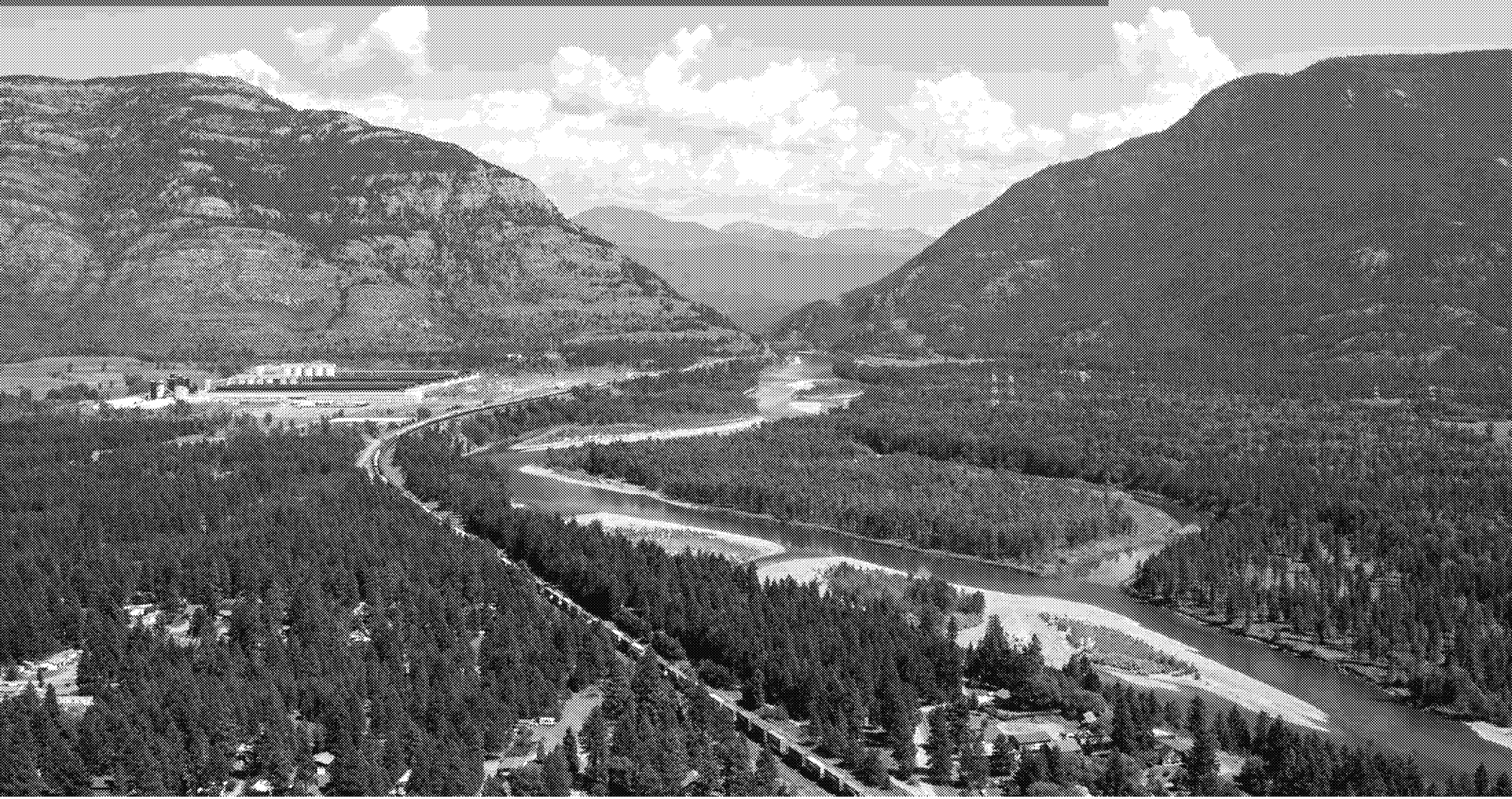
EPA

2017
Region 8

Anaconda Aluminum Co Columbia Falls Reduction Plant Site

also known as the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) site

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PLAN



Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) promotes fair and meaningful public involvement so that all people enjoy equal access to the decision-making process and the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards regardless of race, color, national origin or income level.

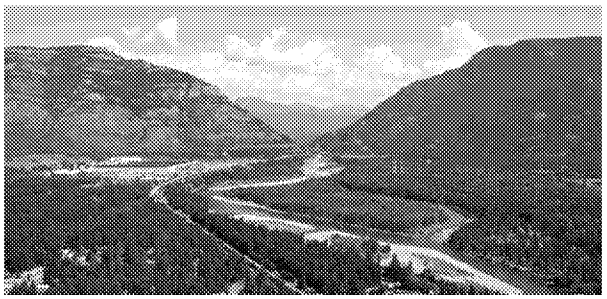
To do this in the EPA Superfund program, EPA staff works with the community and partners to conduct community outreach activities in areas affected by the Superfund designation and develops a community involvement plan that summarizes public concerns about the site and outlines how people can engage throughout the Superfund process.

Community involvement activities at the Anaconda Aluminum Co Columbia Falls Reduction Plant site, also known as the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) site, are designed to:

- Inform and update the public about the site and the cleanup process.
- Engage the public to provide meaningful input into the Superfund process and site cleanup decisions.
- Sustain public engagement throughout the Superfund timeline.

This community involvement plan provides links and contact information to people and resources so that you can learn more about the CFAC site and identify ways to be involved.

Section 1

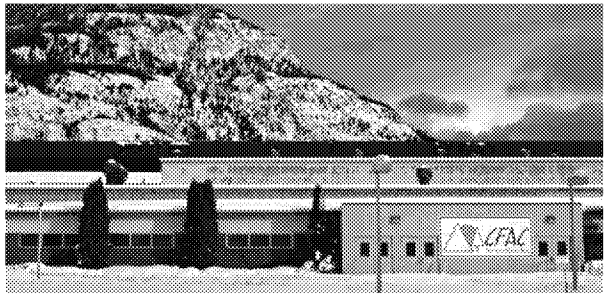


Provides a synopsis of the site and summarizes community concerns and communication preferences.

Section 2

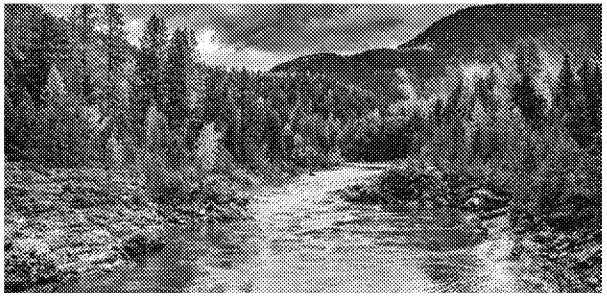
Presents EPA's community engagement program for the site and ways to get involved.

