

NRHS

WISCONSIN CHAPTER

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March 2026

SPARKS AND CINDERS

Our purpose as members of Wisconsin Chapter—National Railway Historical Society is to gather, preserve and disseminate information, both historic and current, pertaining to railroading in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

Preserving Wisconsin Railroad History for 76 Years

Visit the Chapter Webpage www.nrhswis.org



IC&E #4204 at Davis Junction IL on July 1 2005. Photo by Tom Hoffmann

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Wisconsin Chapter Meeting Schedule

Upcoming chapter events

Friday March 6 2026 Tom Hoffmann—Look Back to 2005 20 Years Ago

Friday April 10 2026 (NOTE DATE CHANGE) To Be Announced

Monthly meetings are held in the lower level of the North Shore Congregational Church at 7330 N Santa Monica Dr. in Fox Point. The church is handicap accessible. For more up to date information on meetings and speakers, and also any weather cancellations, check the chapter's webpage at www.nrhwis.org.

Doors open by 7:00 pm, so arrive early to socialize. Meetings start at 7:30pm sharp. Please bring a friend! Our meetings are live-streamed on the Zoom platform. Connection details are shared with chapter members and other interested persons via email the day of the meeting, or before. To ensure you are made aware of this info, we must have a working email address on file - send yours to president@nrhwis.org.

If you have a program idea please contact Program Chair Dave Nelson at engine1385@aol.com

The Big Picture is your page!

We've changed the format of the Sparks & Cinders back page, giving us room to run a large photo. Member submissions are solicited. Please send one or two of your outstanding pictures to Keith Schmidt, editor@nrhwis.org.

Sparks & Cinders is published by and for the members of the Wisconsin Chapter, Inc., National Railway Historical Society monthly except for July and August. The Chapter meets at the North Shore Congregational Church, 7330 N Santa Monica Blvd, Fox Point, Wisconsin, on the first Friday of each month, except June, July and August, at 7:30 p.m. The Wisconsin Chapter is a not-for-profit corporation, affiliated with the National Railway Historical Society and the Wisconsin Historical Society, organized to preserve the history of railroading in Wisconsin and the surrounding area. Additional information is available on the chapter's website, www.nrhwis.org.

Membership in the Chapter is open to anyone having an interest in any aspect of railroading who is also a member of the NRHS. Paying \$20 annually to the Chapter will entitle you receive Sparks & Cinders. Paying the National dues of \$50 to the NRHS will entitle you to membership and subscriptions to the NRHS Bulletin and NRHS News. Full NRHS membership is required to participate in chapter business discussions and to vote in annual chapter elections. All address changes should be sent to Mike Yuhas membership@nrhwis.org (or via USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207).

Wisconsin Chapter officers are: Keith Schmidt President Ward Wells Vice President, Tom Marcussen, Secretary; Tara Grudzielanek, Treasurer. Directors: Dan Grudzielanek, Mike Yuhas, Ralph McClure and Neal Wegner. One Vacancy

Contributions to Sparks & Cinders should be sent to Editor Keith Schmidt at editor@nrhwis.org (or USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207) by the 15th of the month to be considered for the following month's publication.

All original material published in Sparks & Cinders may be reprinted in other railfan publications provided credit is given to "Sparks & Cinders, Wisconsin Chapter, NRHS." If an author is indicated for the item or article, credit must also be given to the author. The views, opinions, and comments published in Sparks & Cinders are those of the authors and do not reflect the policies of the Wisconsin Chapter or the National Railway Historical Society. Copyright ©2025, Wisconsin Chapter, Inc., NRHS.

Annual Meeting Summary March 6 2026

Called to order 7:32pm

The annual business meeting was called to order at 7:32pm by President Keith Schmidt. There were 22 in person attendees and 32 members in Zoom.

A quorum of chapter and national members in good standing

The minutes of the February 2025 annual meeting presented on the chapter website were approved as presented.

