



LOCAL OPINIONS

Pawlenty wants \$897 million for projects

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Wednesday, January 18, 2006

A project intended to reduce Koochiching County's cost to dispose of its garbage and benefit the environment is among the \$897 million in bonding recommendations Gov. Tim Pawlenty outlined Tuesday.

While the county sought \$2 million for the project, Pawlenty's recommendation to provide \$1 million to Koochiching toward the project made Commissioner Mike Hanson happy Tuesday night.

"We're pleased the governor recognizes that our request has legitimacy," Hanson said. The recommendation, he said, means the governor, his administration, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency have faith in the technology.

The facility, which would be called the Renewable Energy Clean Air Product, would "gasify" waste at very high temperature and therefore release very few emissions into the air. The process would generate byproducts such as hydrogen, ethanol, biodiesel, vitrified glass, rock wool and other materials.

The county would own the facility, which would be located in International Falls.

The proposal would bring both environmental and economic benefits to the area by reducing the \$1 million annual bill the county pays to dispose of its solid waste in a landfill in Kittson County. It would also end the need to landfill garbage by Koochiching County residents. County officials anticipate seeking waste from other areas.

County officials are also exploring the idea of developing training courses for workers at the facility at Rainy River Community College, which would create a market for workers using the new technology.

The facility would employ about 15 position, which will require a level of education and certification to operate the plant.

The project would involve a partnership between county, state and federal agencies as well as private organizations. Distributed Generation Solutions of Mendota Heights would handle the technical aspects of the proposal, and Korridor Capital Advisors of St. Paul would handle the unique financing options.

Meanwhile, Hanson said the next step will be convince the Legislature to fund the request and to ask for additional state money for the project. Funding is expected to be sought from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Hanson said he was pleased with the governor's recommendation, he urged Borderland residents to understand that the project remains in the preliminary stages.