

Update as of 1200, July 19, 2023

Stillwater Train Derailment Press Release

Reed Point, Montana (July 19, 2023) – 12:00pm

Cleanup teams have relocated their base of operation from Holmgren Fishing Access Site outside of Columbus to Riverside Park in Laurel. Unified Command is working to open Holmgren to the public as quickly as possible; some cleanup resources will continue to be staged at Holmgren throughout the process. As of Tuesday night, teams have collected approximately 112,700 pounds of asphalt material.

Riverside Park in Laurel is being used to launch boats for all on-river crews and as a staging area for asphalt material collection. Assessment teams have reviewed downstream to river mile 55. Five cleanup teams continue their efforts downstream with crews working in river miles 29 – 33.5 today. Additional cleanup crews are returning to previously cleaned areas for further cleanup, if necessitated by the assessment team, prior to an area being marked officially cleared. Daily asphalt material collection totals may vary depending on the approach; some days the cleanup teams place a focus on staging and moving the material when asphalt collection is challenging due to the heat. Two additional workers experienced heat-related illness and teams are prepared to issue a work stand down if the temperature reaches triple digits. Mandatory work rest breaks have been instituted based on the temperature.

The safety meeting for the river operations teams has moved from 5 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. now that they are launching out of Riverside Park. The river flows continue to drop and operations crews are working on acquiring smaller boats which can better navigate low areas in the river.

Unified Command has mobilized a response team to collect reported asphalt material on land. Please continue to report observed asphalt material so the information can be logged and addressed as cleanup teams move downstream.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks crews collected fish from the Yellowstone River downstream of the incident site. Fish will be tested for human consumption safety, and results will be released to the public as soon as they are available.

At the derailment site, recovered rail cars have been cut open for appropriate processing and material removal. This will support the car and material disposal process and help establish a more accurate estimate of how much asphalt material entered the river from the impacted cars.

Cleanup and assessment crews continue to look for impacted wildlife daily. A garter snake was taken to the Montana Raptor Conservation Center in Bozeman, cleaned, and released. The previous press release had a miscalculated total for impacted wildlife. There have been eight total snakes impacted rather than the four reported. There have been seven snakes and seven birds that died after encountering the asphalt material; one snake encountered the material and was released back into the environment for 15 total confirmed animals impacted by the material.

EPA's river operations dashboard on the incident website has up-to-date information on the amount of collected asphalt material and assessment locations and is available online: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/719ee8d6c1d743e89b95ee946d1d4d45/page/River-Operations/>

Members of the public are encouraged to continue avoiding touching the asphalt material with bare skin and reporting it to the email below. This email can also be used for any impacted landowners to start the process of filing a claim. To report observed asphalt material, submit information to: rpderailment@mtrail.com

Anyone with information about oiled wildlife are encouraged to call the Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) Response Hotline at 888-ASK-OWCN (888-275-6926).

For more information, please visit the response websites at: <https://response.epa.gov/stillwatertrainderailment>
<https://www.stillwatercountymt.gov/train-derailment/>

This response is operating under a Unified Command which enables different jurisdictions and organizations to jointly manage and direct incident activities. Unified Command for this incident is comprised of representatives from Stillwater County Disaster and Emergency Services, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Montana Rail Link.

