

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

POTOMAC CHAPTER, NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 235, KENSINGTON, MARYLAND 20895-0235

JULY 2019



HONORING THE PAST. In 1941, an American Locomotive Company shop worker wrote "Big Boy" in chalk on the front of the locomotive and the name stuck. Below the steam locomotive's new name, the unknown laborer also scratched a "V," a popular symbol for victory during World War II, a conflict in which the Big Boy locomotives would soon play a pivotal role. The tradition continues with restored to service Big Boy #4014; pictured here during a scheduled stop at Medicine Bow on May 4, 2019, during it's 5-day inaugural run to Omaha. Photo by: Alex Mayes

PROGRAM: The Susquehanna Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad will be shown in a video transfer from original 16mm color film. See page 2.

MEETING: July 16, 2019. 8PM. Lobby Level Auditorium of the Montgomery County Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville, MD.

NEXT MEETING DATE: August 20, 2019

DEADLINE FOR AUGUST ISSUE: July 26, 2019. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at c.moritz@comcast.net

INFO ON CHAPTER ACTIVITIES: <http://potomacnrhs.org/>

ADDRESS MEMBERSHIP INQUIRIES TO: Rick Davidson, Membership Agent, 2908 Breezy Terrace, Alexandria, VA 22303-2401 rdavidsonjr2908@verizon.net

THE CHAPTER FAMILY

If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, has lost a loved one, or has a new birth in the family, please call the Chapter on (301) 251-9461.

IN MEMORIAM. With deep sadness, we note the passing of Potomac Chapter's Founding Member, Ara Mesrobian, on June 18th at the age 93. Ara was battling cancer and pneumonia. For many years Ara served as Staff Photographer for the NRHS Bulletin. The Potomac Chapter extends its Deepest Sympathy to Ara's family and friends. Please keep Ara and his family in your Thoughts and Prayers. Word has come from Ara's niece, Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, that a grave side service for interment of Ara's and Caroline's mother's ashes (she died last year) will be held at Rock Creek Cemetery on August 3, 2019, at 11AM.

We also note with sadness that Paul Dolkos' wife, Linda, passed away on June 5th at age 78. Paul was a Founding Member of the Potomac Chapter and our first Chapter President. The Potomac Chapter extends its Deepest Sympathy to Paul and his family. Please keep them in your Thoughts and Prayers.

We also note the passing of John H. 'Jack' Griffin on June 19th. He was the Chessie System's Director of Passenger Operations until his retirement in 1985 following a 44-year career with the B&O and Chessie System. Mr. Griffin assisted the Baltimore Chapter, NRHS, in coordinating its many passenger train excursions in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Chessie Steam Specials and Chessie Safety Express Specials, which occurred over two 2-year periods in 1977-78 and 1981-1982. These excursions helped the Baltimore Chapter and many other NRHS chapters grow their membership in the east. Mr. Griffin dedicated many weeks to make these events happen. Mr. Griffin Also was of great help to Railroad Passenger Cars as they maintained their fleet of cars in Baltimore. (Interchange - Baltimore Chapter, NRHS) The Potomac Chapter extends its Deepest Sympathy to Mr. Griffin's family and friends. Please keep them in your Thoughts and Prayers.

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAM. The Susquehanna Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad is located in Central Pennsylvania on the PRR Harrisburg to Buffalo line, this video covers steam freight and passenger action in the 1950s between Sunbury and Northumberland. There are also segments on the Shamokin and Wilkes-Barre branches. Included are M-1s, L-1s, K-4s, I-1s and some early diesels.

2019 ANNUAL BALTIMORE AND POTOMAC CHAPTERS NRHS ANNUAL PICNIC. IT'S TIME TO MAKE YOUR RESERVATION! Our Annual Joint Picnic with the Baltimore Chapter, NRHS, will be held 5-8PM on August 17, 2019, at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum (BSM). Admission is by donation of at least \$15 per Adult and \$7 per Child. Plus, if you can, donations of snacks, salads, cakes, etc. are solicited. Volunteers are needed to arrive by about 4 PM to help set-up tables and the like. And then, if some can stay to help put things away, this is also appreciated.

The BSM should be back in operation by August 17 and will provide streetcar rides. The caterer will return for the fourth year to provide pit beef, turkey, ham, and other goodies. The Chapters will provide sodas and water. Bring your family, your friends, and enjoy an evening at the Museum. See page 11 for a banquet flyer. **NOTE:** THE DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS IS AUGUST 9.