Section 3



Reviews the CFAC site's history and status.

Appendices



Summarizes key community information and provides supplemental and contact information.

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Street sign leading to the CFAC site.
Cover: Aerial view of the CFAC site alongside the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

The Middle Fork of the Flathead River in Autumn

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EPA would like to thank the Flathead Beacon for allowing the use of the newspaper's photographs in this document. The photographs may not be used or reproduced without the express consent of the Flathead Beacon.

Site Synopsis

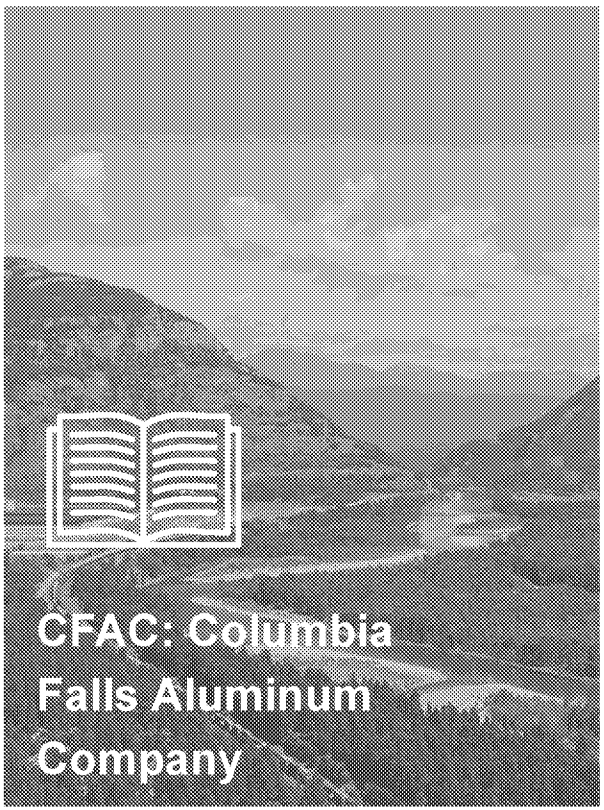
The CFAC site is located at 2000 Aluminum Drive, two miles northeast of Columbia Falls in Flathead County, Montana. It covers about 960 acres north of the Flathead River; the CFAC facility operated on site between 1955 and 2009. The CFAC site is located in EPA's Rocky Mountain and Plains Region (Region 8). EPA Region 8 serves Montana, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming and 27 sovereign tribal nations.

During its operation, CFAC created significant quantities of spent potliner material, a federally listed hazardous waste, as a byproduct of the aluminum smelting process. EPA's initial site evaluation indicated groundwater and surface water had been contaminated with cyanide, fluoride, and various metals. Multiple potential sources of contamination are located at the site that may pose risks to human health or the environment.

To protect human health and the environment, EPA added the CFAC site to the National Priorities List (NPL) in 2016, making it eligible for additional study and cleanup resources under EPA's Superfund program.

Superfund is the federal program that investigates and cleans up the country's most complex, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites to protect public health and the environment. The program was established by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA).

At the CFAC site, EPA is the lead agency. EPA works closely with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to oversee site investigation and cleanup activities. CFAC and their contractor Roux Associates are currently conducting the site's remedial investigation with EPA and DEQ oversight. DEQ is overseeing the demolition of physical structures on site.



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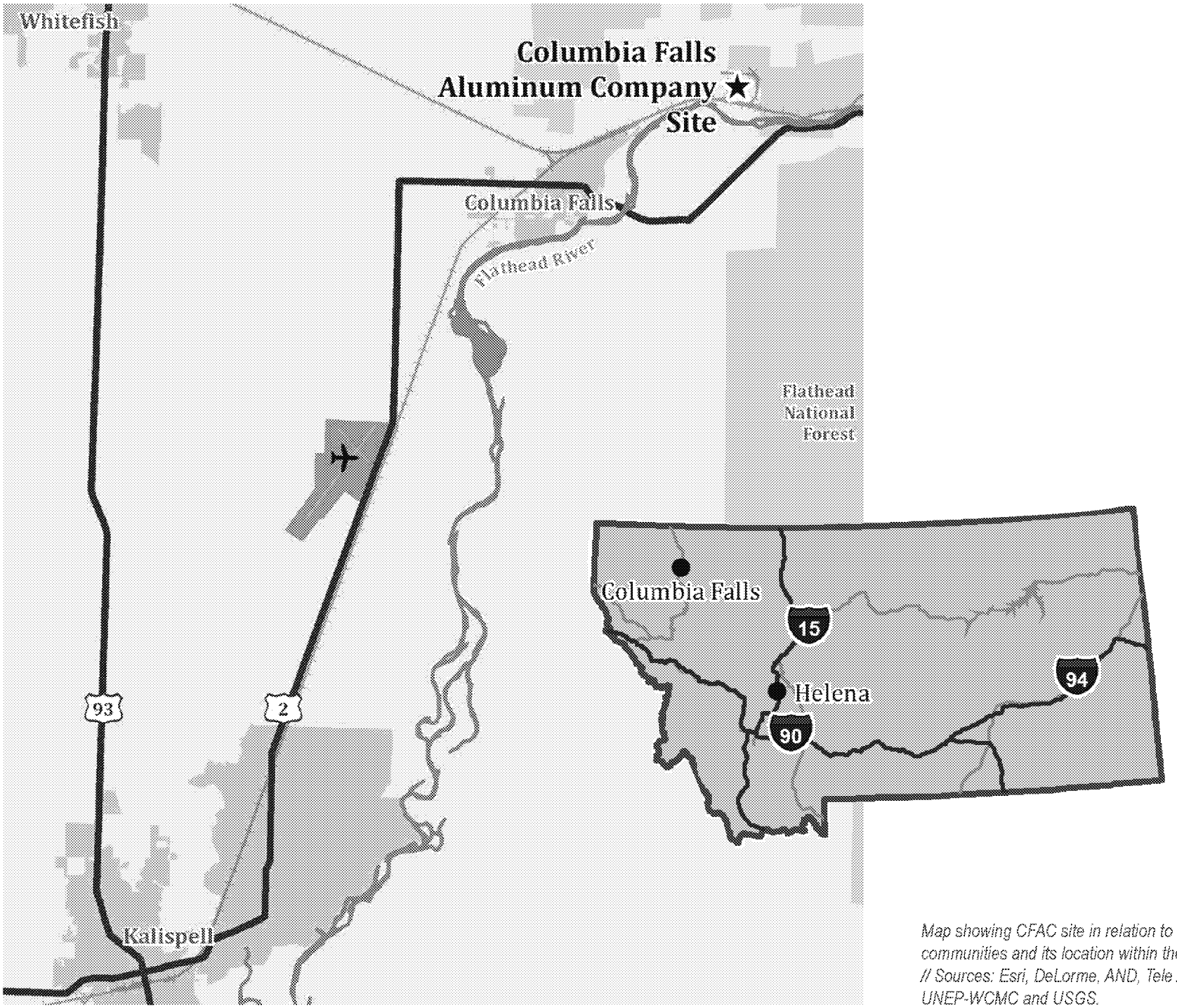

