

NWE BREAKS GROUND ON GAS POWER PLANT

By Tim Trainor

ANACONDA - Dirt was displaced Thursday for what some are calling Anaconda's first major economic development project in decades - NorthWestern Energy's \$201.8 million natural-gas-fired electric generation facility.

"We are so excited," said Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Chief Executive Becky Guay. "This is the most significant industrial and economic development project that has happened in Anaconda since the close of the smelter way back in 1980."

Guay said the plant, once complete, will double the county's tax base, injecting much-needed money into its schools and infrastructure.

She said the county has agreed to provide water and sewer lines to the project at a cost of about \$3.6 million, which she expects to be completed by May.

Bob Rowe, NorthWestern's president and CEO, said he's excited about what the project means for Anaconda - and for Montana's energy future.

"This really is a special occasion," he said. "We are commemorating the construction of our first major electric generation plant in 20 years."

The plant, which will be located about three miles east of Anaconda off the Mill Creek Highway, will operate as a "regulation resource."

It is designed to keep the transmission grid in balance by matching electric generation with electric load on a moment-to-moment basis. The plant, therefore, will be able to respond to demand, 24 hours a day, within a few seconds.

The company plans to build the plant in two stages. Three 50-megawatt turbines are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2010. An additional 50-megawatt turbine generator will be added later, depending upon the company's need for additional regulation service.

First announced in 2008, the plant is expected to hire about 125 workers during construction and employ 10 during operation of the facility, according to a news release.

The plant will pay approximately \$8 million in property taxes annually and have an operating life of between 30 and 40 years, the release said.