Old Dominion Division RRE Annual Summer Dinner. The Old Dominion Division of Railroad Enthusiasts will hold their annual summer dinner on Thursday, July 18, 2019, at the Amphora Restaurant, 377 West Maple Avenue, Vienna, VA, at 6:30PM. Members and nonmembers are welcome. Come and enjoy an informal visit with other railfans. RSVP Dave Bieritz by July 16 at bieritzd@commpot.com or (703) 430-6277.

STRASBURG RAIL ROAD SEEKS GENERAL MANAGER. The Strasburg Rail Road Company (SRC) is actively seeking a General Manager (GM) to lead, manage and help grow our business. The GM will have primary P&L responsibility while leading an experienced team of 170 employees. SRC operations include historic, tourist excursions, retail concessions, special events, a world-class steam locomotive/railcar repair/restoration facility, and a growing freight business.

Qualified candidates will have education and experience commensurate with leading and growing an established business. To be considered, please send a cover letter, a current resume, a summary of your skill / experience that would demonstrate competence in managing our operation.

The deadline for submission is August 1, 2019. Reply in confidence to jobs@strasburgrailroad.com or; Executive Search Committee, Strasburg Rail Road Company, P.O. Box 96, Strasburg, PA 17579 (Railway Preservation News www.rypn.org)

RAIL NEWS

WESTERN MARYLAND 1309 UPDATE. The long and twisting restoration of 2-6-6-2 No. 1309 at Western Maryland Scenic Railroad may finally be nearing a successful conclusion, punctuated with the dramatic setting of the 100-ton boiler and frame onto the wheels in the coming weeks. On June 25, 2019, Executive Director John Garner gave Train's News Wire this rundown on work to revive the last steam locomotive made by Baldwin in 1949 for domestic use, and when completed, the world's largest operating compound Mallet:

- Spring rigging on front and rear engines is finished.
- Boring of intercepting and compounding valve is done.
- All shoes and wedges machined and installed in frame.
- Both cross-compound air pumps rebuilt and ready to install.
- Electrical system, including temperature sensors for main bearings, 90% complete.
- Lubrication system 75% complete.
- Driving boxes and hub liners for rear engine complete.
- Front engine boxes and hub liners nearing completion.

Contractor Gary Bensman adds that piston rings from all four cylinders will be replaced with new since the original bronze segments were stolen and scrapped. The valve gear on the high pressure (rear) engine is being completely rebuilt with new pins and bushings. All the recently machined driving box crown brasses are being hand fitted to ensure proper clearances on the axle bearings. This is in addition to a completed boiler that has been steamed twice, a backhead, a new cab, and a new tender. But the next big milestone, reuniting the boiler and frame with the driving wheels, is on the horizon once all of the prep work is done.

The crane move to set the engine on its two sets of 56-inch diameter wheels was delayed for most of the spring because of parts production problems at machine shops. Bensman says he is working with a crane company, the Belt Group of Cumberland, MD, that is donating its services to set the locomotive on both the front and rear engines on the same day. "It will give us the flexibility needed to get that front engine mated in there properly," he said in a text message.

Bensman explains the crane procedure that will make the engine whole again: "The rear crane will sling at the front of the throat sheet and will have 85% of the lift. The front crane will sling at the front flue sheet. " The rear of the locomotive weighs much more now than when it was unloaded with the cab, grates, ashpan, and other items installed during the work. Once the boiler and frame are

back together, final reassembly can follow.

The \$2.7 million restoration has been beset by funding issues, parts theft by an employee, abrupt personnel changes, missed deadlines, and other missteps over the last five years since its acquisition in 2014. But the contractor and the railroad have kept it lurching forward, despite obstacle after obstacle. The locomotive last operated in 1956, and its return to service at Western Maryland Scenic is seen as a potential breakthrough for the tourist railroad that has suffered from a host of issues unrelated to the locomotive, including a problematic landslide area near Frostburg.

Restored, No. 1309 will be the only articulated in regular operation in the Eastern U.S., and the world's largest operating compound Mallet – that is a locomotive that uses its steam twice to drive two sets of cylinders. Its new home is a 17-mile mountain railroad, which includes the famous Western Maryland Railway's Helmstetter's Curve, and its new Appalachian location is not far from its Chesapeake & Ohio roots in the coalfields of West Virginia. But right now there is still work to be done, and that's evident when you talk to the railroad and project managers who have weathered the project's many ups and downs and are eager to see it finished.

