Black Butte Mine Superfund Project Update

March 2013

EPA and its contractor, CDM Smith, began field work at the former Black Butte Mine in late October 2012. The initial field investigations (Phase 1) focus on an area adjacent to and including the former mine site (see map below). The primary objective for Phase 1 is to assess mercury movement from mercury sources at the former mine site into Garoutte Creek, which eventually becomes the Coast Fork Willamette River. Work began with the establishment of stream sampling stations and an on-site rainfall collection station that will allow for continuous monitoring of stream flow and surface water quality and allow for collection of rainfall samples, respectively. Surface water, sediment, and rainfall sampling was conducted during a storm the week of March 4th.

EPA and the Battelle National Laboratory began an evaluation of mercury in water and sediments in Cottage Grove Lake the week of February 18th. From other studies we have come to understand that the vast majority of the mercury that accumulates in fish is an organic form of mercury, termed methylmercury. However, most of mercury transported over time from the Black Butte Mine to the lake is believed to be inorganic mercury. It is not clear what processes control the rate of conversion of inorganic mercury in sediments to methylmercury in water within the lake. Addressing this question is the objective of this study. This aspect of the Black Butte Mine project is being funded by the EPA Office of Research and Development as the findings may have implications to mercury contamination in lakes elsewhere in the US.

EPA has established an Information Repository at the Cottage Grove Library at 700 Gibbs Avenue in Cottage Grove. We will routinely add materials, including copies of these Project Updates, as they become available. For more information, contact EPA project manager, Rich Muza at 503-326-6554, muza.richard@epa.gov or Alanna Conley, EPA community involvement coordinator, at 503-326-6831, conley.alanna@epa.gov.