Map showing CFAC site in relation to the surrounding communities and its location within the state of Montana. // Sources: Esri, DeLorme, AND, Tele Atlas, First American, UNEP-WCMC and USGS.

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The Superfund timeline can take many years. This timeline below shows the major steps in the Superfund process and the progress of the CFAC site.

Screening

Discovery

A potentially contaminated site is reported to EPA or a similar state or local agency.

Preliminary Assessment (PA)

EPA gathers historical and other available information about site conditions to evaluate whether the site poses a threat to human health and the environment and whether further investigation is needed. It also helps identify sites that may need immediate or short-term response actions.

Site Investigation (SI)

Further analysis of air, water and soil at the site to determine what hazardous substances are present and whether they are being released to the environment and are a threat to human health.

National Priorities List (NPL) Site Listing Process

EPA evaluates the risks posed by the site using the Hazard Ranking System. Sites that score at or above an established level qualify for cleanup under Superfund and are proposed for listing on the NPL, a list of the most serious sites identified for long-term cleanup.

Investigation

Remedial Investigation/ Feasibility Study (RI/FS)

The RI collects data to determine the nature and extent of contamination at the site. The FS identifies technologies capable of treating the contamination, and evaluates the cost and performance of different cleanup approaches.

Proposed Plan

The Proposed Plan summarizes RI/FS findings and identifies cleanup alternatives and a preferred approach to addressing site risks. Public comments are considered.

CFAC Site Timeline

1984	1984	1988-2014	2015 (proposed NPL listing) 2016 (final NPL listing)	RI: 2016-2020 FS: 2021 (estimated)

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Decision

Record of Decision (ROD)

The ROD documents and describes the site's selected remedy.

Remedial Design

EPA works with the State and potentially responsible parties (PRPs) on technical specifications for cleanup remedies and technologies.

Cleanup

Remedial Action

This step involves the actual construction or implementation of the cleanup.

Construction Completion

Physical construction of all cleanup remedies is complete, all immediate threats have been addressed and all long-term threats are under control. Though long-term cleanup actions may still be operating, the site is often ready for reuse.

Post-Cleanup

Post-Construction Completion

Includes activities that follow construction completion, such as operation and maintenance and long-term response actions, institutional controls, five-year reviews and optimization of remedies. The goal is to ensure the long-term protection of human health and the environment.

NPL Deletion

The final stage of the Superfund process. EPA may delete a site from the NPL if the Agency determines no further response is required to protect human health or the environment.

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Community involvement is essential throughout the Superfund process to ensure people can share information about the site and participate in the decision-making process – from initial investigations to final cleanup and reuse of the site. Community involvement activities have been ongoing and will continue at the CFAC site in order to identify and respond to community concerns, engage people in the Superfund process, and develop the community involvement plan.

At the CFAC site, these activities have included:

- Researching community documents and considering public comments.
- Meeting with local residents and community groups.
- Working with elected officials and government partners at the local, state and national level.
- Cooperating with local news media.
- Conducting community interviews.

Community interviews are an important part of EPA's public engagement program. EPA will continue to conduct community interviews to identify community concerns about the CFAC site and ensure effective community engagement throughout the Superfund process.

In June 2016, EPA conducted an initial round of interviews with Columbia Falls residents, adjacent landowners, former CFAC workers, local business owners, elected officials and other stakeholders. Their experiences ranged from having minimal contact with the CFAC facility to working on site for decades.

Community members can discuss concerns with EPA whenever a representative is in the area, or contact the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator by phone, email, or mail at any time.

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Community members gather around one of the landfills on the CFAC site during a tour in 2016.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

Community Concerns

Review of information gathered during community interviews and other outreach activities has identified several community concerns about the CFAC site. Some people noted that some site contamination concerns are longstanding, stretching back 20 to 30 years.

HUMAN HEALTH

Community members are concerned about the contamination on site and how it may affect people's health. People discussed concerns about potential health impacts but did not attribute any health-related issues or illnesses to the site or facility operations. People would like to have educational materials about site conditions to better understand any risks associated with living in the area and recommendations for minimizing potential contact with site contamination. People also observed that, in spite of "no trespassing" signage near the site, people continue to access the area to play ballgames and ride motorcycles and ATVs.

CLEANUP

People want the CFAC site cleanup to be thorough, protective, lasting and timely. People are concerned about potential effects of the cleanup on surrounding areas, including the transportation of asbestos and other hazardous materials through the community. Interviewees also shared concerns about long-term monitoring of the cleanup and some people have expressed frustration that site investigation and sampling activities have taken several years.

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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

People want to be informed and engaged in the Superfund process and stated that the community, city and county officials, the CFAC Community Liaison Panel, residents near the CFAC site, and other stakeholders should receive timely updates. Many community members expressed concern about whether their input would be considered in the decision-making process. Community members also asked about the roles of various agencies and organizations.

THE ECONOMY

People are concerned about the potential impacts on the local economy that may result from listing the CFAC site on the NPL as well as from the site's cleanup. Some interviewees noted that the site's listing could stigmatize the area; other interviewees thought that the site's cleanup could remove a major community concern and attract new businesses, residents and visitors. Several people shared concerns about the decline of industrial employers such as CFAC and expressed the need for sustainable economic development and quality jobs in the area.

WATER

Water quality and access to clean water are community priorities. People noted that water quality is related to both groundwater, for wells and municipal water supplies in Columbia Falls, and surface water, for downstream communities. People requested more information about which contaminants have been identified in area water supplies and whether those concentrations pose a risk to public health or the environment. People also asked about potential cleanup options for area water supplies, whether wells and water infrastructure systems will need to be upgraded or replaced, and whether site contamination could impair area water supplies over the long term.