"We won't announce a completion date or set an inaugural trip until after we have an operating locomotive," Garner says. "We are eager to get the engine into operation, but we want to do the restoration right, break in the engine, and present it so that it is safe and reliable. That's our goal, and we're sticking to it." He says that local support is coming from Allegany County and the cities of Cumberland and Frostburg to prepare the tracks for No. 1309. The three entities are providing \$90,000 for tie replacement. Trains magazine gave its \$10,000 Preservation Award to the project in 2015, and readers have supported the project with more than \$75,000 in donations, which are still being accepted at www.wmsr.com (Trains News Wire)

WMSR TRACK WORK NEEDED TO PREPARE FOR #1309. Following a review of the 11 miles of Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, track inspectors determined that 1,200 ties, spikes, and plates needed immediate replacement at a total cost of \$90,000. The cost is being split, with Allegany County paying \$45,000 and Cumberland and Frostburg each contributing \$22,500. Jeff Rhodes, City Administrator, said the County, and the City of Frostburg, had both already approved their contributions to the maintenance project. The WMSR notified Allegany County, who owns the railroad track bed, on June 7th of the need for the emergency maintenance. (Cumberland Times-News)

CASS SCENIC RAILROAD TO FINISH CLIMAX PROJECT BY MID-SUMMER. In less than 12 weeks, a more than decade-long project will be completed when Cass Scenic Railroad crews finish the restoration of Middle Fork Climax No. 9. Cass shop crews are expecting the arrival of the locomotive's steam chest during the week of June 3rd. New air tanks are currently ordered and will arrive at the shop facility in the upcoming weeks. With the arrival of the steam chest and expected air tanks, crews will soon begin reassembling the drive shaft – the final component to the project. Cass shop crews spent much of the late winter on final piping and putting together the various injector lines. The locomotive successfully passed a boiler test in March 2019. Final touch-up and cosmetic work will take place once the drive shaft has been reassembled and the air tanks are installed. "Middle Fork Climax No. 9 will return to steam within the next two months. We suspect the first true debut will be during our Rail Heritage Weekend on September 6-8, 2019," says Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad Marketing and Business Development Manager Chase Gunnoe. "This project demonstrates the collaboration of many talented people and we're excited to see

this project become a reality," Gunnoe adds. Cass has not announced a definitive date on when the locomotive will be under steam, pending these final items. Please refer to the railroad's Legacy page for additional details on this and other projects. (Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad)

UPDATE ON WEST VIRGINIA'S DURBIN-CASS CONNECTION. The Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad (DGVR) will not open its Durbin to Cass connection until after the fall season. DGVR track crews have maintained, and at times, operated ahead of schedule on its track rehabilitation effort, however a small 40-foot bridge is in need of replacement, and that project is being overseen by the West Virginia Department of Transportation.

"Engineering experts with the State of West Virginia are designing a new bridge that will be installed at Trout Run. Since this right-of-way is overseen by the State, they will be the entity responsible for the bridge's design and construction," says Chase Gunnoe, DGVR's Marketing and Business Development Manager.

The State is already moving forward with a design type and construction schedule, but the full construction will not be completed until mid-to-late fall, preventing a late-summer debut and regular excursions in the fall. "We understand the delay in unveiling this rail line may be disappointing, but we're grateful for the State's leadership and their collaboration in providing us with a brand new bridge that will be able to safely serve our customers for many years," Gunnoe says.

The previous bridge at Trout Run was dislodged during the historic flood of 1985 and while original assessments indicated a new bridge could be built on existing abutments or through a culvert-style design, it was determined in collaboration with the railroad's engineering partners that the most ideal option is a new bridge.

DGVR, which oversees the Cass Scenic Railroad, had intentionally delayed selling public excursion tickets on this new corridor until a firm opening date was reached internally. The railroad's Rail Heritage Weekend on September 6-8, 2019, was to serve as the soft opening for the new line and was going to provide photographers the chance to travel between Cass and Durbin by rail for the first time.

With the delayed opening, DGVR will still host the three-day event, but will concentrate operations out of Durbin south and from Cass to the north, meeting at the out-of-service section at Trout Run. The event will trace the entire line segment with the exception of the small area at Trout Run.

