

Former Sawmill Redevelopment

EPA Region 8

Contamination from former sawmills can present significant environmental and economic challenges for many communities across the country. Often located in desirable areas such as riverfronts and downtown districts, these properties are rich in local history, as they previously served as major employers and economic contributors. However, when a mill closes the surrounding community is faced with both economic, as well as environmental challenges that can take decades to overcome. Fortunately, both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state agencies have developed programs that can assist local leaders as they assess, clean up and ultimately transform these properties back into productive community assets.

Success stories in EPA Region 8 demonstrate that perseverance, creativity, partnership and leveraging can restore sawmill properties to a variety of productive uses that will benefit the surrounding community well into the future.

Missoula Sawmill is Ready for Reuse

Location: Missoula, Montana

Size: 46 acres

EPA Funding: \$137,500 EPA Targeted Brownfields Assessment; EPA Revolving Loan Fund, \$2.4 million; EPA Brownfields ARRA subgrant

Leveraged Accomplishments: \$11.9 million redevelopment funding; \$218,679 cleanup funding; 86 redevelopment jobs

The former Champion International Sawmill operated for more than 80 years on a 46 acre property along the Clark Fork River in downtown Missoula. The cleanup and redevelopment of the highly visible property was a priority for the city and was a critical component in the Missoula Downtown Master Plan.

In the late 1990s, the city and the EPA began characterizing the property and confirmed extensive methane contamination from wood debris, with levels high enough to elevate the site to Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) State Superfund list. The property's location and redevelopment opportunities encouraged the city and developers to continue pursuing site cleanup and redevelopment. With financial and technical support from the EPA, the city issued \$3.2 million in low interest loans and subgrants to remediate the property.

The size and complexity of the site meant that cleanup work would take place over the course of several years. Nevertheless, the city and stakeholders were determined to capitalize on redevelopment opportunities and remained committed to reclaiming the area. After nearly 15 years of assessment and cleanup work, the Montana DEQ issued a final cleanup complete (closure) letter in spring 2014 and in June of that same year the city dedicated Silver Park. This new 17 acre park is owned by the city and features bike paths, green space and restored, historic sawmill structures and equipment. In March 2015, developers broke ground on the first part of the privately-owned 29 acres that will host a mixed retail and housing development. Additional retail plans include a boutique 200-bed student residence and a brewpub restaurant in the now aptly named, Old Sawmill District. Additionally, the cleanup enabled the City of Missoula to leverage funds to lengthen Wyoming Street from North California Street to Cregg Lane, which created an important new connector route and helped alleviate congestion for the surrounding neighborhoods.



Missoula Sawmill site before restoration.



Missoula sawmill in Montana, after cleanup.

EPA Brownfields Assessment and Revolving Loan Fund grants were critical to the redevelopment of this former sawmill on the banks of the Clark Fork River.

Dubois Sawmill Now Promoting Health and Wellness

Location: Dubois, Wyoming

Size: 55 acres

EPA Funding: \$200,000 EPA Cleanup Grant

Leveraged Accomplishments: \$368,000 Wyoming DEQ (DEQ's 128a funding); \$31,000 leveraged by state and locally; \$237,000 Wyoming DEQ cleanup funds; \$40,000 City of Dubois cleanup funds; \$704,900 Wyoming Business Council (utility installation).

Often referred to as the “Gateway to Yellowstone”, Dubois, Wyoming (pop. 995) is a small community surrounded by unrivaled natural beauty and is rich in local history. Like many western communities, that history is intertwined with the railroad and timber industries. Beginning in the late 1950s, Louisiana Pacific operated a sawmill to make 2' x 4' studs for homes at the Dubois Mill. In 1988 the mill closed, Dubois lost more than 200 jobs, and for the next decade the 55-acre sawmill sat vacant. Then, in 1998, the Albright/Arlen family purchased the property and donated it to the Nature Conservancy for the “health and enjoyment of the citizens of the greater Dubois Community and its future generations.” Almost immediately, the Nature Conservancy sold 5.5 acres to the Dubois Medical Board for \$1 to construct a new medical clinic. Then, in 2005, an additional 7 acres were sold to the Dubois Community Project for an assisted living center and the remaining acreage to the Town of Dubois for \$1.

At the same time, the Town of Dubois spent years working with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to address contamination on the property. From 2006 to 2008, Wyoming DEQ provided funds to conduct Phase I and Phase II environmental assessments. The assessments identified refuse landfill piles and petroleum contamination above Wyoming DEQ's soil cleanup levels. With continued assistance from Wyoming DEQ, the town was able to clean up the bulk of the debris piles.

With the completion of the debris cleanup in 2010, the town moved to address the 8,000 to 9,000 cubic yards of contaminated soils. To that end, a \$200,000 EPA Cleanup Grant was applied for and awarded in 2012 and used to excavate contaminated soils from 2013 to 2015. The remedial actions taken at the Dubois Mill allow for unrestricted reuse of the property.

With cleanup complete, a locally designed redevelopment plan is guiding the way toward a full reclamation of the property. A key aspect of the reuse is the improvement of open and greenspace, in the form of the River Walk Project, which includes a river walkway path, benches, a paved parking lot, a fish pond and improved access to the Wind River. In addition, several redevelopment projects are completed including the Dubois Medical Clinic, the Dubois Western Activities rodeo grounds, the 25-unit Dubois Community Project Assisted Living Center, and the Duffy Therapy and Fitness Center. All of these improvements promote the health and wellness of the Dubois community. Additionally, a sidewalk along the river provides fishing access and the Dubois Anglers Wildlife group is working on a two-acre children's fishing pond.



*A historic photo of the Dubois Sawmill Site.
Photo courtesy of the Dubois Museum.*



Dubois Sawmill site after restoration.

“The Town of Dubois, Wyoming is a good example of how a small, rural community comes together to find a way to clean up a brownfield (a former sawmill) and end up with a tremendous community asset.”

—Vickie Meredith
Wyoming DEQ