

CIRI and the Iron Range Brownfields Program

Historical perspective

CIRI's mission is to create collaboration among communities on a vision for the future of the Iron Range. This has resulted in projects that result in real economic improvements and often get spun off from CIRI to live on their own. Examples include; the Central Iron Range Sanitary Sewer District, Pit Lake Hydrology Study, Underground Mine Mapping and others.

In 2007-08 CIRI began an effort to organize a brownfield redevelopment Entity on the Iron Range. The goal was not limited to obtaining money from a single grant, but included creation of an organized effort that could assist communities with a variety of financial resources and brownfield revitalization expertise over many years. The plan was to obtain a Brownfields Assessment Grant from the EPA for a coalition of Iron Range communities and then spin that off into job creation efforts in those communities.

CIRI submitted grant applications each year and each grant application resulted in a few more Range communities joining in the effort until the term Central Iron Range no longer applied. The grant writing effort was finally successful in 2012 and that coalition of communities included Eveleth, Gilbert, Virginia, Buhl, Chisholm, Hibbing, Keewatin, Nashwauk, Bovey, Marble, Taconite, Coleraine, Balkan township, Lone Pine township and Ely was awarded \$753,000. Over the course of two years a substantial number of brownfields were assessed and redeveloped using the EPA money. The Chicago EPA Project Manager toured a number of the brownfield sites in the fall of 2014 and commented that the Iron Range Brownfield Coalition was one of the most effective in the country. So the goal of a successful EPA grant was achieved and the goal of an organized entity was well underway.

Details and Definitions

- **CIRI – Is a 501 C-3** - organizing body that coordinates grant writing and provides the venue under which brownfield meetings are coordinated and matching funds are sought.
- **Iron Range Brownfield Coalition** – The communities that are listed in each EPA Grant.
- **Fiscal Agent** – The city that accepts responsibility for administrating the grant. Chisholm was the fiscal agent for the 2012 award and Virginia is this year's (2016) designee.

Recent News

- **March 30, 2016** – Hosted representatives of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank for a brownfield tour of the Iron Range. Features included a visit to the Habitat for Humanity Brooklyn School redevelopment site in Hibbing, a “guided tour” of the Iron Range from Keewatin to Virginia, and a visit to the former Staver Foundry brownfield site and Tri-Tec's manufacturing facility in Virginia.
- **December, 2015** - An EPA Grant was submitted last December for fiscal year 2016. The number of communities in the coalition continues to grow and now includes; Cook, Ely, Biwabik, Aurora, Hoyt Lakes and Babbit.

- **May 20, 2016 - The EPA announced the successful grant proposals last week, and the CIRI Iron Range Brownfields Coalition was awarded \$550,000! Virginia is the fiscal agent.**

To-Do Items

- The grant agreement with the EPA will be executed sometime this summer which will make the funding available to complete environmental assessments and cleanup plans. Each community in the coalition will need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as part of the EPA Agreement.
- Each Community should inventory and prioritize Brownfield Sites.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Brownfield revitalization is an economic development tool first and foremost. The project area does not need to have known contamination, only a previous use that inhibits redevelopment.

- **Community involvement and education is an important component to brownfield revitalization and is REQUIRED by the EPA grant program. Cooperation among all the organizations that have “Revitalization of the Iron Range” within their mission should participate.**

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