DGVR track crews have restored more than 10 miles of the line between Cass and Durbin, installing over 17,000 crossties and installing thousands of tons of rock ballast. Additional tamping and track work will be finalized in the coming weeks in preparation for the September Rail Heritage Weekend. DGVR encourages those interested in all projects to visit the 'Legacy' page online at www.mountainrail.com.

DEBUT OF NEWLY ACQUIRED E9. The Friends of the 261 debuted its newly acquired former Milwaukee Road E9A over the weekend of June 22-23 on trips over the Twin Cities & Western and Minnesota Prairie Line. The trips, sponsored by the Friends and the Milwaukee Road Historical Association (MRHA), which was holding its annual convention in St. Paul, featured Milwaukee Road 4-8-4 No. 261 pulling the trips west out of Minneapolis, with E9A No. 101 pulling the return trips east. On June 22, the train operated between Minneapolis and Brownton on the Twin Cities & Western. On June 23 the train operated between Minneapolis and Norwood on TC&W, then from Norwood to Winthrop on TC&W subsidiary Minnesota Prairie Line.

The E-unit was acquired earlier this year from the Wisconsin & Southern

Railroad, and was originally Milwaukee Road No. 32A. It was delivered to the Friends and put on display for Trains Days at Union Depot in St. Paul on June 1-2. The unit then still wore its full Wisconsin & Southern lettering. For the MRHA trips, the Wisconsin & Southern lettering was removed, and a Milwaukee Road Hiawatha "Running Indian" logo was placed on the nose.

The E9 was delivered to the Milwaukee Road by EMD in April 1956 as No. 202A. It was part of six sets of A-B-A E9s purchased for use on Union Pacific's "Cities" streamliners that Milwaukee began operating between Chicago and Omaha in 1955. All were delivered in UP yellow colors. The numbering sequence for the third set was 202A, 202B, and 202C. In the 1959 Milwaukee Road fleet renumbering the set became 32A, 32B, and 32C. Eventually the units were used on other Milwaukee Road passenger services, such as the Olympian Hiawatha between Chicago and Seattle/Tacoma and the Morning Hiawatha and Afternoon Hiawatha between Chicago and the Twin Cities. In 1971 the unit began service for Amtrak, officially leaving the Milwaukee Road roster in June 1974. Amtrak had the unit rebuilt at the Milwaukee Shops and was renumbered 434. It remained on Amtrak's roster until 1982.

It was then sold to the Alaska Railroad where it was renumbered 2402. It ran in Alaska until 1986 when it was purchased by Wisconsin's Northern Rail Car Leasing and numbered 10C. Northern Railcar founded Scenic Rail Dining, which between 1987 and 1990 operated a high-end dinner train out of North Milwaukee on a portion of the former Milwaukee Road to Horicon, WI, owned by the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad. In 1988, Northern Rail Car, owned by William Gardner, purchased Wisconsin & Southern. When the dinner train was discontinued in 1990, Wisconsin & Southern retained the unit for its business train and eventually numbered it 101.

After Watco acquired Wisconsin & Southern in 2011, No. 101 was retained but saw minimal use. The Friends, aware of its Milwaukee Road heritage, worked to acquire the locomotive. Longtime Friends of the 261 members Robert Schroeder and Mary Walters provided key support for the acquisition.

The weekend trips will likely be the last with No. 101 wearing Wisconsin & Southern colors. The Friends plan to repaint the E-unit and renumber it back to 32A this summer. However, it will wear a variation of Milwaukee Road's orange and maroon passenger train colors, since the Friends' car fleet is all painted in that scheme, which was used by the Milwaukee until it began operating the UP streamliners and adopted UP yellow for its passenger trains. (Trains News Wire)

ALASKA RAILROAD'S EXPANSION PLANS. The Alaska Railroad Corp. Board of Directors has approved an agreement with a firm seeking to link Alaska and Canada by rail. The Board voted unanimously on June 13th to approve the deal, which does not require the State-owned railroad corporation to fund the project. Construction is estimated to cost \$13 billion U.S. or \$17 billion Canadian, according to a presentation given to the Alaska Legislature earlier this year, and is years away. The current arrangement deals with initial permitting, land acquisition, and preliminary planning. Under the agreement, the Alaska-to-Alberta Railroad Development Corp. - known as A2A Rail - receives an "exclusive right" to operate a cross-border railroad and the ability to use Alaska Railroad's existing network as it seeks to build a rail line between Alaska and Fort McMurray, Alberta. The agreement calls for the Alaska Railroad and A2A Rail to obtain a right-of-way across State land between the Canadian border and the end of the railroad's existing track. The two groups will draft a cost-sharing agreement.