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Community Concerns *continued*

AIR

Clean air is important to the community. People want to know about any historical impacts from CFAC facility operations on local air quality and if cleanup activities, including the transportation of asbestos and other hazardous materials through the community, could create potential air quality issues.

WATERSHED

People are concerned about potential migration of site contamination that could have broader watershed impacts. These impacts could affect wildlife, water supplies and the general health of area communities.

WILDLIFE

People are concerned about potential health impacts on fish and other wildlife, including winter habitat for elk near the CFAC site. Several people stated that they value the area's environmental resources and see them as an important part of the community's quality of life.

FUTURE LAND USE

People would like to know more about how and if the CFAC site could be reused in the future. Several people said that doing something productive with the land should be a priority. Community members asked that EPA cover future land use considerations as part of site information materials and presentations.

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The area around the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company site is home to many wildlife species.

Communication Preferences

The community expects EPA Region 8 to be transparent about its work and to strive to include all community members and stakeholders in the Superfund process. During outreach activities, EPA identifies methods the community prefers to get information and be engaged in the CFAC Superfund cleanup.

INFORMATION SHARING

People say that EPA should use a range of methods to keep the community, government staff, agencies and elected officials updated on all site-related work. EPA should share information in written form and include graphics, pictures and maps. Information should be straightforward and easy to understand in plain language. Recommended outreach methods include regular mailings, Internet and social media, and emailed newsletters. People also recommend radio announcements, newspaper articles and television news stories to make sure information reaches as many people as possible. Many people also request that information be made available online and locally.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

People agree that meeting in person is a good practice and that EPA should distribute information through a variety of community events and locations. Most people say that weeknights would likely work well for public meetings. Potential scheduling conflicts include City Council meetings on Monday evenings, church nights on Wednesdays, and the Community Market and Farmers' Market on Thursday evenings. Some people also advise against Friday evening meetings.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)

People are interested in exploring the possibility of establishing a CAG at the CFAC site. A CAG is an independent group made up of members of the community and is designed to serve as the focal point for the exchange of information among the local community and EPA, the state regulatory agency, and other agencies, stakeholders, and people involved and interested in the Superfund cleanup.

In May 2015, the CFAC Community Liaison Panel was organized by CFAC to provide a forum for open discussions and exchange of ideas and opinions about the CFAC site. Community Liaison Panel meetings are open to the public and participants represent the community, elected officials, project consultants, state and federal agencies, and CFAC. The Community Liaison Panel is similar to a CAG, with the difference that it is organized by CFAC and not by an independent community group. To learn more about the Community Liaison Panel, please visit:
www.cfacproject.com/community-liaison-panel
cityofcolumbiafalls.org/cfac-liaison-panel

Many people are concerned that having two community organizations, the CFAC Community Liaison Panel and a Community Advisory Group, at the same time could be confusing, be redundant, waste resources, and lead to information discrepancies and inconsistencies. Other people are concerned that the Community Liaison Panel may not adequately represent the community and supported formation of a separate CAG. People recommend that if a CAG was formed, it should be as broadly representative of community perspectives as possible.

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NOTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF SAMPLING RESULTS

People are generally aware of sampling taking place on site, and people want to make sure they are notified of sampling results. People would like to have more information about the schedule, location and extent of the sampling, and emphasized the importance of sampling results being clear and easy to understand.

REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS

People emphasize the importance of continued community access to site documents, via the site's information repositories, regular mailings, community meetings, online resources and other means. Community members regularly review site documents to stay informed and engaged.

Rob Parker, EPA site assessment manager, talks to Columbia Falls residents about designating CFAC a Superfund site.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

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The Community Involvement Plan

EPA's community involvement plan for the CFAC site outlines how EPA will work with others to address community concerns with consideration for the community's preferred communication methods.

EPA Community Involvement Plan Goals:

To ensure fair and meaningful public involvement in the investigation and cleanup at the CFAC site, EPA will:

1. Promote community awareness and understanding of the CFAC site and Superfund process by collecting and making information available and accessible to the public in a timely and non-technical manner.
2. Encourage and publicize opportunities for community engagement and public comment throughout the Superfund process.
3. Sustain long-term public engagement and maintain two-way communication with the community, partners and stakeholders to make sure that people have equal access to the Superfund decision-making process and the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards regardless of race, color, national origin or income.

Community Engagement Tools and Activities

To achieve these public engagement goals, EPA has identified and developed a variety of community involvement tools and activities:

WEBSITE

EPA will continue to maintain a website specifically for the CFAC site. www.epa.gov/superfund/columbia-falls

The website will:

- Provide an overview and history of the site and EPA's involvement.
- Share updated information to the Superfund cleanup process with the public. New and topical information will be featured prominently.
- Provide access to and documents related to the site as they become available to the public. A link to the collection section is located on the front page of the website.
- Provide links to additional resources related to the site.

EPA also has other web pages available for information about the Superfund program and Region 8:

- National Superfund program: www.epa.gov/Superfund
-

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- EPA Region 8: www.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-8-mountains-and-plains
- Superfund Community Involvement: www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-community-involvement

Other organizations with websites that provide information about the CFAC site include:

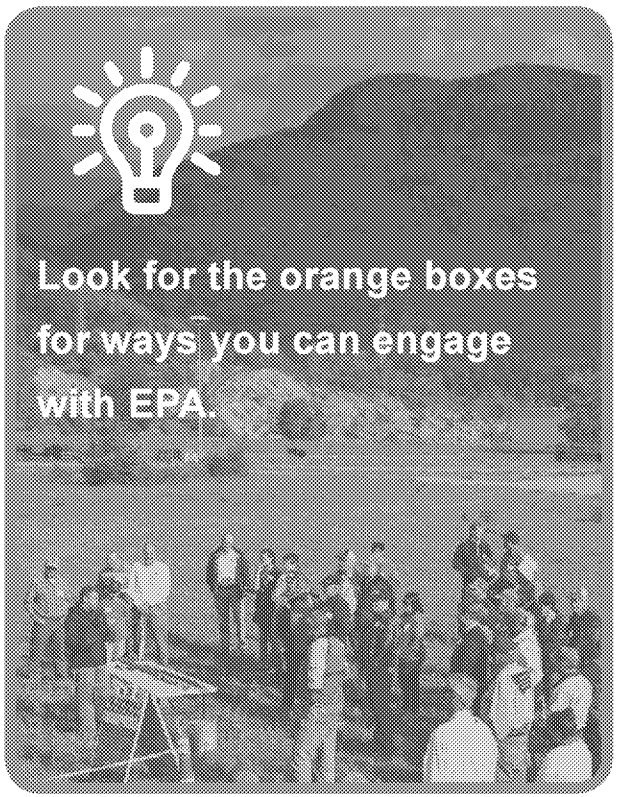
- DEQ: deq.mt.gov/DEQAdmin/CFAC/cfac
- CFAC Community Liaison Panel: www.cfacproject.com/community-liaison-panel
- City of Columbia Falls: cityofcolumbiafalls.org/cfac-liaison-panel

Learn more about the Superfund process and the CFAC site by visiting these online resources. Consider linking to these resources and sharing the information on social media. Let EPA staff know how the webpage can be improved.

