

## Environmental restoration at train crash site to begin

Almost a year after the train crash and lye spill near Gardeau, Norfolk Southern Railroad has been given the go-ahead to complete environmental restoration work at the site.

Under an agreement with the Pa. Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), Norfolk Southern will restore vegetation along the creek banks and wetland areas and redirect Big Fill Run back into its natural channel. The stream has been diverted to allow soil excavation and other remedial work.

DEP Regional Director Kelly Burch said both sides worked out a schedule that will take advantage of the growing season. Burch also said the restoration work will be monitored for five years.

Norfolk Southern has been excavating and removing contaminated soil. Land must be restored to the original contours and replanted with native, indigenous plant species by Dec. 1.

The June 30 spill wiped out fish and aquatic life in an 11-mile segment of Sinnemahoning Portage Creek, Big Fill Hollow. It also affected aquatic life in the Driftwood Branch of Sinnemahoning Creek. The spill's effects were observed as far as 30 miles downstream, with much of the impact in Cameron County.

Up to 42,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide, also known as caustic soda or lye, spilled from three tanker cars. An unknown amount of the chemical soaked into the ground. DEP says it must be removed to ensure a complete recovery of Sinnemahoning Portage Creek, which is designated as an exceptional value and wild trout stream.

In October, DEP announced \$8.89 million in penalties against Norfolk Southern for unpermitted discharges and waste disposals, and releasing hazardous substances. The restoration agreement announced this week does not resolve those penalties, which are the subject of ongoing litigation.