"A rail connection between Alaska and Canada and the rest of the United States is a project that has been talked and dreamed about for close to a century," said Alaska Railroad President and CEO Bill O'Leary in a prepared statement. "Completing that connection has amazing potential for Alaska and this

agreement between the Alaska Railroad and A2A Rail is an important first step to get the project underway." Sean McCoshen, co-founder of A2A Rail, said by phone that the agreement will unlock right-of-way negotiations, which in turn will encourage President Donald Trump to approve a presidential permit needed for the railroad. Governor Mike Dunleavy has already asked the president to issue a permit, and so has the Alaska Legislature. With a permit in hand, the project becomes much more attractive to potential shippers, and with shipping agreements in hand, A2A Rail would have an easier time finding financing.

The project is being driven in part by demand for an oil-shipping route out of the Canadian Province of Alberta, where bitumen and oil sands are mined. Those materials are then processed and converted into useable oil. Environmental protests and opposition from local and Native groups has prevented the construction of pipelines out of the Province, leaving producers with few options for export. With pipelines unavailable, some producers have taken to exporting oil by train, using thousands of tanker cars to reach refineries or ports.

Larry Persily, a journalist who has also worked on oil and gas issues for the State, Federal government, and municipalities, is skeptical that an Alberta-to-Alaska rail link will solve this problem or even be built. In a recent opinion column, he wrote that the cost of transportation over such a link "could eat up at least one-third of the value of the oil," making the route uneconomical. He referred to a 2015 study that indicated a railroad shipping 1 million barrels of oil per day – double the volume currently shipped through the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System – would have to charge between \$15.44 and \$21.41 Canadian per barrel. By phone on June 13, he said, "I think it's economically nutsy, but we have a history of that here in Alaska." In his view, pipelines can and will be built in the years required for permitting and constructing a railroad. As an example, he pointed to a recent decision by the Canadian federal government to continue the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline between Alberta and the Pacific Ocean via British Columbia.

"Coming from Alberta, exporting oil is part of this, but it's not the only part of this," McCoshen said. As he explained, a rail link could allow Alaska ports to compete with overloaded Lower 48 container-ship terminals. Shipping times are shorter, and the great-circle route between Asian ports and California already passes near Alaska. When it comes to oil, "there's a 5 million barrel-per-day supply problem in Alberta," he said, and he expects the prospective rail link to be able to carry 1 million to 1.2 million barrels per day. McCoshen said A2A employs "40-45 full-time people going on the development side," and "through contracting, there's hundreds more," including former Alaska Lt. Governor Mead Treadwell. "It's a massive project. It's a massive undertaking," he said. (Anchorage Daily News www.adn.com)

NS PREPARES TO ROLL OUT TOP21 PRECISION SCHEDULED RAILROADING OPERATING PLAN.

Norfolk Southern is preparing to roll out TOP21, the railroad's new precision scheduled railroading operating plan, to enhance customer service, increase operating efficiencies, support growth, and drive long-term shareholder value. TOP21 is a key initiative of Norfolk Southern's (NS') new three-year strategic plan to Reimagine Possible in all aspects of business operations. In April, the railroad announced that the first phase of TOP21 will focus on the company's general merchandise market. NS already has made initial changes to its train plan for TOP21, and the railroad will make the rest of the changes starting in early July, coinciding with the July Fourth holiday.

To demonstrate commitment to a smooth transition to TOP21, NS has been working closely with customers, including inviting them to town hall meetings attended by train and engine crews as well as employees involved in operations, marketing, and customer service. "As we Reimagine Possible, a hallmark of our

brand of precision scheduled railroading has been and will continue to be intense customer communication and collaboration," said CEO James A. Squires. "As we have promised, we will work closely with customers before and after we implement TOP21. Our goal is to achieve mutually beneficial results that include reliable and consistent service as well as growth opportunities. We want to grow our business and our customers' business, all while operating more efficiently and safely."

"TOP21 supports the five principles that are at the heart of our reimagined railroad: serve our customers, manage our assets, control our costs, work safely, and develop our people - what we call the NS Way," said Mike Wheeler, Chief Operating Officer. "With TOP21, the company's goal is to serve our customers better while operating our network more efficiently and driving down operating costs."