FORMAL PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS

Before key Superfund decisions are made at the site, EPA will announce and open a public comment period and encourage people to submit information. EPA considers all public comments in the Superfund decision-making process. The last formal public comment period opened in March 2015, when EPA proposed the CFAC site for listing on the NPL.

Share your thoughts with EPA during public comment periods.



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PERIODIC UPDATES

EPA will develop and distribute information about the site on a quarterly and as-needed basis. These updates will:

- Provide regular updates about the Superfund process.
- Notify the public about public meetings and availability sessions and public comment periods.
- Distribute information and educational materials about areas of community concern.
- Provide links to publicly available documents and other resources.
- Reach a broad audience representative of the community and diverse stakeholders.

EPA will maintain and continue to build the mailing list. If you would like to be on EPA's distribution for the CFAC site, please contact EPA's community involvement coordinator. Updates will be available at the site's information repositories.

Contact EPA staff to add your name and preferred contact information to the mailing list. Consider relaying these updates and information to others and encourage them to sign up for updates if interested. Doing this helps make sure that everyone in the community has access to accurate and up-to-date site information.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

To help address community concerns about the CFAC site, EPA will collect, prepare and distribute user-friendly documents to help people understand the Superfund program and CFAC site conditions, technical reports and legal concepts. EPA will use maps, photographs and other visual aids in these materials to help people understand the CFAC site. Current fact sheets include:

- *Introduction to Superfund:* discusses community involvement requirements of the CERCLA law, the Superfund process and opportunities for community involvement.
- *Reusing Superfund Sites:* discusses EPA's approach to supporting the beneficial reuse of Superfund sites and shares success stories.

Fact sheets, brochures and other educational materials will be shared with all parties on the site distribution list, will be available at the site's information repositories, and will be shared during public events and with other organizations for broad distribution.

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Read and share site-related educational materials with others. If you know of other resources and publications that relate to the CFAC site, please share them with EPA. Similarly, if there is a need for new or expanded information resources, please let EPA know.

INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

EPA will continue to maintain a physical place for the collection of information and documents related to the CFAC site. Physical copies of documents are available for review or photocopying at both of the site's information repositories:

ImagineIF Library - Columbia Falls
130 6th Street West
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
(406) 892-5919

EPA Region 8 Headquarters
Superfund Records Center
1595 Wynkoop Street
Denver, CO 80202-1129
(303) 312-7273 or
(800) 227-8917 ext. 312-7273

Some of the materials available at the repositories include:

- Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study Progress Reports (multiple reports are available, dating to November 2015)
- Administrative Settlement Agreement and Order on Consent for Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study
- Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study Work Plan
- Phase I Site Characterization Sampling and Analysis Plan
- Site Reassessment for CFAC Aluminum Smelter Facility
- Support Document for the Revised National Priorities List Final Rule
- Fact sheets and brochures relevant to the CFAC site

Visit one of the site's information repositories and tell other people about their locations. Consider reviewing technical documents and providing feedback and comments to EPA staff. If you have feedback on the repositories and how to make them more accessible to the public, please let EPA know.

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NEWS MEDIA

EPA Region 8 will provide updates and information to local newspapers and radio and television stations and ask them to report on site-related issues. EPA staff will be available for interviews and will respond to media inquiries in a timely fashion.

EPA will publish public notices about meetings and other events in local newspapers and send the notices to other local news outlets. EPA Region 8 will include the following media outlets as part of outreach and information delivery efforts.

Newspapers: Daily Inter Lake, Flathead Beacon, Hungry Horse News, Missoulian

Television: KCFW and KECI – NBC Montana, KPAX – CBS Channel 8, KTMF – ABC Fox Montana

Radio: KGEX 600 AM, KERR 750 AM, KJJR 880 AM, KOFI 1180 AM, KUKL 90.1 FM, KHNK 95.9 FM, KBBZ 98.5 FM, KDBR 106.3 FM

Read, watch and listen to local news media reports about the site and share that information with others. Keep an eye out for notices for public meetings or other events in local newspapers.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

EPA will attend meetings held by community groups, local and tribal governments, and other organizations to share information about the site and address community questions, concerns, ideas and comments. To identify appropriate opportunities and venues to deliver information about the CFAC site, EPA will coordinate with Flathead County and the City of Columbia Falls and community organizations such as the CFAC Community Liaison Panel, the Senior Citizens Center, the Columbia Falls Lions Club, the Rotary Club of Columbia Falls, the Kiwanis Club of Columbia Falls, the Columbia Falls Chamber of Commerce and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

EPA will also hold separate public meetings for key Superfund milestones and decisions. EPA will ask for community feedback at these meetings. Notice for EPA-hosted public meetings will be provided in advance and EPA will coordinate with DEQ, Flathead County and the City of Columbia Falls to schedule them.

Different formats may be used for public meetings, depending on the topic and situation. EPA may host public meetings or hearings, open houses, informal gatherings focused on particular topics of interest, and informal availability and listening sessions so that community members can share their thoughts with EPA staff.

Potential meeting locations include Columbia Falls City Hall, the Columbia Falls High School theater, the Columbia Falls Junior High School Cafetorium, the North Valley Community Center and the Coop/Columbia Falls Community Market.

Consider inviting EPA to speak at a meeting or event. Please also attend EPA public meetings and other Superfund-related public meetings to share your thoughts, concerns and questions. Let EPA staff know about other organizations or events that could be a good fit for EPA to coordinate with or attend.

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U.S. Senator Jon Tester, EPA Remedial Project Manager Mike Cirian, and CFAC Environmental Manager Steve Wright during a 2016 site tour.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

Contact EPA for an interview. Interviews usually last around 30 minutes and can lead to discussion afterward. Encourage others to participate in an interview.

CAG SUPPORT

Should the community decide to form a Community Advisory Group, EPA has support resources available. EPA will work with the community and coordinate with Flathead County and the City of Columbia Falls regarding potential CAG formation. For more information, please visit www.epa.gov/superfund/community-advisory-groups

Learn more about CAGs and what they do. Meeting with other community members could provide an opportunity to discuss potential CAG formation for the CFAC site and ways to ensure broad community representation. Please contact EPA site staff for follow ups and support.

