

Stillwater Train Derailment Press Release

(February 16, 2024) – 1:30pm

Reed Point, Montana— Unified Command for the Stillwater Train Derailment released the Phase 2 cleanup plan today, detailing the second phase of cleanup. Phase 1 of cleanup included the immediate aftermath of the derailment, the emergency response stage, and transitions in August 2023 to maintenance operations. These maintenance operations allowed land crews and small boats to continue recovering asphalt on a reduced scale throughout the fall and winter.

The [Phase 2 plan](#) begins with a rapid assessment of the riverbank once ice, debris, and water levels allow safe access in the spring. Teams will assess the riverbanks and remove accessible asphalt revealed through changing river conditions, including shifting sandbars, over the winter and early spring. A second shoreline clean up and assessment will occur in summer following the spring melt.

Unified Command cleanup guidelines are based on the goal of maximizing asphalt material removal while limiting long term impacts caused by removal operations such as damage from heavy foot or vehicle traffic and removal of native material. Actionable asphalt includes deposits that are 15cm or larger when on sand and 50cm or larger when on pebble; deposits on vegetation or root balls will only be removed if asphalt is very sticky, thick and/or dripping. If identified asphalt material is not actionable, crews will attempt to break it into smaller pieces and cover it with sediment to aid in the natural breakdown process. The guidelines around actionable asphalt are flexible and depend on best professional judgement when in the field. To date, crews have recovered an estimated 236,385 pounds of asphalt.

Unified Command is hosting a public meeting at 6 p.m. on Feb. 29 to discuss the phase 2 plan. This meeting will be held at the Stillwater County Civic Center, 16 Sheep Dip Rd, Columbus, MT 59019. Submit questions in advance at: <https://forms.office.com/g/5iiN33QaZK>.

The meeting is also accessible online or via telephone. Register to attend the Zoom meeting by phone or online at: https://mt-gov.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_urManP9HRyCcfnN5ntnnMA. A confirmation email with access information will be sent to the email registered.

The natural resource damage process to evaluate the injury caused to the environment due to this event will continue through the Natural Resource Damage Program. More information can be found at: <https://dojmt.gov/lands/nrdp-public-notices/notices-of-public-comment/>.

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Members of the public are encouraged to avoid contact with the material and report observed deposits to rpderailment@mtrail.com

Additional information regarding this response is available at: www.response.epa.gov/stillwatertrainderailment

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.