NS began developing the TOP21 plan last year using computer modeling and simulation tools to analyze data and train flows to achieve optimum network fluidity and velocity. Under TOP21, the railroad will focus on reducing circuitry of freight car movements to and from customers and balancing its network flows. This will allow the railroad to run fewer trains, use its operating assets more efficiently, and create capacity for growth.

"TOP21 will improve our network fluidity and velocity, reduce our circuitry and train miles, make our railroad more resilient, and give us greater capacity for growth," said Alan Shaw, Chief Marketing Officer. "We are engaged with our customers to talk about these changes and how we all can benefit from the opportunities that lie ahead as we fully implement the plan." (NS Media News)

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUES D&SNG RAILROAD FOR STARTING 416 FIRE. The U.S. Forest Service officially announced on July 2nd that the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad is the cause of the 416 Fire. The U.S. Attorney's Office announced on July 2nd a lawsuit on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service in the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado against the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Co. and its owner and operator, American Heritage Railways Inc., that seeks to recover damages suffered as a result of the 416 Fire.

"The United States alleges that the fire was ignited by burning particles emitted from an exhaust stack on a coal-burning steam engine owned and operated by the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad," a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office said. Because the D&SNG started the fire, the Department of Justice says the railroad "should be held liable under Federal and Colorado law for all the damages incurred by the United States as a result of the fire, including the costs of fire suppression and the costs to rehabilitate the public lands damaged by the fire." "Protecting our public lands is one of the most important things we do in the U.S. Attorney's Office," said U.S. Attorney Jason Dunn in a prepared statement. "This fire caused significant damage, cost taxpayers millions of dollars and put lives at risk. We owe it to taxpayers to bring this action on their behalf."

D&SNG owner Al Harper did not return a call seeking comment on the afternoon of July 2nd. Denver attorney Richard Waltz, representing the railroad, declined comment.

Dunn, speaking to The Durango Herald, said the D&SNG has denied it caused the 416 Fire. The U.S. Attorney's Office attempted to negotiate with the railroad, Dunn said. He wouldn't comment further on how the negotiations went.

Though the cost of fighting the 416 Fire has been estimated around \$40 million, the news release said the Federal government is seeking \$25 million from the D&SNG. Dunn said additional costs may be determined going forward. "If you operate a railroad that emits embers, then you have to be accountable if that conduct starts a fire, regardless of whether it was intentional, negligent or

not," Dunn said.

According to the seven-page lawsuit, the D&SNG's locomotives had ignited "multiple fires" along the approximately 45-mile track from Durango to Silverton before the start of the 416 Fire. As a preventive measure, the D&SNG had placed a metal screen over the smokestack to capture burning exhaust particles, but it didn't catch all the emitting material, the lawsuit alleges. Fire investigators, the lawsuit says, found a "collection of numerous, extinguished embers, cinders and ash particles on the ground adjacent to the railroad track, including at the specific point of fire origin."

Though the official announcement came nearly 13 months after the start of the fire, many residents expressed few doubts about the train's involvement. About 9:45 a.m. June 1, 2018, residents in the Meadowridge subdivision, about 10 miles north of Durango, saw a "wisp of smoke" near a bend in the tracks as the D&SNG passed by, igniting intense speculation that the train was the cause of the 416 Fire. The small spark climbed up a hillside as some Meadowridge residents, who had grown used to seeing the D&SNG start fires and had equipped themselves with their own water truck, attempted to put out the growing blaze. Extreme drought conditions, however, set the stage for what went on to become Colorado's sixth-largest wildfire. By the time the 416 Fire was contained nearly two months later, an estimated 54,000 acres of mostly San Juan National Forest lands within the Hermosa Creek watershed had been consumed. Despite coming dangerously close to homes north of Durango, not a single structure was lost in the blaze, nor was anyone seriously injured. But the fire took its toll on the community, forcing thousands of evacuations, causing economic losses in Southwest Colorado and leaving behind a threat of potentially destructive flooding to homes and property below the burn scar. These fears of flooding materialized in July and September when heavy rains hit the burn area, causing destructive flooding to homes north of Durango. As a result, about \$7 million will be spent to protect about 120 homes and buildings in the area.

