

Summary of Project History and Superfund Process

As many of our neighbors are aware, Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) has worked under Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) supervision, with input from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), to assess conditions at its former aluminum smelting plant and review alternatives to remediate the site.

The Superfund process requires CFAC to take certain actions to assess the site and evaluate alternatives, all of which have now been completed. CFAC conducted a Remedial Investigation to assess site conditions, which was approved by EPA in February 2020, and a Feasibility Study to evaluate the remedial alternatives for the site, which was approved by EPA in June 2021. The final clean-up method will be determined by EPA.

CFAC's top priority throughout this process always has been to ensure the short- and long-term protection of human health and the environment. CFAC conducted more than 100 off-site samples, none of which show materials from the site migrating to Aluminum City or the main stem of the Flathead River.

The Remedial Investigation included a comprehensive investigation of soils, river sediments and ground and surface water. The process determined chemicals and metals are present at levels in groundwater and soil onsite that have the potential to pose a risk if left unaddressed.

The Remedial Investigation assessed site conditions and supported the development and evaluation of remediation alternatives in the Feasibility Study. The Feasibility Study examined multiple alternatives to achieve legally required groundwater quality standards and used an established analytical method to score the alternatives. Using this EPA-approved approach, the highest scoring alternative for addressing the legacy landfills included improving landfill caps and installing a slurry wall, which will isolate the impacted material from groundwater.



Scheduling Update and Path Forward

EPA currently is assessing the information and analyses in the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study to determine its preferred alternative to address site issues.

EPA anticipates releasing its proposed plan in Spring 2023. Once it is released, EPA will open a public comment period, which will include a public meeting, as well as the ability for interested parties to provide written comments. Following the comment period, EPA will consider those comments when developing its Record of Decision, which will contain the final plan for the site remedy.

Regardless of the alternative selected, the Superfund process requires EPA to perform a comprehensive review every five years to ensure the implemented remedy continues to protect human health and the environment, as well as remain in compliance with all applicable laws.

Early Action Update: South Percolation Ponds

Because this is a detailed and lengthy process, CFAC already has taken proactive clean-up actions to address areas of the site. This was conducted with EPA approval and guidance.

In March 2021, CFAC completed early action at the site and removed sediments from the South Percolation Ponds to prevent the possibility of those sediments eroding into the river and to allow the river to flow back into its northern channel. This was done because the path of the river was moving and threatening to flood the ponds. After cleaning up the sediments, CFAC restored the river bed to its natural state and the river bed has migrated as expected.



Former South Ponds area,
Summer 2022.



Flathead River and former South Ponds area
(looking west), Summer 2021.

Site Reuse Update

The site encompasses approximately 1,300 acres, most of which were used during the operating period. CFAC is remediating this area for the purpose of future industrial or commercial use.

In 2020, CFAC entered into an agreement to sell 772 acres of land on the other side of the Flathead River from the site to the Flathead Land Trust and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission (FWP). The sale was completed in December 2021. That portion of the property is open to the public and is managed by FWP.

Since May 2022, CFAC has rented an onsite warehouse to an aircraft support services company.

Additional Project Details

To learn more about this project or review cleanup alternative rankings in detail, visit the project website at CFACproject.com

If you'd like to be notified when the proposed plan is released, please email EPA's Amanda Bartley (bartley.amanda@epa.gov) **to be added to the site email list.**

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