

Cotter at the Crossroads

A community grapples with a uranium mill's past, present and future



Outreach group hopes to educate community

*By Lauren Lehman
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The choice of people to sit on the Fremont County Independent Outreach Committee rests solely with Angela Bellantoni of Environmental Alternatives Inc.

Both Bellantoni, facilitator of the committee, and Pat Mutz, mill manager of the Cotter Corp., have confirmed that.

Bellantoni has a contract with the Cotter Corp. to organize the committee. She said the committee will decide whether to make the terms of her contract public.

Bellantoni, in a telephone interview Tuesday, said, "I have set the quota at 15. We can modify and adjust membership so it represents the community as a whole. Everybody who has submitted a questionnaire has been invited to attend. There is strong opposition to Cotter in this group. The door is wide open.

"It's a good question about whether there will be a chairperson. We've only met twice," she said, adding that a charter has been adopted and issues have been prioritized. She said she wants the committee to "become more and more public. They just right now need to get their feet on the ground."

She talked about her role and what she envisions as the role of the committee. "I would never have done this if I was under the thumb of the Cotter Corp. because I don't believe that is in the best interests of the community," she said.

Bellantoni also said she originally approached mill officials about serving as an outside scientific source. "The outreach group was their idea." "I can be an extra set of eyes on that data so it is not just state and Cotter eyes on this information," she added.

"They (Cotter officials) understand this is a hands-off situation. They have to have an incredible amount of trust in whatever happens.

"I will go forward in whatever path the committee wants to take. I will go to outside sources. I may go back to Cotter and ask questions. Cotter has agreed to this. The plus is that I am here and community knows who I am," she added.

Bellantoni stressed her teaching background and said group members will go back to the entities they represent once they have a firm understanding of the science, the permit process and the facility. She said a lot of confusion has resulted from the misuse of terms. "What is a waste? What is a mixed soil? These terms are very specific. If that is understood then people will have a whole different perspective," Bellantoni said.

"As an educator for 15 years I believe I can teach the topic. Environmental Alternatives does permitting all over," she said.

"People don't seem to understand that Cotter actually has limitations like waste versus material and hazardous material versus mixed material.

"In science and the regulatory world this means a world of difference.

"This group's obligation is to become well versed in this industry."

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