

Environmental business boosts bentonite industry

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CODY — Wyoming's bentonite industry, long in the shadow of the depressed oil market, is seeing an increase in demand for the mineral in environmental applications.

When oil prices fell precipitously in the early 1980s, the demand for bentonite, often referred to as "drilling mud," fell with them. However, Tom Thorson, president of Black Hills Bentonite Company, said the industry outlook is improving.

"We're doing better than we were five years ago, but not as well as 10 years ago," Thorson said.

Thorson estimated that in the industry's peak year in 1981, production was about 4.5 million tons. The "low water mark" in 1986-87 was probably 2 million tons or less, and the probable production now is at a rate of between 2.5 million to 3 mil-

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Sales In Environmental Business

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Sun, May 3, 2020