

Pentagon doesn't want N.D. ABM, but may have no choice

■ Treaty requires Nekoma site

By Philip Brasher
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is moving forward with plans to install an antimissile defense system in North Dakota that could bring the state hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts.

The Pentagon does not want to put the system in North Dakota, but the Army's project specifications, released last Friday, say the site must comply with the U.S.-Soviet anti-ballistic missile treaty.

"Right now, there is just one site that is allowed under the ABM treaty and that site is by Grand Forks, N.D.," Army spokeswoman Gerda Sherrill said Tuesday.

The specifications say companies should be prepared to build the system for other sites if additional sites are allowed, she said.

Prefers coast sites

Henry Cooper, director of the Strategic Defense Initiative, has said he prefers building sites near the east and west coasts to provide broader protection to the country. Russia, however, has not agreed yet to allow sites outside North Dakota, and congressional leaders prefer a more limited project.

"I think that Cooper has recognized that half a loaf may be better than none and is putting in all the pieces to maximize the possibility of getting half a loaf," said John Pike, space policy director for the Washington-based Federation of American Scientists.

The North Dakota site, which was to be the base for ABMs until the Soviet treaty was signed in the

1970s, has 100 silos and other facilities available for the new system. The facility is located near Nekoma 75 miles northwest of Grand Forks.

Economic development

Economic development officials in North Dakota were excited about the bid specifications.

Pentagon officials have told the state it is sure to get 5 percent of the money spent on the project and possibly 10 to 15 percent, said Robert Elsas, a U.S. Small Business Administration analyst in Bismarck.

The General Accounting Office estimates the system will cost \$36 billion, according to Defense News.

"If we can do 10 percent of \$36 billion, that would be pretty nice," Elsas said. "This is probably the biggest procurement action going on in the country right now."

Several teams of defense contractors are expected to bid for the missile contract.

Officials from Martin Marietta Corp. and the Lockheed Corp., who are expected to submit one of the joint bids, have already visited North Dakota, Elsas said.

He said there are a number of items in the specifications for which North Dakota companies could bid, including security fencing, engineering studies, portable toilets, road paving, pest control and custodial service.

The proposals are due in 90 days and the Army expects to spend another three months evaluating them before awarding the contract, Sherrill said.

The land-based system is supposed to guard against accidental launches from the remains of the Soviet Union or terrorist strikes from Third World nations, according to the specifications.