As the fire burned in the San Juan National Forest, Harper's fleet of six coal-fired steam engines sat idle in a rail yard, unable to infuse thousands of dollars into the Durango and Silverton economies, for more than 40 days. The subsequent flooding also forced mandatory closures. For the past year, Harper, whose family has owned the railroad since 1998, acknowledged the D&SNG could be responsible for the blaze and said the train would take full responsibility. Harper, vowing the train would never be shut down as a result of fires again, then invested about \$7 million in the conversion of coal-burning engines to oil-burning and to acquire two custom-built diesel locomotives - engines that hold a lesser risk of starting wildfires. (The Durango Herald www.durangoherald.com)

DERAILMENT SENDS LOADED COAL CARS INTO THE GREAT DISMAL SWAMP WILDLIFE REFUGE.

A coal train's derailment in the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Virginia is raising concerns about the swamp's wildlife and the fragile peat soil that has accumulated there over the course of centuries. Chris Lowie, Manager of the Federal refuge, said 36 of about 100 cars went off the tracks early in the morning of June 25th. The Norfolk Southern train was carrying a fine, sand-like form of coal that spilled into water-filled ditches along the tracks and into the forested wetland.

"The cars were a pile of metal," Lowie said by phone on June 26th. "They were accordianed, literally. Most of them were sideways, busted-up and tipped over. Coal was everywhere."

NS said in a statement the same day that the coal spill "is confined to a relatively small area" adjacent to the tracks and that "there is no impact to any major waterway." The company said its personnel are on-site and coordinating the cleanup with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

The Federal Railroad Administration said in an email that it's aware of the derailment and "is actively monitoring the railroad's response, recovery, and restoration efforts." Amtrak said service was disrupted to and from Norfolk and would be restored on June 27th.

The swamp is about 30 miles southwest of Norfolk. The rail line cuts across the northern part of the refuge, with the derailment occurring about halfway through the swamp, Lowie said. There are no public roads for miles, which means cleanup crews are reaching the scene by taking old logging roads.

The Great Dismal Swamp was once an impenetrable morass where explorers vanished. Before he was president, George Washington kicked-off generations of logging there before the swamp became a National Wildlife Refuge in 1974. Since then, efforts have been underway to restore it. The derailment's impact remains unclear, Lowie said.

The coal isn't harmful on its own. But its heavy metals could leach out in the swamp's highly acidic water and threaten turtles, snakes, frogs, and small fish, Lowie said. They are part of a complex food chain that includes herons and egrets as well as bald eagles and bears. The swamp's endangered species include red-cockaded woodpeckers. "There's not grave concern, but there is concern," Lowie said of the wildlife.

Robert B. Finkelman, a geologist and research professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, said coal can leach into water. But how much depends on the type. Officials have not said what kind of coal spilled at the swamp. "Dumping coal into water, especially acidic water, can't do any good," he said. "The question is how bad." Finkelman added that coal is nowhere near as harmful as coal ash, the residue left over from burning coal to produce electricity.

The derailment has also sparked concerns about the swamp's unique and carbon-heavy peat soil. It consists of partially decomposed twigs, leaves, and roots of plants that have accumulated over centuries. Lowie said the peat could likely be damaged as NS digs out the sand-like coal. Workers have already pushed cars and coal deeper into the swamp as the cleanup gets underway, Lowie said. "Norfolk Southern is confident they can clean this up," Lowie said. "They've had coal spills before. The difference here is the peat soil. You can't just dig a hole in the ground and fill it back up with dirt and say it's restored."

The Great Dismal Swamp has drawn international attention from scientists in recent years because peat soil has become a threat to the climate when it's damaged or destroyed. When this soil dries and is exposed to oxygen, microscopic organisms break down the peat into carbon dioxide and release the greenhouse gas. The Refuge has been in the process of rewetting much of the swamp in an effort to protect and restore the soil. It's an effort that scientists say will help to fight global warming. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)



(Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)



Annual Baltimore & Potomac CHAPTERS PICNIC

Come and get it!!

When? Saturday, August 17, 2019

What Time? 5:00 – 8:00 PM

Where? Baltimore Streetcar Museum

Eats? Catered Pit Beef, Pit Turkey, Pit Ham

How Much? Minimum \$15 donation per adult; \$ 7 per child, and (if possible) a donation of salads, cakes, desserts, etc.



Photos by Charlie Plantholt

Pit Beef, Pit Turkey, Pit Ham, Burgers, Hot Dogs, condiments, sodas & other goodies!
Bring the Family –Bring your friends!
Streetcar rides during the Evening!
Operate a Streetcar!

CUT – HERE – RETURN TO ADDRESS BELOW BY **August 9, 2019**

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