COORDINATION WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

EPA Region 8 will continue to coordinate with DEQ, the Flathead County Health Department, the City of Columbia Falls, the Montana Department of Health & Public Services, and other relevant agencies on the implementation of CFAC site investigation and cleanup activities. EPA will also respond in a timely manner to inquiries from local, state and national elected officials, and meet with them regularly to ensure they are kept informed of site updates and milestones.

Talk with local, state and federal public service personnel and elected officials and share your comments, concerns and questions.

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

EPA will continue to arrange interviews with community members and stakeholder group representatives. These community interviews will help EPA:

- Identify new and ongoing communication strategies to better engage the community and interested parties.
- Stay abreast of community concerns, issues and perspectives as they evolve across the Superfund timeline.
- Implement, monitor, evaluate and revise this community involvement plan.

Contact EPA for an interview. Interviews usually last around 30 minutes and can lead to discussion afterward. Encourage others to participate in an interview.

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SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

EPA will share CFAC site updates through Facebook, Twitter and other social media:

- EPA Region 8 Facebook
- EPA Region 8 Twitter
- EPA Region 8 News and Events webpage

Consider sharing information about the site on social media and following, relaying information and linking to EPA social media posts related to the CFAC site.

INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS

EPA Region 8 will continue to maintain a presence in the community through informal visits and discussions with residents and stakeholders. EPA staff will also be responsive to emails, phone calls, in-person discussions and written inquiries from the public.

Contact EPA staff for the CFAC site.

Mike Cirian
Remedial Project Manager
(406) 293-6194
cirian.mike@epa.gov
108 East 9th Street, Libby, MT 59923

Robert Moler
Community Involvement Coordinator
(406) 457-5032
moler.robert@epa.gov
10 West 15th Street, Suite 3200,
Helena, MT 59626

Please see the Appendix for additional contacts for the CFAC site.

View of Nucleus Avenue, Highway 486 in Columbia Falls, Montana // Source: Flathead Beacon

Additional EPA Resources

EPA has other resources available that people can access depending on specific community needs and priorities.

Technical Assistance Programs:

Technical assistance refers to the provision of services focused on increasing community understanding of the science, regulations and policy related to environmental issues and EPA actions. To support healthy communities and strengthen environmental protection, EPA works closely with communities to make sure they have the technical help they need.

- Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (TANA) Tool: This is a process to identify additional support that a community may require in order to understand technical information and participate meaningfully in the Superfund decision-making process. A TANA helps EPA determine what technical assistance resources and information the Agency can provide to meet community needs.
- Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) Program: This program provides services through a national EPA contract. Under the contract, a contractor provides scientists, engineers and other professionals to review and explain information to communities. TASC services are determined on a project-specific basis and provided at no cost to communities.
- Partners in Technical Assistance Program (PTAP): Colleges and universities provide voluntary technical assistance to communities through this program.
- Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program: TAGs are awarded to non-profit incorporated community groups. With TAG funding, community groups can contract with independent technical advisors to interpret and help the community understand technical information about their site. The TAG recipient group is responsible for managing their grant funds and contributing a 20 percent award match. Most groups meet this requirement through in-kind contributions such as volunteer hours toward grant-related activities.

Environmental Justice Resources:

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice.

EPA Region 8 programs collaborate closely to make sure underserved, low income and tribal communities facing disproportionate environmental risks have opportunities for meaningful participation in environmental decision-making. Region 8 also coordinates closely with EPA Headquarters and states to support initiatives that provide all people living near Superfund sites with technical assistance, training opportunities and other services. EPA has a variety of environmental justice resources available:

- Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) Cooperative Agreement Program: The CPS program provides funding for eligible applicants for projects that address local environmental and public health issues within an affected community. The program assists recipients in building collaborative partnerships to help them understand and address environmental and public health concerns in their communities.
- Environmental Justice Small Grants Program: EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants Program supports and empowers communities working on solutions to local environmental and public health issues. The program is designed to help communities understand and address exposure to multiple environmental harms and risks.

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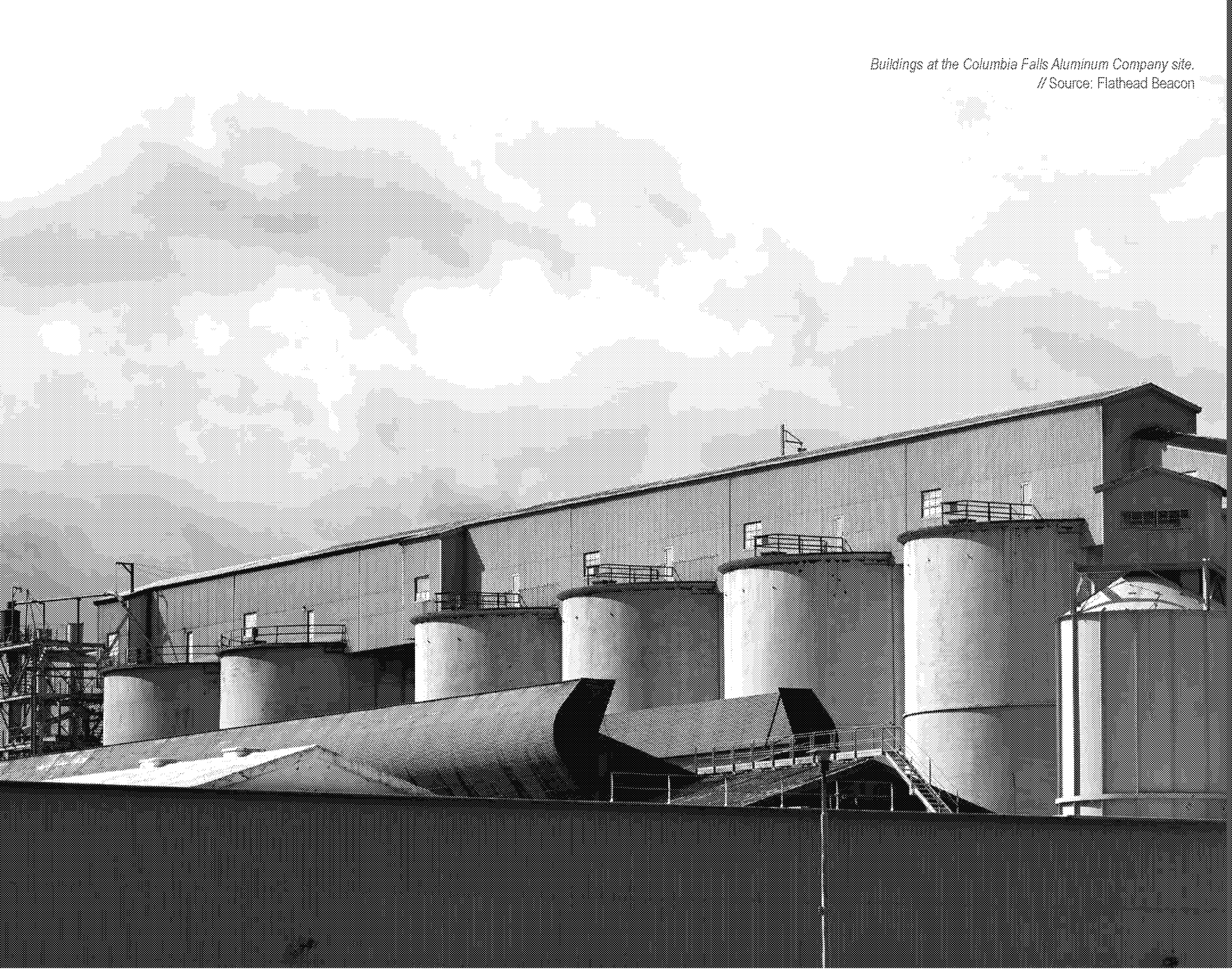

