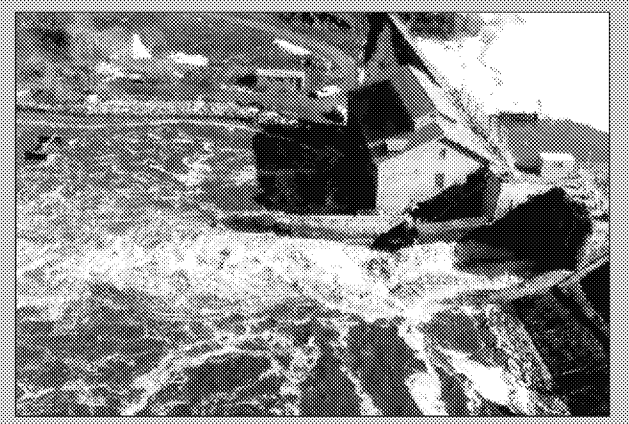
RETURN TO USE INITIATIVE
2010 Demonstration Project

MILLTOWN RESERVOIR SEDIMENTS
Milltown, Montana

THE SITE: The Milltown Reservoir Sediments Superfund site (the Site) in western Montana is part of a larger regional cleanup effort addressing much of the Clark Fork River watershed. The Site includes about 120 miles of the Clark Fork River upstream of its confluence with the Blackfoot River. After a century of mining operations in the area, millions of cubic yards of contaminated sediment had built up behind the Milltown Dam. Arsenic in the sediments polluted the local drinking water aquifer and the release of copper from the sediments threatened fish and other aquatic life downstream. Cleanup activities included the removal of the Milltown Dam and contaminated sediment in the dam's reservoir, followed by the restoration of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers.

THE OPPORTUNITY: In addition to protecting human health and the environment, cleanup and restoration of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot river channels could provide several other benefits, including ecological revitalization and recreational reuse. Dam and sediment removal could lead to improved water quality, strengthen native and recreational fisheries, provide wildlife habitat, and allow for expansion of wetlands and riparian areas. The State of Montana was also looking to locate a new state park in the area, providing opportunities for boating, fishing, hiking and biking.

THE BARRIER: Diverse site stakeholders – local communities, state and federal agencies, two tribes, responsible parties and property owners – had different perspectives on cleanup strategies and future use of the area. Any plan for moving forward would need to integrate remediation, restoration and redevelopment.



PICTURED: Milltown Dam prior to its removal in 2010. (Source: EPA)

BARRIER: Numerous ideas for how to clean up, restore and reuse the Site.

SOLUTION: Extensive public outreach and stakeholder coordination leading to an integrated vision for the Site's remediation, restoration and redevelopment.

PICTURED: The restored Clark Fork River and adjacent wetlands in November 2011. (Source: EPA)

BEFORE: Contaminated sediment in dam reservoir affected ground water and downstream aquatic life.

AFTER: Two restored, free-flowing rivers; declining ground water contamination; new state park with broad public support.

THE SOLUTION: EPA worked with site stakeholders to develop integrated plans for cleanup, river restoration and reuse. A Superfund Redevelopment pilot project in 2002 led to formation of the Milltown Superfund Redevelopment Working Group, which brought together site stakeholders to plan for the future. The resulting Conceptual Development Plan, first published in 2005 and updated in 2007, identified opportunities for historic preservation, heritage tourism, environmental education and recreation. A new Montana state park would include trails, river access points, bridges, interpretive areas, a viewing area overlooking the confluence of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers, and a visitor's center. The region's trail network would connect to the new park.

THE SITE NOW: In September 2012, site stakeholders marked a major project milestone – the end of the Site's remediation and restoration phases and the beginning of its monitoring and redevelopment phases. Removal of the Milltown Dam took place from 2008 to 2010. More than three million tons of contaminated sediment was removed and river channels and floodplains have been restored. The confluence of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers now flows freely for the first time in a century. Fish populations are recovering. Contaminant concentrations downstream and in ground water are declining, restoring drinking water supplies. Revegetation efforts by the State of Montana are using native species to reestablish wildlife habitat and control erosion.

The Conceptual Development Plan is now in the early stages of implementation. In 2010, 415 acres at the Site transferred to the State of Montana for Milltown State Park. More than $3 million in grant funding has been allocated for the park's development and operation, on top of about $5 million already allocated for land acquisitions and adjoining trails. The "confluence" area just below where the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers come together is the focus of initial park development efforts. Clark Fork River opened for recreational use in 2013. Regular updates are available on the state park's website: www.milltownstatepark.org. "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."

Another part of the larger Milltown Reservoir / Clark Fork River Superfund site nearby is also in reuse. The Clark Fork Coalition, a local environmental organization, is part-owner and the managing partner of Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch, a 2,300-acre sustainable working cattle ranch next to the Clark Fork River.

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