

## Clark Fork River Cleanup

# Racetrack to Arrowstone: *What's happening and what's next*

Photo: Clark Fork Coalition

Now in its 15th year, Superfund cleanup of the Upper Clark Fork River is currently concentrated between Gemback Road, near Racetrack Pond, downstream (north) to Deer Lodge, including Arrowstone Park. For the cleanup, the State of Montana divides the river between Warm Springs and Garrison into 22 phases. Current work, and this update, focuses on phases 7, 10-12, and 13.

### Phase 7 - Near Racetrack Pond: What's Happening?

- About 50% of the contaminated sediments in the floodplain (within the defined removal boundary) have been removed as of early May (~70,000 cubic yards). Work is proceeding south to north in stages to avoid having too much of the bank and floodplain exposed at one time.
- Contaminated sediments are being hauled to the Opportunity Ponds repository near Anaconda, about 15 miles southwest from the site. Clean fill is being sourced from an onsite pasture and from an area south of Deer Lodge off of Lake Hill Road, roughly 8 miles north of the site.
- Streambanks are being rebuilt using an "enhanced brush matrix," a strategy first used in Phases 3 & 4 that incorporates wood and branches into the bank. This provides overhanging cover and shade, plus habitat for insects, which improves ecological conditions while new riparian vegetation is becoming established (see photo).
- Both clean and contaminated soils are being removed from a future wetland area on the east side of the river. Wetland construction is anticipated for 2026.
- The project is currently on budget - estimated at \$5 million total, including monitoring & maintenance. (Note: The State plans to review and update the [Clark Fork River Strategic Plan](#) and budget later this year and will then confirm if the project budget is still on track.)



**State agencies will host a public tour of Phase 7 this summer.** Check our website for info, or sign up for our emails at [clarkforkrivercleanup.org/contact-1](mailto:clarkforkrivercleanup.org/contact-1).

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Will all of the contamination in this area be removed?

No, only contaminated soils within the average 100-year Channel Migration Zone (with some exceptions). This is a smaller removal boundary than was used in previous phases. See our comments about this issue in our Feb. 2025 newsletter, available online at [tiny.cc/CFRTAC-Feb25](https://tiny.cc/CFRTAC-Feb25).

#### Can I use the river?

Yes, the river is open for public use, but not the floodplain. Please observe signs and stay within the river itself. Note that there is a temporary bridge about 0.5 river miles downstream from Gemback Road.

#### When will Phase 7 cleanup be done?

Work is expected to end in Oct. 2025. Wetland construction should start in 2026.

#### What routes will haul trucks use?

Trucks are using both the Frontage Road and I-90. Also expect to see more trucks using the Racetrack I-90 overpass.

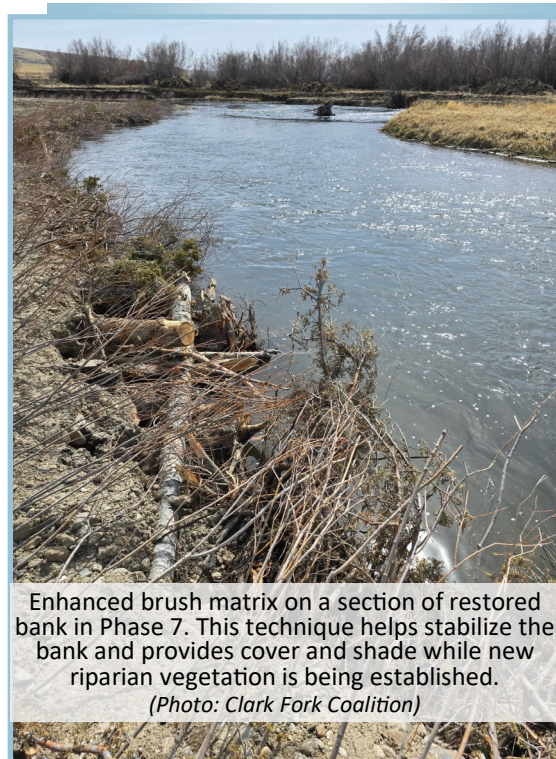
#### Can I still access Racetrack Pond?

Yes, but please use the signed, temporary parking lot southwest of the main lot.

#### What if there's a flood?

To reduce the risk of contaminated sediments reaching the river during runoff or large rain events, work is proceeding in small steps so that less of the floodplain is exposed at any given time. The State is also working to "button up" vulnerable areas prior to runoff.

See CFRTAC's comments on Phase 7 and cleanup agencies' responses in our February 2025 newsletter at: [tiny.cc/CFRTAC-Feb25](https://tiny.cc/CFRTAC-Feb25)



Enhanced brush matrix on a section of restored bank in Phase 7. This technique helps stabilize the bank and provides cover and shade while new riparian vegetation is being established.  
(Photo: Clark Fork Coalition)



**Phase 13 of the cleanup** begins north of the I-90 overpass on the south end of Deer Lodge and includes Arrowstone Park. Arrowstone is a popular destination and the public has long been concerned about conditions at the park (especially potential risks from exposed arsenic and other heavy metals), and the timing of cleanup here.

