

FRIDAY WASHOUT DERAILS MONTANA RAIL LINK TRAIN

March 18, 2017 at 5:00 am | By [Keith Kinnaird \(mailto:kkinnaird@bonnercountydailybee.com\)](mailto:kkinnaird@bonnercountydailybee.com)



(Photo by KEITH KINNAIRD) Railroad tracks and a section of Jersey barrier span a washed out embankment near Lake Pend Oreille on Friday.

PONDERAY — Up to 60 empty coal cars and a locomotive derailed early Friday morning following a washout on Montana Rail Link's mainline along Lake Pend Oreille.

There were no injuries and no hazardous materials were released, the company said in a statement. The derailed cars and locomotive remained upright.

The derailment occurred shortly after 6 a.m. The washout occurred east of the intersection of Third Street and Cedar Avenue. One set of train tracks and a Jersey barrier were suspended over a 30-foot tall void in the railroad's embankment on Friday. At the bottom of the void was a current of stormwater.

Other culverts under the tracks on Ponder Point appeared to be running at or near capacity on Friday afternoon.

Montana Rail Link spokesman Jim Miller said the cause of the washout remained under investigation.

"We do know that high water levels and ground saturation are contributing factors," said Lewis.



Montana Rail Link crews mobilized equipment on either side of Highway 200 at Kootenai Bay Road and Seven Sisters Drive. Large pieces of track-mounted equipment plodded east along railroad right of way to reach the damaged section of track. Other crews and heavy equipment staged closer to the site at Fourth and Railroad Avenue.

An official from Lake Pend Oreille Waterkeeper was also at the site to assess the damage. The water quality watchdog group has opposed increased coal shipments through Bonner County due to the impacts of a derailment on the lake and the broader implications of coal consumption and climate change.

Lewis said it's unclear when the main track will be reopened for use.

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CRIME/PUBLIC SAFETY

Train derails south of Cocolalla Lake in Bonner County

UPDATED: Mon., May 1, 2017, 11:23 p.m.



As many as a dozen train cars, filled with corn, lie along U.S. Highway 95 in the Cocolalla area north of Coeur d'Alene, Monday, May 1, 2017, where they derailed in the early morning hours. No one was hurt and BNSF crews were on scene quickly. (Jesse Tinsley / The Spokesman-Review)

From staff reports



A BNSF train carrying corn derailed Monday morning south of Sandpoint.

The crash was reported just after 6 a.m. south of Cocolalla Lake, according to Bonner County dispatchers.

BNSF spokesman Gus Melonas said the train was 110 cars long and carried only corn. He said about 25 cars in the middle went off the tracks, and five tipped onto their sides.

The crash didn't cause a fire and no one was injured, but it stoked concerns about the safety of the tracks at a time when BNSF is moving forward with plans to build a second rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille. Sandpoint Mayor Shelby Rognstad has voiced opposition to that project, citing concerns about increased shipping of coal and crude oil.

If the corn from Monday's derailment were instead a toxic fuel, Rognstad said, the effect on the environment "would have been absolutely devastating."

"If we can't ensure that our tracks are safe, it doesn't make sense to keep building tracks, particularly over our waterways," he said.

Melonas said the train that derailed Monday had originated in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and was headed to Kalama, Washington.

About 60 trains a day, including Amtrak, use the line where the derailment occurred. The crash blocked both tracks on the line, Melonas said.

The railroad hopes to have the tracks cleared in time to resume service by noon Tuesday. Equipment was on the way to the scene from Libby, Montana, and Pasco to move the blocking cars and repair tracks, Melonas said.

Train cars that are heavily damaged likely will be cut up and removed from the scene.

The derailment partially blocked U.S. Highway 95, which runs parallel to the tracks, but the highway remained open.

UPDATED: MAY 1, 2017, 11:23 P.M.

Tags: Cocolalla Lake, train derailment, trains

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