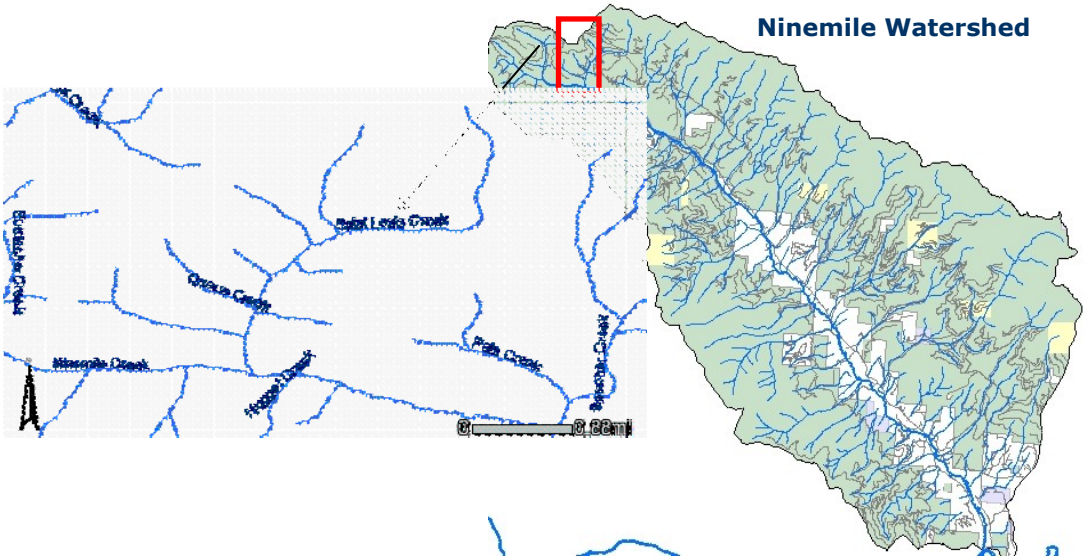
St Louis Creek



St Louis Creek is located approximately 20 miles up Ninemile Creek from the Clark Fork River. The St. Louis Creek watershed is 2,819 acres in size with 8.5 miles of stream in the watershed. Over 90% of the lands within the watershed are owned by the Lolo National Forest. Fires in the early 2000s burned around 22% of the watershed.

The only mine of significant size and operation was the Frances Copper/Joe Wallit Mine from 1948 to 1995. Other mines in the watershed were small and conducted little assessment work. The Frances Copper Mine is a strip mine listed as producing copper, silver, gold, lead, and antimony. The impacts of mining at the site cover an area roughly 15-20 acres in size. MBMG files state that miners began producing from the Frances in December 1973 with 500 ft trenched, 150,000 tons stripped, and 3,000 short tons of ore shipped in 1974.

A 1981 environmental assessment reports that "the operation was poorly conceived and conducted. This resulted in a serious problem, with waste material providing a continuous sediment source to St. Louis Creek." The claims were closed in 1995 and miners left approximately $2,000 in bond monies for reclamation.

Significant environmental effects exist from historic mining of the Frances Copper operation. The site has a very large open cut and a pond with standing water. Overflow from the pond discharges to St. Louis Creek through a PVC pipe located on the south side of the pond. The middle portions of the waste-rock dumps were being actively eroded by East Fork of St. Louis Creek, and the lower edges of the waste-rock dumps were being eroded by the main fork of St. Louis Creek. A seep emerges from the toe of one of the waste-rock dumps. Soil sampling at the site show elevated levels of lead, arsenic, copper and zinc.

Approximately 20,000 cubic yards of mine waste rock has been removed from the floodplain of St Louis Creek and placed within a repository on site. The repository has been capped with native topsoil, covered with compost and erosion fabric, and revegetated with native grass seed. During the summer of 2011, Trout Unlimited and Lolo National Forest will reconstruct 1,000 feet of stream channel at the site and rehabilitate the culvert crossing leading to the site. The reclaimed site will be replanted with a mix of native shrubs and conifers starting in the fall of 2011.

The total project cost is approximately $510,000, with major funding coming from Missoula County through the DNRC's Reclamation and Development Grant Program, US Forest Service, and MFWP's Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The following is the general breakdown for project costs: $75,000 for survey and design; $300,000 for mine waste cleanup; $75,000 for stream channel restoration; $15,000 for materials; $20,000 for planning and oversight; and $25,000 for revegetation activities and site cleanup.