Buildings at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company site.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

Site Background

Site Description

A primary aluminum reduction facility was active on site from 1955 to 2009. The facility's permanent closure was announced in March 2015. The CFAC site covers about 960 acres. It is bounded by Cedar Creek Reservoir to the north, Teakettle Mountain to the east, Flathead River to the south and Cedar Creek to the west. The Flathead River is a fishery that includes the federally designated threatened bull trout and the federally sensitive westslope cutthroat trout. The site's total property area covers about 3,196 acres. The remainder of the site property is located south of Flathead River. This area was never used for industrial operations.

Buildings and industrial facilities on site included offices, warehouses, laboratories, mechanical shops, paste plant, coal tar pitch tanks, pump houses, a casting garage and a potline facility. The CFAC site also includes seven closed landfills, an active landfill, material loading and unloading areas, two closed leachate ponds, and several wastewater percolation ponds. A rectifier yard and switchyard owned by Bonneville Power Administration and a right-of-way for the Burlington Northern Railroad are also within the site's boundaries.

Buildings at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company site.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

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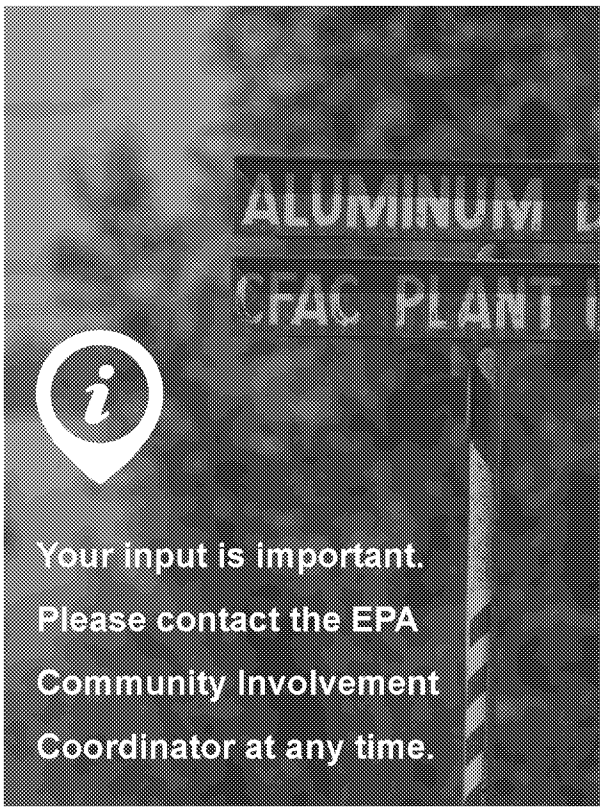
The CFAC site is located in a rural setting. The nearest residences are located adjacent to the site's southwest boundary, about 0.80 miles west of the historic footprint of site operations, in a neighborhood referred to as Aluminum City. The City of Columbia Falls anticipates that land uses in this area will not change rapidly in the foreseeable future.

Site History

Prior to the site's industrial development in the 1950s, land uses in the area were residential and agricultural. Anaconda Copper Mining Company purchased the property in 1951 and built the aluminum reduction facility. In 1985, CFAC bought the plant from Atlantic Richfield Company, which had acquired the facility from the plant's original owner in 1977. Glencore, a Switzerland-based company, acquired CFAC in 1999 and announced the facility's permanent closure in 2015.

Facility operations generated significant quantities of spent potliner material, a federally listed hazardous waste, as a byproduct of the aluminum smelting process. Contaminants detected at the site include cyanide, fluoride and metals, including arsenic, chromium, lead and selenium. These contaminants are present in soils, surface ponds and groundwater at the CFAC site and pose a risk to nearby wells and the Flathead River.



Your input is important. Please contact the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator at any time.

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Current Status

EPA and the State of Montana have determined that a comprehensive investigation of the CFAC site is necessary to inform effective cleanup actions to address these risks. EPA proposed adding the site to the NPL in March 2015, making it eligible for additional study and cleanup resources under the Superfund program. EPA finalized the CFAC site's listing on the NPL on September 9, 2016. EPA carefully evaluated all public comments received on the proposal to list the site to the NPL before making a final decision.

All cleanup work is approved and overseen by EPA and DEQ. In November 2015, EPA signed a final agreement with CFAC to investigate site contamination. Under the terms of the agreement, CFAC is conducting a comprehensive investigation of soils, river sediments, and ground and surface water to determine the nature and extent of contamination at the site. In 2017, the collection of the first round of data from the investigation was completed. The results of the investigation will determine cleanup needs and identify potential cleanup options. Calbag purchased the physical aluminum plant infrastructure from CFAC and work is ongoing to dismantle the structures.

