

Oil shipments to resume in pipeline that broke under river (Update)

March 11 2015, byMatthew Brown

This Jan. 19, 2015 file photo crews work to contain an oil spill from Bridger Pipeline's broken pipeline near Glendive, Mont., in this aerial view showing both sides of the river. Bridger Pipeline LLC company prepared Wednesday, March 11, 2015 to resume oil shipments through a pipeline that broke and spewed 30,000 gallons of crude into Montana's Yellowstone River, as cleanup work on the spill upstream of Glendive was on hold and most of the oil remained unrecoverable. (AP Photo/The Billings Gazette, Larry Mayer,File)

A Wyoming company is preparing to resume oil shipments through a pipeline that broke and spewed 30,000 gallons of crude into Montana's Yellowstone River, even as most of the spilled oil remains unrecovered.

Cleanup is on hold near the small city of Glendive, where the water supply for 6,000 residents was temporarily contaminated.

Efforts to remove oil from the Yellowstone will resume after it's clear of ice and safe to work on, said a spokesman for Bridger Pipeline LLC, the company responsible for the spill. But prospects were considered slim for much more crude to be recovered so long after the spill.

The Casper, Wyoming company began restarting a 50-mile section of the pipeline that runs south of the spill site to Baker, Montana on Wednesday, spokesman Bill Salvin said.

Workers also have been setting up equipment to drill a new passage for the line deeper beneath the river, under an order from federal regulators.

The line carries oil from the Bakken region of Montana and North Dakota. The damaged section was installed in 1967, in an 8-foot-deep trench dug into the river bottom, according to documents submitted to regulators. It became exposed over the past several years—through flooding, scouring of the river bottom by ice or some other force—and broke open in January.

After Glendive's water was contaminated, when oil got into a supply intake in the river, filters were installed to screen out any petroleum products. No problems with the water have been reported since the initial days after the accident.

This Jan. 19, 2015 file photo a warning sign shows the location of a 12-inch oil pipeline owned by Bridger Pipeline Co. that spilled up to 50,000 gallons of crude along the Yellowstone River near Glendive, Mont. Bridger Pipeline LLC company prepared Wednesday, March 11, 2015 to resume oil shipments through a pipeline that broke and spewed 30,000 gallons of crude into Montana's Yellowstone River, as cleanup work on the spill upstream of Glendive was on hold and most of the oil remained unrecovered. (AP Photo/Matthew Brown,File)

It was the second significant oil pipeline spill into the Yellowstone in less than four years, prompting Montana officials including Gov. Steve Bullock and U.S. Sen. Jon Tester to call for more stringent federal oversight of the nation's aging pipeline network.

The Legislature is considering a measure requiring the state to release to the public information about pipeline depths around the state. The Department of Environmental Quality also would have to publish online details on the commodities being transported and the closest shut-off valves to a river.

The bill from Senate Majority Leader Matthew Rosendale, a Glendive Republican, cleared the Senate last month on votes of 50-0 and 48-2.

Ice on the Yellowstone has hampered cleanup efforts from day one, and only about 10 percent of the oil released into the river has been recovered. Two workers have been monitoring the river downstream of the spill for evidence of oil, Salvin said. It's been several weeks since significant cleanup work has occurred.

An application from Bridger Pipeline for a state license for the drilling work is pending with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, said agency spokesman John Grassy.

The company wants to install the replacement section at least 40 feet beneath the river bed, according to documents provided to The Associated Press.

A final decision on the license was expected soon.

A second license will be needed for Bridger to remove the damaged pipeline, Grassy said.

Rosendale said he was satisfied with the company's plans and the amount of coverage for the pipeline.

The cause of the spill remains under investigation by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, said agency spokesman Damon Hill.

Safety regulators in January had ordered the line to be replaced where it crosses beneath the Yellowstone as a condition for it to be restarted. Identical improvements were ordered for a second waterway crossed by Bridger's line—the Poplar River in northeast Montana.

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