

SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER



A Dam Story. I'm starting this newsletter with the plight of Albeni Falls Dam. Why? You might ask. Does the dam affect the Sewer District? Not directly, but for us Board members, the dam presents a "teaching moment." Let me explain.



The dam has 10 huge, rolled-steel gates manufactured in the 1950s. A crane, running along the top of the dam, lifts and lowers the gates to control the lake level. There's one spare gate! Last year the Corps of Engineers (COE) used its spare to pull a gate for inspection. It failed the inspection and is now useless. The COE determined that all the gates were manufactured at the same time with the same flawed materials, and any one of the gates could collapse, likely during a lifting operation. If a gate collapses, there's no spare. Our lake will be virtually uncontrolled. The month-to-month lake level will look like an

inverted "V" with the peak in July. Our fixed docks will be useless for all but a couple of weeks!

So, what have we learned? We learned that the gates are near or past their planned life cycle and that over the last 60 years, the COE failed to properly inspect and maintain the gates. Now it's a crisis, there's no money to manufacture new gates, and our recreation economy is at risk.

How does this lesson apply to the Sewer District? Our original sewer collection system – the mainline, the galvanized metal lateral connectors and control valves – was installed in 1978 with a planned life cycle of 70 years. We're 66% of the way through. Like those Albeni Dam gates, we've already discovered that the lateral connectors are breaking down and leaking prematurely. Your Board must avoid a catastrophic collapse of a portion of the collection system, cutting off folks from their sewer connection, most likely during the high-use summer months, and bringing DEQ down on our heads. Bottom line: we've deferred capital improvement too long. It's time to get serious about rehabbing the oldest sections of our system.

Budgeting for the Future. In 2022, we adopted a policy to annually budget our capital depreciation adjusted for inflation and apply it to capital improvement. That's \$55,000 for next year. We've held off major fee increases by using excess savings, which we will do again in the upcoming budget, but that will almost deplete our excess going forward. What we're thinking about doing is raising the Basic Fee \$5.00 per month, to raise approximately \$20,000 for an engineering study to determine how best to address rehabbing of the collection system (we tried for a govt grant but lost out to districts with even more urgent needs). Over the next few years, I anticipate that our fees are necessarily going to rise substantially to properly maintain our system.

Budget Meetings. At our July 16th Board meeting, we will authorize the publication of the FY 2025 budget and fee increase. That meeting will be held via Zoom and there's a Zoom invitation on our website. At the August 20th meeting, we will hold a public hearing on the budget and fee

increase. That meeting will be held at the fire station on Bottle Bay Rd and you're invited to attend and address the Board.

Pancake Feed. Your Board wants to sweeten the bitter news above with our first pancake feed in conjunction with the Sagle Fire District. Come meet your neighbors on Saturday morning, August 10th at the Fire House. We're still working out the details, so look for the signs we'll post around the District.

Stick the Stickers! We sent everyone these stickers to attach to your septic pump controller and switch panel. They provide our phone number and a reminder to never switch-off the sewer pump. Maybe you're like me and left them sitting in your pick-up. Or you lost them. It's not too late. If you have the stickers, please attach them asap. If you need more, email us at info@bbsewer.org or call us at (208) 265-4270.



Encroachment Permit Requirement. A reminder to those who are planning construction this summer. **YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE A PERMIT FROM THE SEWER DISTRICT** if your construction in any way affects our collection system. We just had an incident where a contractor failed to obtain an encroachment permit so we could locate our sewer lines for him. In removing a retaining wall, the lateral sewer line was severed and there was a small spill. It could have been worse. The cabin owner will be paying a substantial fine and costs for inspections. So, if you or your contractor plan to excavate on the property where there's a present sewer connection, please go to our website, download and file for an encroachment permit. It's easy, cheap and it's required.

Accessory Dwellings. Our Compliance Officer and Board member, Rob Behrens, along with one of our operators, Brent Binnall, and myself, took a tour of the District the other day to scope out those parcels with extra structures that are not paying their fair share. We found a number. Our rules provide that each sewer connection serves up to four "bedrooms." If, for example, you have three bedrooms in the house and a separate bunk house, you're good. But, if your second building is capable of independent living (kitchen, sink, bathroom, bed, etc.), then you pay an additional Service Fee. Same applies to "mother-in-law" apartments in the main house. We'll be following up on those who have separate structures, which our rules require us to treat as second dwellings unless and until you call us for inspection.

Why do we charge extra for accessory dwellings? Good question and admittedly it's an imperfect payment structure. It starts with the proposition that those capable of using more of the sewer system should pay more. It ends with this reality: we must be concerned with providing and maintaining a collection and treatment system that operates efficiently at times of "peak use." So, yes, some folks have accessory dwellings that are used for just a few weeks in the summer. But, your District is constructed and maintained for just that high-volume use. Those that use more should pay more.

Bill Berg, District President

billb@bbsewer.org

June 29, 2024