

Clark Fork River News



CFRTAC annual site tour reminder

The Clark Fork River Technical Assistance Committee (CFRTAC) is set to host the annual Clark Fork River Field Tour and BBQ Social with help from Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP).

The event is scheduled for Aug. 26 at 1 p.m. at the Arrowstone Park Picnic Pavilion, located on the west side of Main Street about a mile south of Deer Lodge, and is free and open to the public.



Join local members of CFRTAC, DEQ, and NRDP for an up-close look at the cleanup and restoration of the Clark Fork River. Tour highlights include the cleanup progress on Phase 7 near Racetrack Pond and future plans for other sections of the river. Sturdy footwear is highly recommended. Attendees will be transported by shuttle to the site before returning to Arrowstone Park for a BBQ.

A brief Q&A session will follow the updates. During which, the public can ask questions of the representatives regarding their work.

Itinerary

- 1:00: Meet at the Arrowstone Park Picnic Pavilion
- 1:10: Introduction to the Clark Fork River cleanup and restoration projects
- 1:30: Load vans and carpool to Phase 7 site near Racetrack Pond
- 1:45: Walking tour of active cleanup and restoration work
- 4:00: Return to Arrowstone Park for BBQ and further discussion

More information on the cleanup can be found on [DEQ's Federal Superfund page](#) under "Clark Fork River Operable Unit" and at ClarkForkRiverCleanup.org.

Phase 7 updates from DEQ and NRDP



Construction

Construction in Phase 7 started in January 2025 and has been progressing steadily. Some time was lost due to winter weather and springtime high flows, but all streambank construction is complete, except for areas under the temporary bridge, which are expected to be completed this fall after the bridge is removed.

Approximately 75% of the contaminated material has been removed and replaced with clean alluvium fill (rounded river rocks and cobbles) generated from an on-site borrow source. The large piles of dirt visible from the interstate are backfill piles amended with compost that will be spread on top of the alluvium fill to grow and sustain vegetation. The original project completion date was late October and is now expected to extend until mid-December due to weather, planting restrictions, and additional contaminated soil removal. The temporary parking lot will be reclaimed, and the existing parking lot is set to re-open upon completion of the project.

Intermountain Construction Services (ICS) is performing work on Phase 7, under the engineering oversight of Tetra Tech. The complete removal of impacted material is confirmed within seconds by engineers in the field using a portable X-ray fluorescence analyzer, or XRF analyzer, used to examine the floors and walls of an excavation to ensure all contaminated materials are removed. Additional materials are removed if the XRF analyzer shows that contamination is still present. The XRF analyzer undergoes daily quality assurance and control processes and select samples are sent for laboratory analysis to ensure the XRF analyzer is reporting accurate results.

Habitat Streambanks

DEQ incorporated specific restoration actions funded by Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) into the overall remediation and restoration of Phase 7, and one of the most significant restoration actions was the “new” streambank treatments and large wood structures.

These streambank treatments incorporate large wood, live willows, and log structures into the remediated and restored streambanks. These treatments were used to rebuild contaminated streambanks as well as treatment of streambanks that would not be treated as part of the remedy, including “clean” streambanks and streambanks that were previously stabilized utilizing debris such as whole car bodies, car body parts, and metal wire.



These streambanks are intended to provide better immediate aquatic habitat while still developing good long-term habitat. Initial reports from FWP’s spring fish population surveys indicate they appear to be supporting similar adult fish densities to downstream un-remediated habitat, and FWP believes these brush matrix streambanks provide adequate short-term habitat for various age classes of fish. NRDP is also conducting new aquatic habitat monitoring to measure potential benefits of the new streambank treatments and future design changes.

Most of the woody material for these streambanks was obtained using Upper Clark Fork River Basin terrestrial funds to remove conifers that are encroaching into grasslands and supply the materials (junipers and conifers) for streambank construction. Land use and fire suppression have allowed conifers, such as Rocky Mountain juniper and Douglas fir, to expand their typical ranges into native grass and sagebrush ecosystems.

