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Out of the Blue

Posted: Tuesday, May 04, 2004 - 07:35:59 am PDT

By MIKE McLEAN
Staff writer

MIKE McLEAN/Press

Blue Waters Technologies president John Shovic and vice president Tom Daugherty say their Coeur d'Alene-based company can help wastewater treatment plants meet stricter pollution standards that are being considered for the Spokane River.

Promising new water treatment offered

COEUR d'ALENE -- As water quality standards are tightened in the Spokane River, a key player for cleaning up wastewater may be a small company in Coeur d'Alene.

Blue Water Technologies, headquartered in a few rooms of office space on the second floor of the Charlotte's Web building, has the sole license for a new cleanup process developed at the University of Idaho.

"We're in the right place at the right time with a good solution that helps people and the environment," said John Shovic, president and CEO of Blue Water Technologies.

The company recently broke ground on a research facility to use its technology to remove phosphorus from a million gallons of treated wastewater per day at the Hayden Regional

Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Washington state is proposing stricter standards that could restrict economic growth if communities can't reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the river, specifically at wastewater treatment facilities.

For the Spokane River, stricter Washington standards would also flow to wastewater treatment plants upstream, because Idaho must meet Washington's water quality standards at the border.

Blue Water Technologies' Vandal Ion process is especially good for removing phosphorus from treated wastewater.

The technology behind the year-old company is so new, it's mainly been done with pilot projects and demonstrations.

"The facility in Hayden will give us a showcase," said Tom Daugherty, vice president of business development for the company.

Environmentalists are also looking at the technology.

Dale Marcy, the clean-water point man for Kootenai Environmental Alliance, is impressed by presentations he's seen about Blue Water Technologies, although its real-world application is still in its infancy.

Marcy said it could be suddenly more important to take out more phosphorus.

"Decisions are going to be made between regulatory agencies between two states," Marcy said. "What kind of water do we want for the Spokane River? What kind of fisheries? How are we going to manage it?"

Marcy, an environmental science instructor at North Idaho College, has some understanding of the Blue Water Technologies process.

"As a chemist, I think it looks like it will work," he said. "It's a matter of applying the technology to millions of gallons a day, day in and day out, with all the things that can go wrong."

Daugherty said he doesn't anticipate problems ramping the Vandal Ion process up in scale.

"The core of the system is off-the-shelf sand filters," he said. "We're changing the chemistry."

The Vandal Ion process coats sand in the filters with a chemical that absorbs pollutants. As the sand is funneled through the treatment process, the coating rubs off the sand grains in a separator.

The pollutants go into the existing sludge-handling system while the sand is recycled.

"Everything increases proportionally," Daugherty said. "Once you are over 300,000 gallons a day, it's a cookie-cutter process. There is no difference (in applying the technology) between a 300,000 gallon-a-day plant and a 40 million-gallon-a-day plant. It's just a matter of using more filters."

Daugherty said Blue Water Technologies is focusing on applications on the Spokane and Snake rivers, although there has been some interest from the Midwest and Japan.

"Our growth plan is to stay in our own back yard and grow outward," he said.

Shovic said Blue Water Technologies is unique in more than one sense.

"It's an Idaho company using Idaho technology from an Idaho university to solve Idaho problems," he said.

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