

Doctoring up the dock

Faced with growing demand to accommodate super-sized freighters, the Port of Lewiston set to embark on renovation of aging fender system

By Elaine Williams of the Tribune Sunday, March 21, 2010

The fenders on a barge dock are being reinforced as the Port of Lewiston prepares to accept oversized loads on a regular basis.

"We do have a fender system in place, but it's old and in need of repair," said David Doeringsfeld, manager of the Port of Lewiston.

The work will involve driving steel pipes into the river bottom and placing wood facing on them in a project anticipated to cost \$250,000, Doeringsfeld said. "It's to keep the barges from pushing on the concrete of the dock."

Ideally the work would be completed sometime in August, but that will depend largely on the port's ability to obtain needed permits, including one from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The work won't be completed in time for at least one of the anticipated large-cargo projects, but the dock is in good enough shape to handle off-loads expected this summer, Doeringsfeld said.

The port is using \$190,000 of a \$237,000 federal appropriation, and capital improvement funds, for the project. The remainder of the federal appropriation will pay for design of an expansion that will more than double the length of the dock to 270 feet. That addition is estimated at \$2.2 million.

Strengthening the dock is important because port officials believe there's a growing demand to accommodate super-sized freight, Doeringsfeld said.

The Port of Lewiston has handled two such loads in about two years, and the most recent, a pressure vessel bound for the Kearl Oil Sands in Alberta, Canada, got a lot of attention, Doeringsfeld said. "It put us on the map as an alternative route for getting oversized freight into Canada and the Midwest."

That type of cargo usually goes through the Panama Canal into the Gulf of

Mexico and then is unloaded in Texas before reaching its recipient by road, Doeringsfeld said.

The port in recent months has worked with a number of potential customers, including those who would like to off-load wind turbines, Doeringsfeld said.

But the deal that appears to be farthest along is one with Emmert International, a subcontractor for Conoco. The plan calls for barging four huge drums to the Port of Lewiston beginning in May, then taking them in separate truck trips across the Idaho Panhandle on U.S. Highway 12 in June on their way to Billings, Mont., Doeringsfeld said.

Most of the logistics have been worked through, but the port doesn't yet have a signed contract, Doeringsfeld said.

A single drum weighs more than 100 tons and is about 50 feet long and 20 feet wide, according to the Idaho Transportation Department and the port.

The weight and size of the cargo will call for a different off-loading procedure.

A barge will be parked perpendicular to the dock as a tug boat pushes the barge from the opposite end to keep it snug with the dock. Then a tractor-trailer rig will pull onto the barge to off-load the drum, which will be on a stand.

Normally, the port operates a crane yard where containers weighing about 40 tons are lifted on and off of barges parked parallel to the dock. Two grain terminals also are located at the port that use conveyor belts to load grain into barges that haul it in bulk.

Getting the cargo off of barges is only part of the process. For the highway section of the journey, each drum will be placed on a tractor-trailer rig that will have a combined length of about 220 feet, or a little more than two-thirds the distance of a football field, said Doral Hoff, ITD's district maintenance engineer in Lewiston.

The length of the trailers helps distribute the weight and minimizes road damage, Hoff said. The trailers, which will take up two lanes of Highway 12, will slowly "leap frog" to Montana.

Oncoming traffic will be stopped for intervals of about 15 minutes while the truck travels a short distance and then pulls off in a turn lane or other wide area to let vehicles pass.

The oversized loads will only move at night, Hoff said. His agency, which hasn't

issued permits yet for Emmert International's trip, is looking at a number of windows, including from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The four trips by Emmert may be just the first of the summer following the same route with similar-sized cargo. Representatives of Imperial Oil/Exxon Mobile were in town last week going over plans they have to truck pieces of a refinery on Highway 12 as they move them to the Kearl Oil Sands Project in Alberta, Hoff said.

Imperial Oil/Exxon Mobile would need significantly more trips than the four Emmert International has requested. It's too early to know how many transports will be needed, in part because ITD hasn't issued permits yet, Hoff said.

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