

Deb Purvis, President
Cooke City Park County Water District

COOKE CITY INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Statement of the Problem

Cooke City is a tiny community 3 miles outside the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Tourism is the mainstay of the economy for this area and the number of visitors is increasing at an astounding pace. In 2009, 4000 people visited the Visitor Center in Cooke City. (Cooke City Chamber of Commerce) Last year that number grew to 23,000 visitors! This summer we counted 21,566 people who visited our community center.

According to YNP records, nearly a quarter of a million people entered Yellowstone National Park through the Northeast entrance. Although we have no way to count how many of these visitors stopped in Cooke City, it is easy to imagine that the number was considerably higher than the 21,000 who stopped at the visitor center.

All businesses and homes have individual on site septic systems. Most were installed over twenty years ago; many were installed 30-40 years ago and there are even some homes served by

cesspools. All of the businesses on the south side of Hwy 212, the main street, lease space from the US National Forest Service for their drain fields. These leases are set to expire in just over 2 months on December 31.

In 2010, Cooke City constructed a community center with public restrooms. Buses numbering 222 carrying 6660 passengers traveled through Cooke City this summer. A considerable number of those buses stopped at the Community Center and those passengers used the facilities. This system was sized for 600 gallons per day (GPD) based on best guesses on patronage, the DEQ usage table, and the available space. In the month of August 2017, the Community Center used an average of **990 GPD with a peak day of 2340 GPD**. That septic system is already overwhelmed and failing.

Clearly, this community must address the issue of wastewater management to be a viable gateway community. According to the Census Bureau as reported by the Montana Department of Commerce, the year round population of Cooke City is 35, with a median household income of \$38,500.

<http://comdev.mt.gov/Resources/Financial/Tar>

[getRate2015](#)) Obviously, a community of this size cannot afford to pay for a wastewater treatment system without some significant financial assistance

Efforts to Address the Problem

Cooke City and the surrounding communities of Colter Pass and Silver Gate have a 3% resort tax. Representatives of various community organizations meet annually to decide how to allocate the roughly \$170,000 that is collected. Last year \$20,000 was approved for matching funds for a Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) grant to fund a preliminary engineering report (PER) to explore alternatives for managing wastewater. An additional grant from the Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) was awarded. The initial draft of the PER is due in March of 2019.

We have also been searching for cooperative ways to address the problem with other public and private agencies. Please see attached letter from our community organizations to Park County Commissioners. Moreover, in an effort to increase awareness and explore possible solutions, our fire chief and I gave testimony at the Local Government Legislative Sub-Committee hearing in

Helena earlier this year. Additionally, recent conversations with representatives from the National Forest Service are very hopeful in terms of securing land necessary for a community drain field.

Conclusion

It is important to bear in mind that Cooke City is not a city or county. We are a remote unincorporated section of Park County without the resources and ability to tax that a political subdivision or governmental entity has. Yet, we find ourselves as an important gateway into Yellowstone. We need to be able to protect the health of our citizens and guests by providing basic sanitation while safeguarding our natural resources.