bureaucracy usually move slowly. When government is involved any plan is liable to change, any schedule liable to be held up indefinitely.

But at the Hobbs Wastewater Treatment Plant everything is running smoothly.

"We're still on schedule as projected. Everything is going according to plan," said plant superintendent Leo Wilson. "There's times we've been ahead (of schedule), there's times we've been behind it, but right now we're right on schedule."

On Feb. 7 the Hobbs City Commission gave the final green light to a plan to build a new plant on the site of the old one. The new plant will meet recently passed state regulations that the old plant does not regarding the content of treated water.

Effluent wastewater is categorized into four classes, and those groupings determine how it can be used depending on the potential for public exposure.

Class 1A and 1B water, the two cleanest types of treated wastewater, are still not suitable for consumption but can be used for irrigation of food crops, parks, golf courses and urban landscaping. Class 3 water can only be used for irrigation of forest trees and seed crops for non-milk-producing animals.

Under the current process, wastewater goes through four phases of treatment. When water first comes into the plant it goes through the pretreatment phase in which large, inorganic objects are removed. Chemicals are also used to reduce odors from the wastewater.

The physical treatment phase removes remaining inorganics and heavier organic matter from the wastewater. In the secondary treatment phase, water goes through three stages — biological, physical and chemical — to



remove biological matter. The final phase is disinfection, which uses chlorine to kill remaining microorganisms.

When the construction is done — it is scheduled to be completed in March 2008 — many of these processes will be altered. The pretreatment phase will not change much, but it will be expanded to include the primary treatment process.

It is the secondary treatment process that will undergo the most radical changes. Currently the

process starts with aeration basins, where microorganisms that feed on organic waste are introduced to the water. The water then goes to clarifiers where the biomass sinks to the bottom. Finally, in the biosolids blending tanks, the remainder of the organic matter is removed.

The new plant will replace the entire secondary treatment process. Replacing that will be the Modified Ludzinger, Ellinger process, which is a more efficient way to remove nitrates from wastewater.

Increased nitrate removal will be one of the most important functions of the new plant, according to Wilson. When effluent water is used for irrigation, excess nitrates that are not absorbed by plants can seep into groundwater supplies. Any water with more than 10 milligrams of nitrates per liter is not suitable for drinking.

"That's the biggest push, to protect the groundwater," Wilson said. "That's all we have. We don't have a river to pull off of."

The construction of the MLE basins

will be the most expensive part of a project that is estimated to cost \$15-20 million.

"The biggest chunk of the change will be associated with this," Wilson said.

The final part of the treatment process, disinfection, will be overhauled as well. Where the plant currently uses chlorine to disinfect wastewater, the new plant will kill microorganisms using ultraviolet rays.

Technically, the process will no longer be classified as disinfection, Wilson said. With the UV rays it will be sterilization.

The UV rays can do the job just as well as chlorine, Woomer said. The new method will also be less hazardous than the old one. Chlorine is a dangerous chemical and is closely guarded at the plant.

"It's safer and just as efficient, if not more," Woomer said.

Some chlorine will still be kept on hand so the disinfection process can continue in the event of a power outage or a problem with the UV process.

When the initial planning stages for the project began in 2003, there was a proposal calling for an entirely new plant to be built about 1.5 miles south of the current one, but that was deemed unnecessary. Instead of building a new facility, many of the buildings and structures at the old one will simply be refitted or renovated.

There is still a lot of work to be done. The facility plan that was drawn up has to be approved, a design engineer has not been chosen and a contract for the construction process has to be awarded.

But so far things have run smoothly, and Wilson is hopeful that the project will be completed by the time the plant's permit expires in June 2008.

"Something could happen along the way. We're not foreseeing it, but we're just aware of that," Wilson said. "We've been real fortunate."

CITY OF HOBBS WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY - IMPROVEMENT TIMELINE EXPAND AND IMPROVE THE EXISTING TREATMENT PLANT												
PROJECT TASK	Sept. 2003 to May 2004	May 2004 to July 2004	July 2004 to Aug. 2004	Aug. 2004 to Feb. 2005	Feb. 2-5 to Mar. 2005	Mar. 2005 to May 2005	May 2005 to July 2005	July 2005 to Aug. 2005	Aug. 2005 to June 2006	June 2006 to Sept. 2006	Sept. 2006 to Mar. 2008	Sept. 2003 to June 2008
WWTP Improvement Study	●											
Complete RFP for Facility Plan (FP)		●										
Complete RFP for Environmental Information Document (EID)		●										
Select Consultant for Facility Plan (FP)			●									
Prepare Facility Plan (FP)				●								
Select Consultant for Environmental Information Document (EID)			●									
Prepare Environmental Information Document (EID)				●								
Preliminary Review of FP and EID by NMED					●							
Public Comment Period						●						
Final NMED Review and Approval of FP and EID							●					
RFP for Final Design of Selected Alternative							●					
Select Consultant for Final Project Design								●				
Final Plans and Specifications									●			
Bidding and Award of Contract to Construct										●		
Construction											●	
NMED Discharge Permit Renewal Date												●

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