CFAC Community Liaison Panel
Meeting Minutes

Date: August 27, 2025
Time: 6:07 – 7:50 p.m.
Location: The Hub Downtown, 533 1st Ave E, Columbia Falls, MT 59912
Facilitator: Kristine Fife, Big Sky Public Relations

CLP Membership
Don Barnhart – Columbia Falls Mayor
Braxton Mitchell – House District 5
Carl Glimm – Senate District 3
Brad Abell – Flathead County Commission
Mitchell Morgan – U.S. Senator Tim Sheehy, Constituent Liaison
Kevin French – U. S. Senator Steve Daines, Field Representative
Brett Slaughter – U.S. Senator Steve Daines, Conservation and Natural Resources Liaison
Steve Howke – Office of Congressman Ryan Zinke, District Director
Julie Perchy – Office of Congressman Ryan Zinke
Franz Ingelfinger – Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, Kalispell Area Wildlife Biologist
Susan Nicosia – Resident, Former Columbia Falls City Manager
Toby Liechti – Civil Engineer and Flathead County Board of Health
Karl Weeks – Columbia Falls Fire Chief
Steve Wright – Flathead Valley resident, Former CFAC Employee
Chauncy Means – Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

1) Welcome, housekeeping, and agenda

- Meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m.
- CLP members, agency partners, and attendees were welcomed
- Agenda overview: EPA/DEQ update → CFAC work plan presentation → Panel Q&A → Public Q&A.

2) Attendance

- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):**
  - Allie Archer — Superfund Project Manager
  - Mackenzie Meter — Community Involvement Coordinator
- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ):**
  - Dick Sloan — State project counterpart
  - Nolan Lister — Public Information Officer
- **Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC):**
  - John Stroiazzo— CFAC project lead
- **CLP Members Present:**
  - Steve Wright
  - Toby Liechti
  - Brad Abell

- Don Barnhart
- Steve Howke
- Franz Ingelfinger

3) EPA & DEQ update — where we are in the Superfund process

- Background: The site completed the Remedial Investigation (RI) and Feasibility Study (FS) (2015–2017 and subsequent work).
- Record of Decision (ROD): Signed January 2025, selecting the cleanup approach.
- Consent Decree (CD): A legally binding cleanup agreement among EPA, MDEQ, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and CFAC is in preparation. After DOJ lodges it in court and public notice occurs, the court considers entry. Timing is outside agencies' control; target is late 2025 / early 2026.
- EPA/MDEQ issued a Unilateral Administrative Order (UAO) so "pre-design" field work can proceed now while the CD is finalized.

Key message: The project is moving from study to design and implementation. The UAO enables collection of data needed to design the selected remedy so full-scale work can start as soon as the CD is entered.

4) CFAC presentation — pre-design work plan (Fall 2025)

Schedule window: September to mid-December 2025 (roughly four months).

Purpose: Obtain detailed, remedy-specific field data for engineering design, focused on:

- Source control: Designing a slurry wall to encapsulate the West Landfill/potliner source area.
- Soils: Defining exact volumes/locations for soil cleanup at identified hotspots.
- Monitoring: Optimizing well network and confirming baseline conditions for longer-term performance monitoring.
- Supporting elements: Liner design for a reservoir overflow ditch (biological assessment this year; installation planned next year).

Field activities:

- **Geotechnical program:**
  - Two drilling contractors mobilizing in late September (multiple rigs).
  - Deep borings (typically ~125–150+ ft) along proposed slurry wall alignment to define subsurface conditions and wall depth/thickness requirements.
  - Three new monitoring wells to refine understanding of groundwater flow and plume edges.
- **Groundwater & surface water sampling:**
  - Sampling to reconfirm plume location and concentrations.

- **Domestic landfill (north end) investigation:**
  - Borings and test pits to characterize subsurface conditions.
- **Soil investigations:**
  - Higher-density sampling to tighten up quantity estimates for excavation/disposal.
- **Wet Scrubber Sludge Pond testing:**
  - Stability/characterization testing (borings and test pits).
- **North percolation ponds & asbestos landfills:**
  - Additional sampling at percolation ponds.
  - Cover evaluation at asbestos landfill areas (verify thickness/condition; plan improvements as needed).
- **Reservoir overflow ditch:**
  - Complete biological assessment is being conducted now; liner installation targeted for 2026.

