Headwaters Montana

Jun 17, 2015

Currents

Oil Trains Pose Real Threat to Fish & Water

Extreme heat in summer, extreme cold in winter make the BNSF rails between East and West Glacier unstable and prone to derailment

FACTS ABOUT OIL TRAINS IN THE FLATHEAD

Trains/week……..12-14
Oil Capacity/Rail Car……30,000 gals
Number of Cars/Train……..……100-110
Gallons Bakken Crude/Train…3 million gals

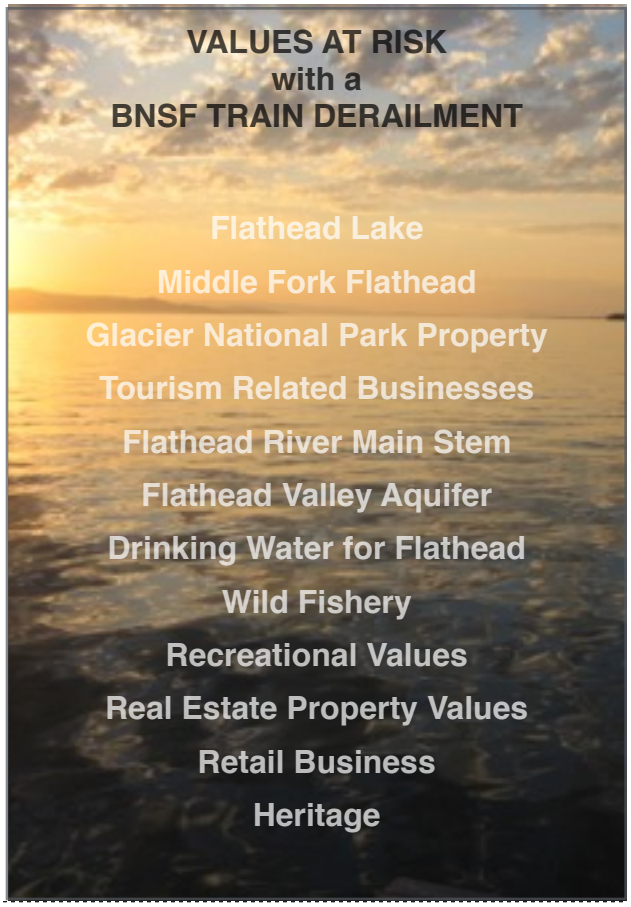
# of Bakken Oil Wells in 2007…….0 (Zero)
# of Oil Tank Cars in 2007……..4,000
# of Oil Train Accidents in 2007……1 (One!)

# of Bakken Oil Wells in 2014……7,000
# of Oil Tank Cars in 2014……..400,000
# of Oil Train Accidents in 2014……110

Total Expected Bakken Wells. 70,000-1000,000

Probability a BNSF Train derails in the Flathead……..100 percent

What is BNSF Doing About This Risk?
Nada. Nothing. Zilch. Zero.



BURLINGTON NORTHERN SANTE FE RAILROAD "SHINES ON" LOCAL YOKELS

Flathead Valley residents can't help but notice the oil trains rolling through the Valley. A lot roll by. Up to two (2) per day. If you stood at rail side and counted the cars whizzing by per train (100) and the gallons per car (30,000) your math would lead you to conclude that each train carried 3,000,000 (that's millions) gallons of volatile Bakken crude. You would be correct.

What would happen to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, the main stem of the Flathead, Flathead Lake, and your drinking water if just one of those cars emptied its contents into the river?

But, really, how likely is a derailment? In statistical terms, scientists would say, "The probability of a derailment is 1 (one)." Translated this means, a 100 percent likelihood. A probability that equals 1 is the same as saying 100 percent. That's scientific parlance for you.

Why can we be so sure that a train will derail? Because the Burlington Northern Sante Fe (BNSF) rail line along the Middle Fork Flathead has derailed many times before.

Derailments happen because:

- The track expands and contracts in heat and cold causing the rails to buckle just enough to lose a train
- Avalanches collide with trains
- Trains go too fast around corners and tip over
- Train operator fall asleep (each train has just one operator on board) and… you guessed it!

BNSF has made statements to the effect that they've invested billions into their rail lines. This is a fact. But did they invest in accident prevention and accident response? Or did they simply send a letter to shippers saying they wanted to improve safety?

What did they do to improve response? They moved a hazard response trailer to the Middle Fork and then stationed the crew in Missoula. In the two hours it would take to mount ANY response, the oil would be half way to Flathead Lake. Are you planning to go fishing/boating that day? What if that highly flammable Bakken crude is on fire, and moving downstream? Feeling the heat yet?

BNSF has made a point of meeting with local folks to explain what they've done and what they plan to do. But what have they actually done besides spun some PR and moved some smoke and mirrors? Bottom line: BNSF has not invested in key actions that could lessen the risk to the watershed.

It's been several years since these enormous shipments of oil across our landscape and valley started. And BNSF has done nothing.

This INaction is unacceptable. And it's time for local folks to step up and demand accountability, greater prevention, and better response capability.

After all, what's at stake? A few million invested by BNSF on prevention and response, or hundreds of millions of damage inflicted on our water, wildlife and way of life.

Here's a sobering fact: Some folks would like to stop the oil trains. Some don't think there's a problem or even an eventual problem (for example, BNSF!). The fact is, oil trains will keep coming. Our only available response must be to improve on derailment prevention AND response. We need to push the statistical probability from 1 to zero.

What Needs to be Done?

Prevention

- Operational Changes: Slow trains down, use multi-manned crews, ban unit trains, more track inspections, improve braking systems, build new avalanche shelters and extend existing ones
- Containment: use crash resistant tanker cars, keep oil in the cars in the event of an accident
- Understand the Resource: map the corridor for resource values, access, and potential problem areas.

Response

- Coordinate and train response capability across agencies (Park Service, US Forest Service, and state agencies)
- Have response vehicles/supplies/crew locally placed and available
- Test responsiveness by conducting a "dye test" (release harmless dye into river to test crew response and understand how the river carries materials)

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