

Opinion

Letter: Transport of Bakken crude places environment at risk

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The March 1 train derailment in Ripley comes on the heels of a Jan. 16 derailment near Schenectady. Thankfully, there was no loss of life, but the end result could have been far more serious if the derailed cars contained dangerous goods, such as explosive Bakken crude oil from North Dakota.

Besides explosions, the risks from rail transport of dangerous liquids also include pollution of our precious aquifers, groundwater and rivers. In December 1970, a freight train derailed near Le Roy, dumping thousands of gallons of a toxic chemical that rapidly reached the groundwater. Cleanup of that toxic mess continues and this 46-year-old pollution problem stems from the liquid contents of two derailed tanker cars.

In July 2013, a train carrying Bakken crude oil derailed, exploded and killed 47 people in Lac-Megantic, Quebec. One tanker's worth of oil reached a nearby river. In February, biologists reported a dramatic increase in fish tumors and a steep decline in the river's biomass.

The Jan. 16 derailment near Schenectady occurred directly over an aquifer that supplies drinking water for 150,000 people. Trains that carry Bakken crude oil in upstate typically consist of 100 tanker cars.

Sen. Charles Schumer and New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman propose rules forcing the oil industry to reduce the explosive gas content of Bakken crude oil prior to rail transport. This is an excellent suggestion, but the risk of severe damage to our vital supplies of drinking water remains unaddressed.

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