Winter view of a CFAC office building.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

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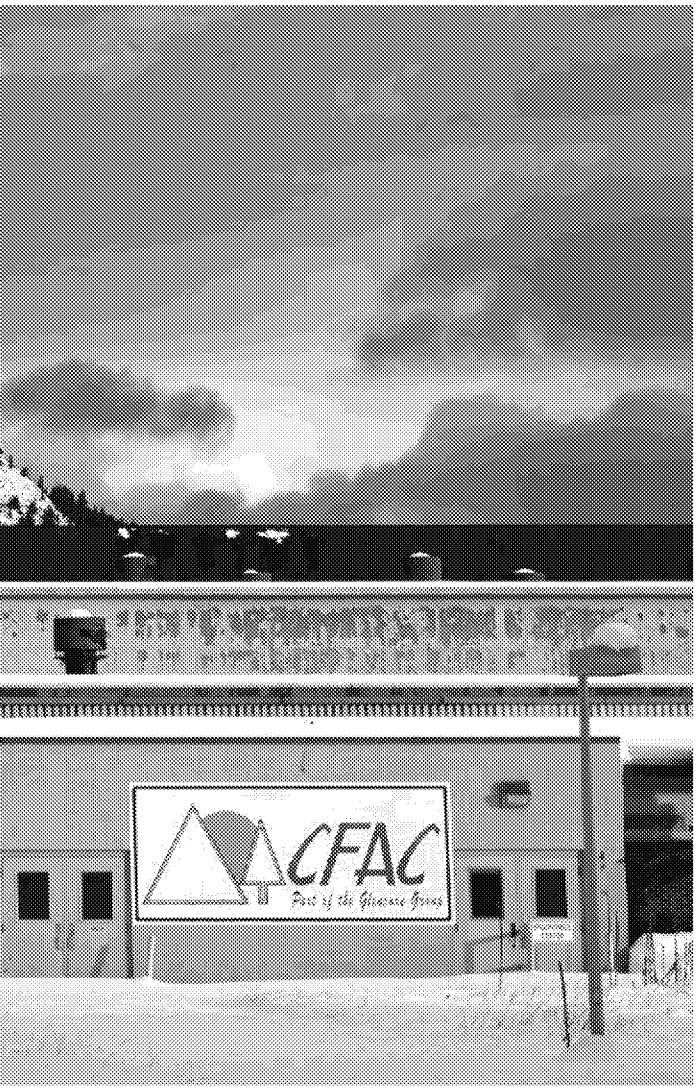

Community Involvement

EPA Region 8, in coordination with DEQ, has conducted community involvement activities through the process leading up to listing the CFAC to the NPL as a Superfund site. Community outreach activities have included establishing and maintaining a public website, requesting and considering public comments, holding public availability sessions and public meetings, attending local meetings of civic and community groups, distributing community updates and fact sheets, publishing public notices in the Daily Inter Lake, Flathead Beacon and Hungry Horse News newspapers, meeting with stakeholders and individuals, establishing and maintaining a local information repository at the Columbia Falls branch of the ImagineIF library, conducting community interviews, and reviewing available community documents. The information gathered through these activities helped to identify community concerns and communication preferences and develop this community involvement plan.

Some of the documents EPA reviewed include:

The Flathead County's Growth Policy: Last updated in 2012, the development of the policy included extensive public outreach and assessment of county-wide goals and priorities. Its findings highlight a community in transition, seeking to balance recognition, conservation, and use of historical and natural resources with economic expansion and sustained population growth. The policy does not specifically reference the CFAC site.

CFAC's April 2015 Community Assessment Report: This report identified a variety of community concerns and perspectives related to the CFAC site. Ann Green Communications conducted community interviews with community leaders, elected officials, neighbors, business leaders, emergency response officials, former employees, environmental advocates and other site stakeholders to ascertain an understanding of community perspectives and interests regarding CFAC and the salvage and remediation work done at the site. Focus areas included issues of importance to the community, local perceptions of industry and CFAC, and suggestions for CFAC's community outreach approach as part of its site responsibilities.

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Community Profile

Columbia Falls and Flathead County are part of northwest Montana's Flathead Valley, which lies between Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi. Surrounded by more than two million acres of the Flathead National Forest and with the Flathead River flowing through the community, Columbia Falls is known as the gateway to Glacier National Park.

Land Use and Demographics

Flathead County encompasses 5,098 square miles. About 94 percent of the land area is national or state forest land, wilderness, farmland, or forest. Developed areas make up the remaining 6 percent of the county. In addition to Columbia Falls, other major population centers in the county include Kalispell and Whitefish.

The county and its population centers have experienced significant and sustained population growth since 2000. It is one of the fastest growing areas in Montana.

The City of Columbia Falls covers 923 acres – 1.3 square miles – and is bounded by the Flathead River to the east and south and by Burlington Northern railroad tracks to the north. The original town was laid out in the 1890s, incorporated in 1909, and developed as a trade- and transportation-related settlement.[1] The community is located about eight miles from Whitefish and 15 miles from Kalispell. State Highway 40 and U.S. Highway 2 connect the three cities.

Historically, the area's economy has been based on industry and natural resources – logging, mining, agriculture and commodities production. Over time, the local economy has diversified, experiencing significant growth in the retail trade and service industries as well as construction and health care. Current economic drivers for Columbia Falls and Flathead County include its natural resources and related recreation and tourism opportunities.

1. Source: *Columbia Falls Master Plan*, 2000. Accessed at flathead.mt.gov/planning_zoning/documents/ColumbiaFallsCity-CountyMasterPlan.pdf.

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Local and Tribal Government Overview

Flathead County
flathead.mt.gov

A County Commission serves as the county's executive and legislative branch. The Commission consists of three elected at-large commissioners. In addition, Flathead County has eight elected officials representing various branches of government. Elected offices include the Sheriff, Clerk and Recorder, Treasurer, County Attorney, Clerk of Court, two Justice Court Justices of the Peace, and the Superintendent of Schools.

City of Columbia Falls
cityofcolumbiafalls.org

The City has a commission-manager form of government. Elected officials include a Mayor and a six-member City Council. The City Manager is the day-to-day manager of city business and activities.

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
tribalnations.mt.gov/cskt

The Flathead Indian Reservation has land located in Flathead County. The Reservation is home to the Bitterroot Salish, upper Pend d'Oreille and Kootenai Tribes – also known as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation. A total of 28,296 acres of reservation land are located in Flathead County – the entire reservation covers more than 1.2 million acres. Headquartered in Pablo, Montana, the Flathead Indian Reservation is governed by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Council, which consists of 10 elected councilmen.

Blackfeet Nation
blackfeetnation.com

The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is located in northwest Montana. The entire reservation spans about 1.5 million acres. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is the governing body of the Blackfeet Nation and is responsible for exercising all powers of government under the Blackfeet Constitution and Bylaws. The Council consists of nine members from four districts who are elected by tribal members to serve four-year terms.

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gianforte.house.gov

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Demolition at the CFAC site.
// Source: Flathead Beacon

United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC)
Community Involvement Plan
2017