

## Clark Fork River News



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### DEQ schedules Feb. '25 meeting at Powell County Community Center

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Montana Natural Resources and Damage Program, and Clark Fork River Technical Assistance Committee are set to host a public meeting concerning remediation work in and around the Deer Lodge area.

The meeting is set for Feb. 25 at 6 p.m. at the Powell County Community Center, located at 416 Cottonwood Ave. in Deer Lodge and is open to the public.

Representatives from the state and community entities will be on hand to provide updates to Phase 7 of construction that began in January, Arrowstone Park and an NRDP-led investigation into declining fish populations in the Upper Clark Fork River. Those who cannot attend the meeting can find summation of the present phase of construction as well as the Where's the Fish investigation below.

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

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## Phase 7 of CFR construction begins

Remediation and restoration construction has begun for Phase 7 of the Clark Fork River Operable Unit.

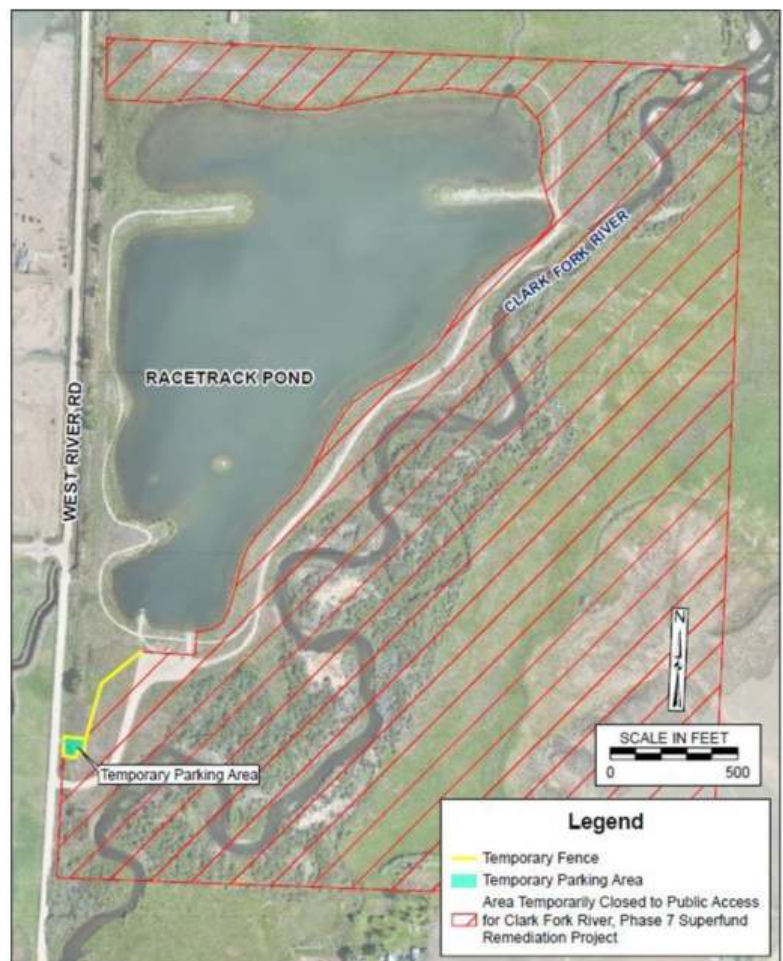


Construction commenced in January 2025 and is expected to continue to the end of October (weather permitting). To ensure safety for the public and construction workers, access to Racetrack Ponds will be temporarily relocated, and the State Land adjacent to Racetrack Ponds will be closed.

Racetrack Ponds are safe for recreation and will remain open to the public with a temporary parking lot (please see the Figure below). Please follow all signage and fencing during construction.

Intermountain Construction Services (ICS) was the low bidder of three for the work, coming in at \$3.7 million. Contaminated sediment will be removed from the site with clean backfill brought in using street-legal heavy trucks. Impacted soils will be brought to the repository at Opportunity Ponds, and clean soils will be sourced from state-owned land south of Deer Lodge. The phase characterization and remedial design documents can be found on the DEQ website.

Please use caution and stay away from the banks if floating the river during construction. ICS intends to work Monday through Friday, but weather may affect the schedule.



## NRDP asks 'Where are the fish?'

The populations of brown trout and other fish species remain near historic lows in reaches of the Upper Clark Fork River (UCFR) between Warm Springs and Deer Lodge. Sampling data from Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) for this section of the UCFR indicate the decline in trout numbers began in approximately 2014 and reached a 50-year low in 2023. Reasons for this decline are currently unknown, but water quality coming from upstream Warm Springs Ponds is a concern. Habitat simplification from the cleanup is also often discussed. Warm summer water temperatures are also a major influence on trout populations in western Montana.



### Investigation Plan

The Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) was allocated \$1 million in early 2024 as part of the revision to the UCFR Basin Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Restoration Plans to investigate reasons behind fish population declines. NRDP has since developed an investigation plan that has three main components:

- Water Quality
- Expanded Fisheries Research
- Stream Geomorphology and Habitat

### Water Quality

The investigation plan calls for additional analysis and integration of existing water quality datasets collected by USGS, DEQ, EPA contractors, universities, BP/ARCO, and FWP, as well as additional monitoring efforts. USGS is proposing to expand its water quality and stream gauge monitoring network. USGS and NRDP are developing a cooperative agreement to conduct more sampling and analysis. NRDP is also working with Montana Tech on two graduate research projects.

### Expanded Fisheries Research

Previous work by FWP has included surveys of tributary fish populations and habitat conditions, trout telemetry studies in the mainstem and tributaries to identify important habitats, two natal origins studies to identify important source populations, studies of fish entrainment in irrigation systems, and routine population monitoring in the UCFR. With funding assistance from NRDP, FWP is proposing new tagging, trapping, and other sampling methods that focus on survival, production, and movement of young trout.

### Stream Geomorphology and Habitat

The State is working to collect quantitative information about the status of stream geomorphology and fish habitat in the Clark Fork River upstream of Deer Lodge. This information is being used to inform remedial design and evaluate the influence of cleanup

and restoration efforts. NRDP is also working with Montana Tech to map cold water refuge habitats and develop strategies to maintain and enhance these critical habitat features.

**Other Efforts**

To identify critical liming factors and successful restoration strategies, it is important that agencies, academia, industry, NGOs, and other stakeholders share resources and information. In April 2024 the Clark Fork Science Forum was held in Butte and was attended by over 100 professionals and students working in the Clark Fork Basin. We are planning on continuing to get this group through online forums and field trips in 2025 and beyond..