Investigation activities (near-term):

- Intermittent equipment deliveries: 2–3 drill rigs active; field crews, samplers, surveyors, and 4± on-site engineers.
- Work six days/week; there will be routine daytime traffic. No impacts are expected to residents.
- Specialist oversight by the slurry-wall consultant will be conducted. **Reporting:** Field teams will prepare technical reports over the winter 2025–26 to facilitate final designs.

5) Oversight, roles, and funding

- **Oversight:** EPA and MDEQ jointly review and approve work plans, provide on-site oversight during field work, and review data and reports. EPA's contractor (e.g., geotech/slurry specialists) supports the agencies.
- **Independent perspectives:** The CFAC technical advisor will receive information and coordinate with agencies; formal supervision of field work remains with EPA/MDEQ. The designers will also be on site supervising data collection
- **Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP):** Conducting its own assessment; CFAC provides some data, but NRDP runs that process independently.
- **Funding/financial assurance: CFAC is paying all current costs**; other responsible parties may reimburse via separate agreements. EPA/DOJ retain enforcement and litigation authorities, and financial assurance requirements are in place via the CD to protect against default.

6) Key technical themes discussed (Q&A)

- **Why the UAO now?**
  To start progress: complete critical pre-design fieldwork now so full cleanup construction can start sooner after the Consent Decree
- **Slurry wall intent & performance:**

    - Encapsulates the source (West Landfill/potliner), diverting clean groundwater around it; plume will shrink via natural attenuation and dispersion once the source is isolated.
    - Lab test-mixes and geotech data will inform wall design (materials, permeability, thickness).
    - Monitoring wells will be placed between the wall and the river to track performance.
    - Contingency ("Plan B"): Pre-installed extraction wells inside the wall enable pump-and-treat if data indicate the wall is not meeting performance expectations.
    - Five-year reviews (and more frequent routine monitoring) will verify performance over time. If performance issues are identified, actions will be taken.
- **Plume status & standards:**
    - Discussion noted higher cyanide concentrations near the source (order of thousands of ppb) and hundreds of ppb in wells downstream
    - Cleanup is designed to meet water quality standards and protect human health and environment. .
- **Monitoring on adjacent/developed property:**
    - Access agreement in place with the developer; agencies/CFAC can sample where needed.
    - A long-term monitoring plan will be finalized during remedial design.
- **Private wells:**
    - Ongoing private well sampling (initiated in 2014–15) has shown non-detects to date.
    - Expect continuation at least for the next few years; future duration/frequency will be determined in the long-term monitoring plan.
- **Biological assessment:**
    - Initial assessment completed in 2021; it will be updated now to reflect remedy-specific work (e.g., ditch liner, wall construction).
    - .
- **Flooding/extreme events:**
    - Based on site elevations and dam inundation studies, floodwaters are not expected to reach the landfill/source area. The wall is designed for long-term performance and will be monitored and maintained. EPA fact sheet on the topic is available at the front door.
- **Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS):**
    - Research provided to agencies indicates aluminum smelting does not generate PFAS constituents of concern.
- **Timeline snapshots (discussion estimates):**
    - Consent Decree: late 2025 / early 2026 (court-dependent).
    - Slurry wall construction: as early as 2027
    - Plume attenuation: Expect progressive declines after source control; precise timing depends on many factors

7) Public information & records

- All CLP minutes, membership history, and key site documents (ROD, RI/FS, fact sheets, etc.) are posted on the CFAC project website.
- This meeting's minutes will be posted on the CFAC website.
- For EPA email updates, attendees were invited to provide addresses to Mackenzie Meter.

8) Next meeting

- **Target:** When the Consent Decree is finalized and ready for public comment (TBD; agencies will announce).
- **Will include:** A schedule update.

Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.
- Attendees were invited to review poster boards and speak with staff.

Meeting minutes prepared by: Kristine Fife