

Cameron County Echo

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Train Wreck Causes Environmental Catastrophe

by Bruce Whitman
 Echo News Editor

Last Friday's train derailment along Norfolk Southern tracks in nearby McKean County caused an environmental catastrophe unprecedented in scope and destruction for this region.

Leaking chemicals from several derailed tank cars have apparently wiped out all fish life in Portage Creek and continuing downstream to the Driftwood Branch of the Sinnemahoning Creek.

At first it was believed that one tank car wrecked in the derailment leaked 16,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide into Portage Creek.

The State Department of Environ-

mental Protection confirmed Monday that three tank cars leaked the caustic substance, dumping up to 38,000 gallons of the hazardous chemical.

"It looks like the fishery in Portage Creek is gone," said Bill Crisp, a Waterways Conservation Officer with the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. "The widespread fish kill extended all the way down the Driftwood Branch to at least Sinnemahoning."

"I've never seen anything like it," said Crisp. "To have a total fishery wiped out over a span of 35 or more miles is just hard to comprehend."

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CHEMICAL FISH FRY – Thousands of gallons of spilled chemicals caused by a train derailment sparked a massive fish kill on the Portage and Driftwood branches of the Sinnemahoning Creek this past weekend. These dead fish, representing a wide variety of species, were along the banks of the Driftwood Branch near the Village of Cameron. Zoschg Photo



CRUSHED AND BATTERED – Two dozen cars of a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed Friday morning along a stretch of track between Gardeau and Keating Summit. Smashed in the wreckage were tank cars carrying thousands of gallons of sodium hydroxide, a highly caustic liquid chemical. The chemical spill worked its way down Portage Creek and the Driftwood Branch of the Sinnemahoning Creek, causing a massive fish kill. Krieg - Echo

Fate Placed Train On Local Rails

Had it not been for severe flooding conditions in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the Norfolk Southern freight train that derailed last Friday near Gardeau would have never been on the Buffalo Main Line.

The train, carrying lumber, paper products, other heavy freight and five tank cars loaded with chemicals, was diverted west from Binghamton through New York and down the Buffalo Main towards Harrisburg.

The derailment took place along a section of track with a notorious downgrade. In years past, big freights coming down this section would have engines both in front and in back of the string to handle heavy braking.

A railroad policeman on scene said that the engine carried a "black box" very similar to those on commercial airliners. It would have recorded the train's speed, braking and throttle position at the time of the accident.

The same policeman said that the train crew would undergo routine testing for alcohol and drugs.

Besides Norfolk Southern officials, others investigating the derailment included the Federal Railroad Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

Quiet Holiday Weekend Shattered By Wreck

It was supposed to be a quiet, long Fourth of July holiday weekend here in Cameron County.

That all changed last Friday morning when a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed near Keating Summit. Two dozen or more freight cars went

crashing off the tracks. Five were tank cars loaded with hazardous chemicals.

One and possibly as many as three of those tankers ruptured, dumping thousands of gallons of sodium hydroxide, a caustic and highly corrosive substance into a field adjacent to the tracks and eventually into Portage Creek.

This triggered reactions by emergency responders, several state agencies and the railroad that continue to this day.