Removing these tree species from these upland areas enhances terrestrial habitat for wildlife, reduces water depletion, provides additional forage for grazers like elk, and increases the productivity and vitality of sage brush-grassland habitats. In addition to woody material obtained from conifer encroachment work, NRDP received donations of large woody materials from British Petroleum-Atlantic Richfield’s reclamation work in the basin and from local contractors. The materials were donated, and NRDP paid to haul the materials to the site.

Coordinating these projects allowed NRDP and DEQ to save money for the Clark Fork River and reduce waste from the conifer removal restoration actions.

NRDP Phase 7 Wetland Complex

Another significant addition from NRDP is the Phase 7 Wetlands. The 1999 Streamside Tailings Consent Decree required the state create in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin up to

400 acres of any combination of the following: newly constructed wetlands or restoration of destroyed wetlands; enhancement of existing wetlands; or enhancement of riparian areas on or along the Clark Fork River or its tributaries. This is also known as the Wetland Plan.

The Phase 7 wetland complex is considered Restoration in addition to Remedy since the wetland's footprint is outside of the remedial removal boundary. NRDP funded the removal of an additional more than 17,000 cubic yards of contaminated materials over approximately 20 acres. This work is funded by NRDP from the portion of the Upper Clark Fork Basin Restoration Fund allocated to the Wetland Plan.

After completion of the Phase 7 project, under separate contract, NRDP will enhance the borrow areas and adjacent riparian areas into highly functional riparian and wetland communities. Specific actions include additional grading to create diverse habitat conditions and additional planting of riparian and wetland vegetation.

NRDP already hosted several tours of this area and received valuable design feedback from local conservations groups, resource managers, and landowners. NRDP will continue to coordinate the development of the design with these groups. The design is anticipated to be completed this winter. Completion of final enhancements of the wetlands complex is expected in the fall of 2026.

Combining these projects allows NRDP to enhance the habitat and preserve the Clark Fork restoration funds.

Revegetation

Once Phase 7 general construction is complete, NRDP-secured contractors will revegetate this area with native plants. Phase 7 revegetation consists of installing more than 10,000 feet of willow trenches and seeding of all disturbed areas with native seed mixes or pasture mixes on private agricultural property. The plan calls for growing more than 10,000 40-cubic-inch, containerized, native plants for planting in the Phase 7 area, work that will be overseen by DEQ. Native plants include; sandbar willow, Bebb willow, Booth willow, Geyer willow, Pacific willow, red-osier dogwood, grey alder, water birch and black cottonwood. Willow trenches and seeding are anticipated to be completed this fall after general construction is complete and planting of the containerized plants will occur in the fall of 2026.



Quick Updates

- **Arrowstone Park (Phases 13 and 14):** the Clark Fork team is currently working on revising and finalizing the data gaps sampling plan for Arrowstone Park. Sampling is expected to occur this fall. This sampling will consist of subsurface soil sampling in locations that were not previously sampled in addition to updated surface sampling

for arsenic. These data will be critical to inform remedial design and assess human health safety for parkgoers.

- **Phases 10-12:** The Clark Fork team is developing a sampling plan for the site characterization sampling for Phases 10-12 of the Clark Fork. This sampling is the first step toward developing the remedial design for these phases. Look out for updated sampling timelines at the next public meeting.
- **Strategic Plan Update:** The State is currently working on the first update to the Strategic Plan (originally released in 2023). This revision will include a budget update as well as a reformat to clarify the plan.
- EPA, in cooperation with the state of Montana, is beginning the **fourth five-year review of the Milltown Reservoir Sediments/Clark Fork River Superfund site**. Five-year reviews evaluate remedies to determine whether they remain protective of human health and the environment. This five-year review will be released in 2026. We want to hear from you! Please reach out to EPA's Community Involvement Coordinator for the site Beth Archer if you have information that may be helpful in the five-year review process. Archer can be reached either by phone at (720) 512-1917 or by email at archer.elizabeth@epa.gov.