

BLACKTAIL CREEK RIPARIAN ACTIONS FACT SHEET

Blacktail Creek overview

Blacktail Creek (BTC) originates in the Highland Mountains, flowing northwest through the Summit Valley to join Silver Bow Creek (SBC) in Butte, MT. Historically, lower BTC meandered through a low-gradient riparian corridor with intermittent wetlands, floodplains, and native vegetation. However, over a century of mining, smelting, and urban development significantly altered BTC and deposited tailings, waste rock, and metals contamination throughout the floodplain—damaging water quality and stream health.

Blacktail Creek Riparian Actions

The tailings, waste, and contaminated soil found around BTC present risks to human and environmental health. To address these risks, the 2020 Butte Priority Soils Operable Unit Consent Decree (BPSOU CD) outlines the required remedy, known as the BTC Riparian Actions. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) received a settlement of \$20.5 million to implement the BTC Riparian Actions on behalf of the State of Montana. Figure 1 below illustrates the project boundaries.

Figure 1



DEQ's responsibilities for a successful cleanup as defined in the BPSOU CD

- Remove tailings, wastes, and contaminated soils/sediments in the project boundaries.
- Reconstruct beds, banks, and floodplains of the BTC and SBC confluence area.
- Revegetate the project area with native wetland and riparian plant species.

FAQS

What progress has been made on Blacktail Creek so far?

- Using results from a pre-design investigation, DEQ completed the preliminary (i.e. 30%) design with contractor support from HydroGeoLogic and input from the MT Natural Resource Damage Program. The package is currently in review by the US Environmental Protection Agency.
- In 2023, DEQ conducted a pre-design investigation to quantify the vertical and lateral extent of waste within the project boundaries and to estimate the dewatering volume necessary for soil removal. The results addressed data gaps that were identified in the BPSOU CD.

What are DEQ's next steps?

- DEQ will continue to refine and expand upon the preliminary design, incorporating additional field investigations and analyses. Completion of the final design is expected by the end of 2026.
- Construction is optimistically anticipated to begin in summer 2027 through 2028, as it is dependent on sequencing with other BPSOU projects.

What will Blacktail Creek look like after remediation?

- Stream reconstruction will restore a more natural curve and flow pattern to the channel, supporting riparian habitat, fish passage, and wetland function.
- Revegetation will include native plant species suitable to wetland, riparian, and/or sub-irrigated zones.
- DEQ will leave the site in a condition that allows for continued recreational access to the creek via the pedestrian trail, fishing amenities, and interpretational signage—as decided by the landowners.

How will the public be involved and informed throughout the process?

- DEQ is committed to an open process as we move through the remedial design and, ultimately, remedial action. We will actively inform the community of progress and provide opportunities for public feedback.
- This summer 2025, DEQ will present the preliminary design to the Butte-Silver Bow Council of Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce, Butte Citizens Technical Environmental Committee (CTEC), and other stakeholders.
- CTEC is an independent body that helps the Butte-area community better understand Superfund issues and stay engaged throughout the cleanup process. CTEC holds monthly meetings that are open to the public.

Learn More

Visit the Montana DEQ Federal Superfund website at

<https://deq.mt.gov/cleanupandrec/Programs/superfundfed>, or scan the QR code with your mobile device. The contact information for key staff is listed below:

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