RETURN TO USE INITIATIVE
2010 Demonstration Project

MILLTOWN RESERVOIR SEDIMENTS
Milltown, Montana

THE SITE: The Milltown Reservoir Sediments Superfund site (the Site) is an Operable Unit within a larger Superfund site, the Milltown Reservoir Sediments/ Clark Fork River Superfund site. The Site includes approximately 120 miles of the Clark Fork River upstream of the former Milltown Dam and Reservoir. The Milltown Dam and Reservoir had been located at the confluence of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers, a few miles upstream of Missoula, in western Montana. Approximately 6.6 million cubic yards of contaminated sediments had accumulated behind the dam. Arsenic in the sediments polluted the local drinking water aquifer and the release of copper from the sediments threatened downstream fish and other aquatic life. These sediments were deposited over the past century, the result of historical mining operations upstream in Butte.

There are ongoing Superfund cleanup activities throughout the Clark Fork Basin. EPA issued a Record of Decision in December 2004, calling for removal of the Milltown Dam and the most highly contaminated sediments. There was broad public support for this cleanup plan with approximately 98% of the nearly 15,000 public comments received favoring EPA's proposed plans.

THE OPPORTUNITY: One of the main objectives of the Milltown project is restoration of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot river channels. By removing the dam and restoring river flow in the area, the project aims to restore the high quality of water from the Milltown Aquifer, allow unrestricted fish passage, improve native and recreational fisheries, provide high quality habitat for fish and wildlife, and allow for expansion of functional wetland and riparian communities. The restored ecosystem will also provide safe recreational opportunities including river boating, fishing and trail access for hiking and bicycling.

The lands in and around the former Milltown Reservoir Sediments site would be converted to a Montana State

PICTURED: View of tailwaters at the former Milltown Dam (Source: EPA)

BARRIER: Competing ideas for what reuses would replace the dam and surrounding area

SOLUTION: Extensive public involvement leading to a common vision of future uses

PICTURED: A view of the new river channels and wetlands on the Clark Fork River in November 2011 (Source: EPA)

BEFORE: Dam and reservoir that contaminated ground water and downstream aquatic life

AFTER: Two free-flowing rivers with improving fish populations and declining contaminant concentrations; wide community acceptance of planned state park

Park with trails, river access sites, bridges, interpretative signage, a viewing area on the bluff overlooking the confluence of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers, and possibly an interpretative center. Ideally, a trail system would link the Milltown Gateway, Confluence and former Reservoir areas along the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers as well as connect to Missoula's Riverfront Trail system, extending the Kim Williams Trail along the Clark Fork River.

THE BARRIER: While there was clear consensus on the need for site remediation, different stakeholder groups at the federal, state and local levels had varying opinions on how cleanup should be performed and what should happen to the Site once cleanup was completed. Many community members wanted the property to be publicly owned, even though it was privately owned at the time. There were concerns that the Site might be sold to private interests who might commercially develop the Site and the community wanted the area to be a public resource. Stakeholders needed to work together to develop a plan for the Site that would integrate remediation, restoration and redevelopment.

THE SOLUTION: Starting as a Superfund Redevelopment Pilot in 2002, EPA and state and local stakeholders began a process of working closely together to develop a vision for the future of the Site and surrounding area once contamination was gone and the river restored. This plan was created in 2007 through a design workshop process in which the community worked with state and federal agencies and volunteer landscape architects. That plan is now in the early stages of implementation.

THE SITE NOW: Removal of the Milltown Dam began in 2008 and was completed in January 2010. The reservoir area was dried out to allow for excavation and removal of sediments with the last load of sediments being removed off site by train in September 2009. Off-site disposal of sediments has removed the source of contamination and the removal of the dam has restored the fish passage along the once again free-flowing Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers. Fish populations are increasing, moving up river and recovering well, and contaminant concentrations downstream and in ground water are declining. The State of Montana is presently planting native species to reestablish vegetation and control erosion along the exposed floodplain that had previously been inundated by the former reservoir.

In December 2010, property owned by NorthWestern Energy and the local Carpenters' Union was transferred to the State of Montana to be developed into a state park. Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer approved two Natural Resource Damage Program grants for the Milltown Project area: 1) a grant of $2,663,749 awarded for the Milltown Two Rivers Recreational Facilities and Access; and 2) a grant of $262,177 awarded to remove bridge piers and logs on the Blackfoot. The Governor also allocated a five-year grant for operation and maintenance of the new park to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. "This Site is just a great example of how state, federal and local groups can work together," said Diana Hammer, EPA Project Manager for the Site. "Everyone has come together to ensure integration of Site remediation, restoration and redevelopment. It has been a real pleasure to work on this project." In 2010, the Site received a $700,000 federal appropriation through the work of Senator Max Baucus towards development of the Milltown State Park. Planning for the Milltown State Park began in 2011 and continues into 2012. Initial Park development will focus on the "confluence" area just below where the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers join. To follow the Park Planning efforts, please visit: www.milltownstatepark.org. In addition to the plans for the state park, the Clark Fork Coalition has developed a sustainable-style ranch on the Clark Fork River operable unit of the Site. Most of the cattle are auctioned off in Butte but a few are sold locally to individuals or at farmers' markets in Missoula.

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