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EPA Announces Plans to Use Funding from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to Clear Out the Superfund Backlog at Two Vermont Superfund Sites

Initial resources will accelerate cleanup for Commerce Street Plume and Ely Copper Mine

Contact Information: Mikayla Rumph, (617) 918-1016, rumph.mikayla@epa.gov

BOSTON (Dec. 17, 2021) – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a \$1 billion investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to initiate cleanup and clear the backlog of 49 previously unfunded Superfund sites across the nation including Commerce Street Plume in Williston, Vt. and Ely Copper Mine in Vershire, Vt. Until this historic investment, these sites were part of a backlog of hazardous waste sites awaiting funding. Thousands of contaminated sites exist nationally due to hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed. These sites include manufacturing facilities, processing plants, landfills and mining sites.

“This work is just the beginning; with more than 1 in 4 Black and Hispanic Americans living within 3 miles of a Superfund site, EPA is working to serve people that have been left behind,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan.** “Approximately 60 percent of the sites to receive funding for new cleanup projects are in historically underserved communities. Communities living near many of the most serious uncontrolled or abandoned releases of contamination will finally get the protections they deserve.”

“These sites have been plagued with legacy contamination that, until now, EPA has not had the funding to cleanup,” **said EPA New England Acting Regional Administrator Deb Szaro.** “Getting these sites off of the backlog list and cleaned up is a very important step for the communities in Vermont to envision potential future uses for these areas.”

The \$1 billion investment is the first wave of funding from the \$3.5 billion in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help cleanup polluted Superfund sites in communities across the country. The backlog of previously unfunded sites that will

now be receiving funding in New England are located in Connecticut, Maine and Vermont.

The Commerce Street Plume Site, added to the National Priorities List (NPL) in April 2005, has been awaiting funding to complete the groundwater cleanup at the site since 2018. The site, located in Williston, Vermont, includes a former wastewater lagoon and a 70-acre groundwater plume, which extends beneath the former Alling Industrial Park (AIP) on Commerce Street, to portions of Kirby Lane and portions of South Brownell and Shunpike roads.

The Ely Copper Mine Superfund Site, added to the NPL in September 2001, has been awaiting funding to complete the cleanup since 2018. The site, which is an abandoned copper mine located in Vershire, Vermont, encompasses approximately 350 acres where historic mining activities took place. The site includes about 30 acres of waste material containing an estimated 172,000 tons of waste rock, tailings, ore roast beds, slag heaps and smelter wastes as well as more than 3,000 linear feet of underground mine workings with associated shafts and Adits (i.e., horizontal tunnels). EPA has selected and designed the cleanup remedy for the site. Future work at the site will include implementing the design and conducting the following cleanup actions: excavation and on-site consolidation of mine waste and contaminated sediment as well as closure of the deep and main Adits.

“It is good news for Vermont that, thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the EPA has selected two Superfund sites in our state for clean up,” **said U.S. Senators Patrick Leahy, Bernie Sanders, and U.S. Congressman Peter Welch.** “Remediation of the wastewater lagoon in Williston and the 350-acre Ely Copper Mine in Vershire are long overdue and will help make these sites safe and productive — strengthening our ecosystems and improving the lives of thousands of Vermonters. With this Superfund cleanup, Congress is saying to Vermont – and to the American people – that we are putting the health and safety of individuals above the wishes of America’s biggest polluters. We look forward to working with the EPA and local leaders to make this cleanup a reality.”

“DEC is thrilled to see this first wave of funding under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law going to continuing the cleanup work at the Commerce Street Plume and Ely Copper Mine Superfund Sites,” **said Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC) Commissioner Peter Walke.** “We’re looking forward to supporting the EPA in their efforts to restore these properties for the people of Williston and Vershire.”

“The Town of Vershire is excited at the prospect of the Ely Mine site finally being slated for remediation. However, while we are excited about the remediation, we do still hope the history of the mine and the people who worked there will not be lost in the process,” **said Vershire Selectboard Chair Vernal Stone.**

“Williston gives thanks and is encouraged by the support given by the U.S. EPA with federal funds for this project. They will enhance the remediation efforts at our superfund site,” **said Williston Selectboard Chair Terry Macaig.**

EPA is committed to carrying out this work in line with President Biden's [Justice40 Initiative](#) by advancing environmental justice and incorporating equity considerations into all aspects of the Superfund cleanup process. This will help ensure that historic and ongoing impacts of contamination on overburdened communities are fully considered and addressed.

EPA is finalizing cleanup plans and preparing funding mechanisms to get construction work started as soon as possible. More information about funding for backlogged sites and accelerated cleanup sites will be available in the coming weeks.

In 1980, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, known as Superfund, was passed. The novel law gave EPA the authority and funds to hold polluters accountable for cleaning up the most contaminated sites across the country. When no viable responsible party is found or cannot afford the cleanup, funds appropriated by Congress are used. A tax on chemical and petroleum industries provided funds to the Superfund Trust fund for Superfund cleanups up until 1995. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law reinstates the chemical excise taxes and invests an additional \$3.5 billion in environmental remediation at Superfund sites, making it one of the largest investments in American history to address the legacy pollution that harms the public health of communities and neighborhoods.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a once-in-a-generation investment that will create millions of jobs modernizing our infrastructure, turn the climate crisis into an opportunity, and put us on a path to win the economic competition for the 21st century.

For more information and to see a list of the 49 sites to receive funding for new cleanup projects, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-sites-new-construction-projects-receive-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-funding>

For more information about EPA's Superfund program, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/superfund>