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A stink over plan to haul trash to Nevada desert

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In the dusty Nevada desert, about 30 miles east of the playa where Bay Area artists and hipsters gather annually to build a temporary city at the Burning Man festival, a San Francisco garbage company wants to build a dump for Bay Area trash.

But a group of residents in the Winnemucca area, near where Recology seeks to build the 1-square-mile landfill, wants the company to leave the desert alone - and California to keep its garbage to itself.

"The notion that Nevada is some sort of wasteland because we don't have Ponderosa pines covering it is repugnant," said Jim French, retired wildlife biologist from the Nevada Department of Wildlife and a member of Nevadans Against Garbage, a group opposing the planned dump.

"Can you imagine the reaction in the Bay Area if the people of western Nevada bought some land in Marin County and wanted to ship their garbage there?" French asked.

Recology, formerly NorCal Waste Systems, is seeking approval to build its landfill 28 miles west of Winnemucca. It wants to build the dump as part of its plan for when existing landfills begin to fill in the coming years.

Under its proposal, Recology would haul as much as 4,000 tons of trash a day from the Bay Area and elsewhere in Northern California by train, five days a week, for 95 years. Workers would spread it across the desert in an ever-growing mound that could eventually grow to 200 feet, critics say.

Recology's proposal has already won support from the Humboldt County Planning Commission, allowing the company to seek permits from the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection.

But opponents gained momentum - and attention for their fight - last week when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., sent a letter to Gov. Jim Gibbons urging him to reject the plan and calling it a "threat to Nevada's sovereignty and dignity."

Adam Alberti, a spokesman for Recology, said the firm, which collects trash in 50 communities in California, chose the Winnemucca site because of its proximity to a rail line and because of its distance from residences and businesses.

"The site is in the middle of the desert and something like 30 miles from its nearest neighbor," he said.

But Alberti said opposition is expected when a landfill is being proposed.

"What is surprising is that we've been at this effort for four years in a very public manner, and the opposition has surfaced so late," he said.

Some in Winnemucca favor the proposal, which Alberti said would create 25 to 35 jobs and could generate at least \$1 million a year in fees, although negotiations on money issues have not started.

Critics are concerned that the dump would pollute the air and water and become an unsightly mess in the middle of the high desert.

"Our desert is a special place to us," said Tom Fransway, chairman of the Humboldt County Board of Commissioners. "Probably as special to us as the ocean is to Californians."

Alberti said studies have shown that the landfill would generate neither odor nor air pollution, and that liners placed beneath the trash would prevent pollutants from seeping into the groundwater.

"There is a lot of fear of impacts," he said, "but the actual impacts would be very minor."

Fransway vowed to fight the project.

"We're talking about 95 years," he said. "That's five generations. Long after I'm gone, there will be a big pile of trash in our community. I don't want to be a party to that."

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