

NATIONAL PRIORITIES LIST (NPL)

Proposed Site

September 2009

BLACK BUTTE MINE | Cottage Grove, Oregon

Site Location:

Black Butte Mine is located in Lane County in rural western Oregon, approximately 10 miles south of Cottage Grove. The site is situated on the south slope of Black Butte, which is part of the Calapooya Divide.

Site History:

Black Butte Mine is a former mercury mine which operated intermittently from the 1890s to the mid 1960s. Peak production occurred from 1927 to 1943. Prior to 1975, the site was owned by a number of mining interests, and used primarily for mineral extraction. From 1975 to 1994, the property had a number of private owners who used the property primarily for logging. Since 1994, the property has been owned by the Land and Timber Company, LLC, which also uses the property for logging.

Site Contamination/Contaminants:

The site is host to a 300,000 cubic yard tailings pile, large areas of contaminated soil near the former mill area, and large volumes of tailings throughout the adjacent Furnace Creek drainage. The most important contaminants in the sources, surface water and sediments are mercury and arsenic. Concentrations of these metals in upland sources exceed EPA cleanup guidelines for soil. Mercury and arsenic concentrations in stream sediments adjacent to, and down gradient of, the site also exceed EPA Risk Assessment Guidelines.

Potential Impacts on Surrounding Community/Environment:

The site drains to adjacent streams Furnace Creek and Dennis Creek, which converge with Garoutte Creek (1/4 mile from the site) which then flows to the Coast Fork of the Willamette River (1.5 miles from the site) and to Cottage Grove Reservoir (9 miles from the site). Fishing occurs in Garoutte Creek at the confluence with Furnace and Dennis Creeks. Wetlands and threatened species are also present within the impacted drainages. Migration of mercury from the site continues to impact sediments in Cottage Grove Reservoir.

Response Activities (to date):

At the request of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ), EPA completed some cleanup action in 2007 consisting of regrading the main tailings pile to prevent erosion, and the capping of certain areas of contaminated soil. In spite of this work, significant contamination remains and sampling confirms that the site remains a source of mercury to the Coast Fork of the Willamette River and the Cottage Grove Reservoir, where mercury contamination in sediments has resulted in a fish advisory.

Need for NPL Listing:

NPL listing is essential to address the significant contamination that remains on site, which continues to impact surface water habitat downstream and Cottage Grove Reservoir. ODEQ does not have the available resources to address problems at the site, and the scope and complexity of the remaining contamination exceeds the capacity of EPA's removal program. The current property owner has limited resources and there are no viable potentially responsible private parties that have been identified. NPL listing remains the only option for addressing issues at the site. EPA received a letter of support for placing this site on the NPL from the State.

[The description of the site (release) is based on information available at the time the site was evaluated with the HRS. The description may change as additional information is gathered on the sources and extent of contamination.]