

# **NEWS ADVISORY**

## **GOVERNOR STEVE BULLOCK**

### **STATE OF MONTANA**

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**CONTACT:** Judy Beck, 444-9725, or Vivaca Crowser, 542-5518

#### **Milltown Section of Clark Fork River Opens to Travel**

HELENA – Governor Steve Bullock will join other state officials on Wednesday, May 1, to celebrate the opening of a stretch of the Clark Fork River that will be open for water traffic for the first time in over a century.

"It's not very often that we can say that we have a brand new stretch of river for fishing and floating, but the removal of Milltown Dam and seven years of restoration work have made that possible today," Governor Bullock said. "Not only can we now float freely down the entire stretch of the Clark Fork, but the fishing is getting better."

**Who:** Governor Bullock and other state officials

**What:** Opening of 2.5 mile stretch of Clark Fork River to water traffic

**When: Wednesday, May 1 @ 10:45 a.m.**

**Where:** Turah Fishing Access Site

The 100-year-old Milltown Dam east of Missoula was removed in 2008 as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund site efforts to clean up three million tons of toxic mine sediment that impacted the groundwater and fishery.

While the extensive cleanup and restoration work was completed, the surrounding 2.5 mile stretch of the Clark Fork River remained closed until this week.

"This opening shows what happens when state and federal agencies cooperate to restore a treasured part of Montana's natural heritage," Attorney General Tim Fox said. "I want to thank the hardworking team in the Department of Justice's Natural Resources Damage Program and all who invested so much time and energy into this restoration project. I and a great many other Montanans look forward to fishing around Milltown!"

Boaters may now travel the nine-mile river stretch between the Turah Fishing Access Site (FAS) upstream of the former dam site and Sha-Ron FAS downstream. The riverbanks will remain closed for another year while recently planted vegetation gets a chance to establish strong roots.

"The cleanup and restoration story at Milltown has been three decades in the making," said Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Director Jeff Hagener.

The area was listed as a superfund site in 1983 and, in 2004, the EPA crafted a cleanup plan for the Milltown area while the State of Montana developed a restoration plan for the site. The plan called for removing the dam and portions of the contaminated sediments behind the dam, Hagener said.

In 2005, federal, state and tribal governmental entities reached agreement on a settlement with Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) and NorthWestern Corporation for the cleanup and restoration of the Milltown Reservoir area.

Since then, the state Department of Justice's Natural Resources Damage (NRD) Program, the Department of Environmental Quality, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), in cooperation with the EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have been working together to carry out cleanup and restoration efforts. The restoration phase, funded by the NRD program, returned the rivers to a natural state and laid the groundwork for a restored floodplain.

These partners, along with community groups and individuals, have also been focused on envisioning a future for the restored Clark Fork and Blackfoot River confluence area at Milltown. Part of that vision includes public recreation and access.

“This historic day is upon us because citizens of Montana called for dam removal and truly smart, committed public servants answered that call, by rolling up their sleeves and figuring out the best way to clean up mining pollution and restore a river,” said DEQ director Tracy Stone-Manning. “This is a tangible reminder that when people work together, epic things can happen.”

"EPA is pleased that the Clark Fork River at Milltown is ready for recreational use," says Julie DalSoglio, EPA's Montana Office Director. "After years of cleanup, we celebrate this long-awaited milestone and new fishing and floating opportunities for Montanans. EPA looks forward to watching the river system continue to restore itself."

Much of the floodplain and hillsides surrounding the restored river channels are part of the 535-acre Milltown State Park. The park will include trail access, phased in over time, which will take visitors through the Blackfoot and Clark Fork confluence area, including a limited access trail through some of the restored floodplains. Interpretive signs will share will some of the area's rich history with park visitors.

FWP reminds recreationists that spring floating conditions on all Montana rivers are rapidly changing, with woody debris and fluctuating flows, and urges caution as anglers and others enjoy this new stretch of floatable water. The Blackfoot River in the immediate confluence area remains closed to floating, but its banks are open.

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