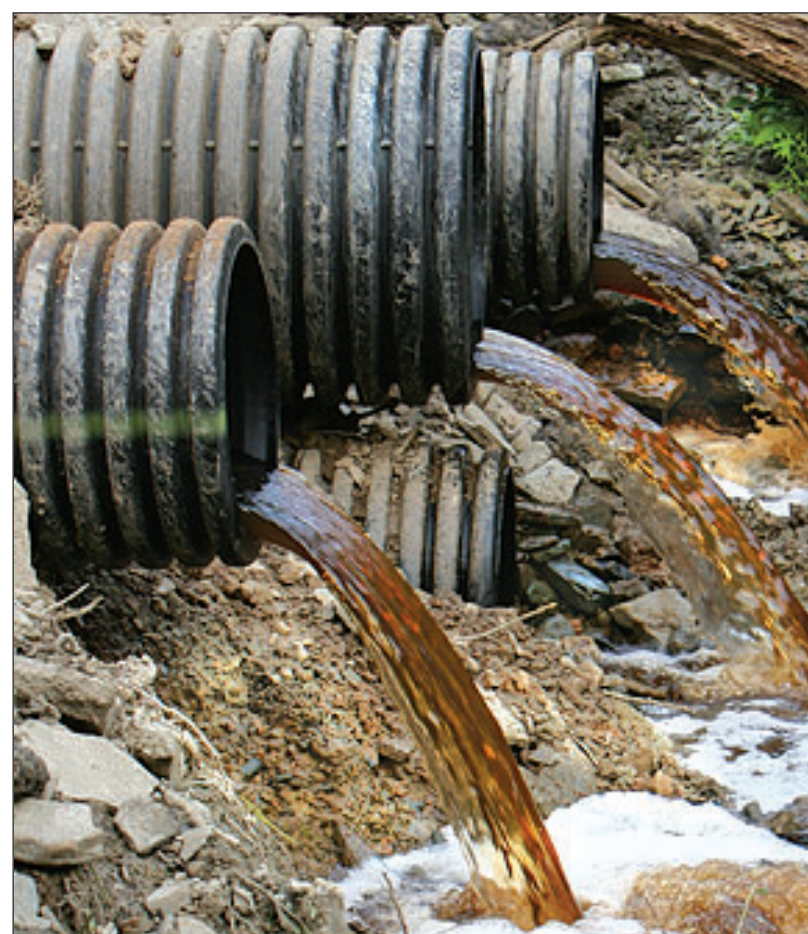
The Cameron County Office of Emergency Services responded to the scene with Deputy Director Laura Narby and Misty Lupro. Among other things, they helped coordinate a staging area for strike teams, emergency medical crews, fire equipment and other responders near Keating Summit along Route 155.

Meeting Dates Changed Due To Holiday

The Fourth of July holiday brought about changes in meeting schedules for both the Cameron County Commissioners and Emporium Borough Council.

Commissioners held their first meeting of July this morning (Wednesday), while Emporium Borough Council postponed its normal meeting date to Monday, July 17.

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NOT YOUR CUP OF TEA – The toxic overflow coming out of these pipes in a temporary dam on the Portage Branch of the Sinnemahoning Creek resulted in a massive environmental mess in McKean and Cameron counties over the weekend. The dam was placed to collect chemicals spilled as a result of a train derailment on Norfolk Southern tracks near Gardeau. Burkhouse Photo

Moscato Enters Bid For Regional Post

Cameron County Commissioner Tony Moscato has thrown his hat into the ring for the vacant post of executive director of the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission.

Word of Moscato's intentions surfaced last week when he submitted a letter of resignation from his post on the commission's executive board.

The resignation was not accepted. Board member, McKean County Commissioner John Egbert, felt that Moscato's resignation was "premature."

The position of North Central executive director has been vacant since Ron Kuleck resigned in December.

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Derailment Prompts Huge Emergency Response Effort

by Bruce Whitman
 Echo News Editor

Last Friday's train derailment on the Norfolk Southern freight line between Keating Summit and Gardeau prompted one of the largest turnouts of emergency responders seen in this region in recent years.

It all started with the incident being reported to McKean County dispatch at 8:58 a.m. Before long, emergency responders were called in from a four-county area.

The derailment involved a 29-car freight headed towards Emporium and eventually Harrisburg. All told, 25 cars, including five tank cars carrying hazardous materials, left the tracks about three miles south of Keating Summit.

The wreck took place adjacent to

Portage Creek in a fairly remote location.

First responders reported that one of the tank cars was leaking a substance later learned to be sodium hydroxide, a highly corrosive, liquid chemical. The substance was leaking into Portage Creek.

Another tanker was loaded with chlorine, but was not leaking.

These conditions prompted a call for hazardous material response units, or strike forces. The response came from Emporium Volunteer Fire Department, McKean County and Elk County.

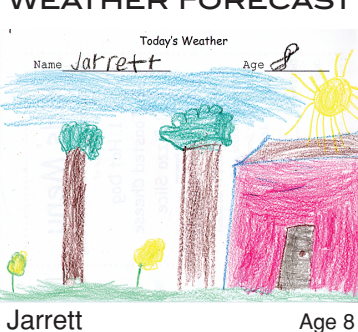
These units, along with ambulances, emergency medical personnel, fire trucks and search and rescue units with ATVs, were staged along Route 155 just south of the Forest House.

Because of the potentially hazardous conditions at the scene, all personnel were maintained well off site with only key officials near ground zero.

Jim Rankin, deputy chief of the Port Allegany Fire Department, was Officer in Charge (OIC) of the incident, along with Bruce Manning, assistant Emergency Management and Hazardous Materials Director for

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PIZZA PALACE PLUS WEATHER FORECAST



Jarrett Age 8