

Company proposes bentonite mine near Thermopolis

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An open-pit bentonite mine is proposed for Hot Springs County in Wyoming.

Billings, Mont.-based Wyo-Ben Inc. is proposing the mine in the Meeteetse Draw area five miles northwest of Thermopolis.

The site would allow for 10 to 15 acres a year of mining for at least 10 to 20 years

and open up a new mining area for the company, said Rick Magstadt, Wyo-Ben's vice president of manufacturing.

"We're hoping to set up a long-term operation in the Meeteetse Draw area," he said. "We have several different mining areas and this is a key area for us as well."

Wyo-Ben owns three bentonite facilities in Wyoming: the Lucerne Mill near

Thermopolis, the Stucco Mine/Mill near Greybull and Sage Creek Mill outside of Lovell.

The mine and the Lucerne Mill processing plant would employ about 35 people, with about eight to 12 of those employees working at the mine itself, Magstadt said.

The mine area would disturb up to 73 acres of land over the planned two decades of production, according to

the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's environmental assessment of the project.

Wyo-Ben would use the cast-back mining method — in which newly removed overburden is put into previously mined areas — to minimize the environmental impact of the mine.

The BLM has opened the project's mine and reclamation plan for review and public comment — available

on the BLM-Wyoming's Website at www.blm.gov/wy — through Aug. 30.

"Basically all the environmental work has been done except for the archaeology report, which we're still waiting on," said Magstadt.

Bentonite is an highly absorbant aggregate clay used in cat litter and as drilling mud or as a sealant in oil, gas and water wells.

Wyoming has about 70 percent of the world's supply of bentonite, according to the Wyoming Mining Association, which represents the state's mining industries.

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Thermopolis Mine Proposed

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