As of May 2025 the MT Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is conducting additional sampling - essential for cleanup design - to fill gaps from previous sampling. Those gaps include sampling at depth in areas where only surface sampling was done before; sampling with more sensitive equipment than was available during previous sampling; and sampling new areas where DEQ did not previously have access.



Arrowstone Park is safe to visit, but follow signage and use caution around exposed soil (Photo: Clark Fork Coalition)

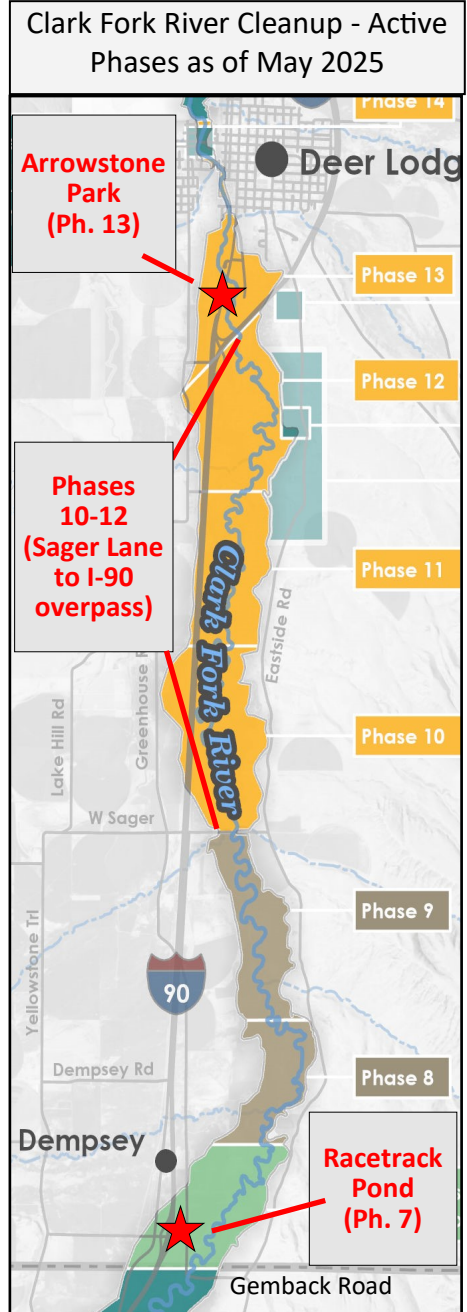
While sampling is not yet complete, it's not the main reason cleanup is delayed at Arrowstone. One of the culprits is determining the level of arsenic EPA will require to be removed to consider the site "clean." In late 2024 EPA proposed a more protective standard for arsenic (applicable nationwide) that would have a significant impact on the design, extent, cost, and timing of cleanup activities at Arrowstone. The "arsenic toxicity factor" ball is now in EPA's court.

As a federal agency, EPA is subject to the same extensive review of programs and staffing as has occurred at other federal entities since January 2025. The inherent uncertainties of this process impact the ability of EPA staff to prioritize work on Arrowstone, or provide definitive answers about arsenic levels. The upshot: They're working on it, but don't expect cleanup any time soon.

#### Is it safe to visit the park?

In 2023 DEQ applied soil caps on areas with exposed contaminated soils and also installed signs in the park warning visitors to use caution.

Those caps are still in place, but soils with elevated levels of arsenic and other heavy metals are currently exposed on the river banks in the park. To avoid exposure, stay on trails when possible, and rinse off boots, boats, dogs, hands, shoes, etc. after potential exposure. If walking off trail, avoid exposed dirt and keep children from eating or playing in exposed areas.



*While we recognize there are numerous challenges at Arrowstone, CFRTAC still firmly believes that cleanup of this important local resource and recreation area needs to occur as soon as is feasible to ensure the safety of visitors to the park.*

## Phases 10-12: Sager Lane to the I-90 Overpass

According to the 2023 Clark Fork River Operable Unit [Strategic Plan](#), Phases 10-12 are considered high priority for cleanup, as there is a high risk that contaminated soils and heavy metals-laced tailings in the floodplain will erode into the river, threatening aquatic organisms and habitat. Volumes of contamination are also high in this reach, especially in Phases 11 and 12. These three phases share the same access point (Sager Lane), and so will be completed at the same time. As of May 2025, DEQ in the process of selecting a contractor for sampling these sites. Sampling is expected to be completed in 2025.

### Federal and State Agency Contacts:

#### MT DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Logan Dudding, CFR Project Manager  
[Logan.Dudding@mt.gov](mailto:Logan.Dudding@mt.gov), 406-444-6434

#### MT NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE PROGRAM

Brian Bartkowiak, Env. Program Mgr.  
[brian.bartkowiak@mt.gov](mailto:brian.bartkowiak@mt.gov), 406-431-0843

#### U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Molly Jane Roby, Remedial Proj. Mgr.  
[robby.molly@epa.gov](mailto:robby.molly@epa.gov), 406-438-0826



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11155 Eastside Road  
Deer Lodge, MT 59722  
[info@clarkforkrivercleanup.org](mailto:info@clarkforkrivercleanup.org)  
[www.clarkforkrivercleanup.org](http://www.clarkforkrivercleanup.org)