

Top EPA official tours brownfield sites



Sen. Steve Daines, center, speaks with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler, left, during a tour of Glacier Rail Park on Friday. Daines and Wheeler were in Kalispell to tour sites involved in the EPA's Brownfields Program, including the former CHS Country Store, CHS Agronomy Center and SunRift Brewery and Restaurant. (Casey Kreider photos/Daily Inter Lake)

Sen. Steve Daines, second from left, speaks with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler during a tour of Glacier Rail Park on Friday. Daines and Wheeler were in Kalispell to tour sites involved in the EPA's Brownfields Program, including the former CHS Country Store, CHS Agronomy Center and SunRift Brewery and Restaurant. At right are Tony Brockman and Mark Lalum, General Manager of CHS Mountain West Co-op. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

Sen. Steve Daines, right, speaks to a group assembled during a tour with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler, left, and Montana Attorney General Tim Fox, of Glacier Rail Park on Friday.

By

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler got an up-close and personal look at the federal agency's impact in Kalispell during a tour on Friday.

Wheeler came from Washington, D.C., to join U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., and local business leaders on a tour of brownfield sites throughout the city that have been redeveloped, thanks to \$2 million in EPA funding.

"We're very happy Administrator Wheeler took the time to come to Kalispell," said Katharine King, assistant director of Community and Economic Development with the city of Kalispell. "The EPA brownfield program has been a great resource for property owners in Kalispell."

Brownfield sites are properties with historically industrial uses where the ground is suspected to be contaminated, often due to the use of hazardous chemicals or petroleum products. The EPA Brownfields Program provides funding and support for assessing potentially polluted sites and redeveloping commercial properties on them.

Sites toured by the group in Kalispell included Glacier Rail Park, which was formerly a stone quarry, and SunRift Restaurant along the downtown railroad tracks. The three former CHS sites downtown—the grain elevators, the CHS Agronomy Center and the CHS Country store—are also brownfield sites, as is the railroad right of way the city is currently working on acquiring from BNSF Railway to install the downtown trail as part of the Kalispell Core & Rail Plan.

“They really are pretty diverse in the kinds of properties,” King explained. “The emphasis of the program is all about moving properties to a higher and better use.”

The EPA Brownfields Program is often a “catalyst” for revitalizing properties, King added. Property developers can be hesitant about brownfield sites, but King pointed out “it’s impossible to know for certain” a property’s potential before the EPA assesses the area.

SunRift Restaurant, for example, turned out not to need any cleanup to develop the restaurant there. Most of Kalispell’s \$2 million in grant funding has gone to assessments, rather than cleanup, King said.

The EPA’s planning assistance also helped the city secure a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER grant from the Montana Department of Transportation for the Kalispell Core & Rail Plan.

She reported cleanup efforts at Glacier Rail Park are now complete, and there is currently a “Phase 2” cleanup project underway at the CHS Agronomy Center at 55 Fourth Ave. EN.

“The tour highlighted examples of business coming back when brownfields are redeveloped,” King said.

“It’s great to have Administrator Wheeler here from the EPA, who came from Washington, D.C. out to Montana to see an example of what we can do with this partnership in our communities when we take these brownfield sites to restore it and reclaim it,” Daines said in a press release. “This is a big win for Montana, a big win for our economy. It is a great way to better utilize the precious resources we have here in Montana.”

Property owners interested in brownfield resources are encouraged to call Katharine King at 406-758-7713.

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