

Bentonite activity grows on world's best deposit

By BARBARA SONNEMAN

WORLAND — Maynard Duckworth with the Worland Bureau of Land Management office said the Big Horn Basin is one of the major sodium bentonite resource areas of the world.

The Worland BLM has been testing bentonite for mining claims in Wyoming and Montana in its warehouse at Worland, he said.

John Moorehouse, BLM forester, said the present warehouse is mainly used for fire fighting equipment, and that a metal building now under construction within the fenced BLM yard will become a bentonite testing laboratory.

Moorehouse said increased activity in bentonite claims has led workers to put in double shifts in some cases.

There is one new bentonite plant at Worland scheduled to use the mineral

from the Ten Sleep area, and numerous increases.

Duckworth said the lab runs physical property tests to see if samples meet industrial standards. In order to patent a mining claim, the claimant must show that the bentonite meets standards and is in sufficient quantity to be of commercial value, he said.

The testing program has been running full time for several months, and could become a year-around operation, with samples taken in good weather and tested in the laboratory at other times of the year, Duckworth said.

An ore called Western Bentonite is located in South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana, and has unique properties, Duckworth said. He said the main mineral in the western bentonite clay is montmorillonite.

The bentonite clay has a high swelling

property, and is used as a binder, dispersing agent, or filtering product, he said.

Duckworth said, roughly speaking, the western bentonite is used about 30 per cent in foundries, for sand mold casting, 30 per cent in the taconite industry to form steel pellets to seed into blast furnaces, and 30 per cent by the petroleum industry for a drilling mud ingredient.

The remaining 10 per cent is used in such miscellaneous items as paint, paper, insecticides, medicines, cattle feed, and some foods, such as candy bars, Duckworth said.

Wyoming bentonite has been of such high quality that its properties are used to set standards for testing, he added. Other types are used for other purposes.

Boyce B. Coffey, also with the Worland BLM said bentonite has been used to seal reservoir bottoms in the west.

Quality High For Wyoming Bentonite

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