Keith introduced the current chapter officers and board members. All of them were in attendance either in person or on Zoom

Tara Grudzielanek presented the treasurer's report (summary as of 12-31-2025)

Landmark Checking	\$7947.02
Landmark Savings	\$4141.78
18-Month CD 3.69%	\$13,752.78
Heartland Fund	\$128,270.47
Receipts	\$22,420.74
Expenses	\$26,927.77

Mike Yuhas presented a membership report. Current chapter membership is 111. There are 28 or 29 members from 2025 that have not renewed. There are 64 members with paid up national membership dues. National dues are paid directly to national.

Mike Yuhas said the grant committee has not met yet.

Annual Election

All of the incumbent chapter officers were willing to run again. Keith opened up the floor to nominations for any of the officer positions. No nominations were presented. Motion was made and seconded to close nominations and reelect the current board. Motion passed

All of the incumbent board members were willing to run again. Brian Hechel was nominated by the board to fill the vacancy on the board. Keith opened the floor to any other nominations. No nominations were presented. Motion was made and seconded to close nominations and elect the slate of board members as presented. Motion passed.

Old Business

None

New Business

A brief review of 75th anniversary events was given. Also a Thank You to everyone that helped with those event.

Discussions will be held with the board regarding our investments and how to properly invest the money to enable grants to be presented and maintain operating expenses.

There was discussion of possible Chapter events to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States. A chapter excursion with East Troy trolley museum and also another charter of Soo #1003 were mentioned.

The floor was opened to any questions or comments for the good of the chapter. No questions were asked.

Motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion was approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59pm

Keith Schmidt did a presentation featuring photos taken with a drone. The photos featured a "Birds Eye" view of railroading. Railyards, coaling towers, bridges and diamonds and interlockings were featured.

The meeting ended at 9:04pm.

Meeting Date Change !!

Due to the observance of Good Friday by the North Shore Congregational Church on Friday April 3rd the April chapter meeting will be held on Friday April 10th. Please make any scheduling adjustments.

From the President

THANK YOU !! To everyone that was in attendance on February 6 for the Chapter's annual meeting. Thank You for being a member of the chapter and the national NRHS if you are. I noticed that the Tony White the president of the national NRHS was in attendance on Zoom. Great to see Tony. Congratulations to the officers and board members on their reelection. Brian Hechel was elected to our board of directors to fill a vacancy. Brian brings his railroading knowledge and other talents to the board.

2026 is the 250th Anniversary of this great country. Several railroads have already unveiled anniversary units. I believe the Canadian National has two units in the shops in Chicago that have been painted for the 250th anniversary. Just have to wait for the unveiling. Union Pacific has announced it will be unveiling a 250th anniversary unit when the Big Boy #4014 heads west on the first part of the its nationwide tour to honor the USA.

I've been talking to the East Troy trolley museum about a possible charter to take place in early July. Waiting to work on some more details. We will share more details when they become available. Stay Warm and Get Busy Livin'

KJ

Wisconsin Chapter NRHS at Mad City Train Show February 21-22, 2026

Several members of the Wisconsin Chapter NRHS helped staff the chapter table at the Mad City Train Show in Madison WI. The show was well attended. I haven't heard any attendance figures but they should be good numbers. There were some issues with traffic on Saturday. There was a dog show, and sports card show along with the train show in the Alliant Energy complex. Sunday traffic moved much better. THANK YOU !! to those that helped. Ward Wells organized the booth and had help from Brian Hechel, Dave Nelson, Neal and Cathy Wegner. If I forgot anyone I apologize. Ward said a good number of people stopped by the booth to visit. Below is photo of the booth. No one wanted their picture taken so I had to zoom out to get Ward in the photo. Thanks again.



Join us on March 6 for Tom Hoffmann's 20-Year Look-Back to 2005

Tom Hoffmann's "Look-back" presentations have been a popular annual feature of the Chapter's schedule for many years. At our March meeting, he will be looking back at 2005 which saw him railfanning in Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Oklahoma, Georgia, and Louisiana (including some Hurricane Katrina damage). You'll appreciate the surprising amount of variety and geography Tom can cram into a single successful day of railfan slide photography. We invite you to join Tom trackside on the CP, UP, WSOR, NS, CSX, South Shore, Georgia Northern, IC&E, CN, Arkansas-Oklahoma RR, BNSF, KCS, EJ&E, Belt RR of Chicago, and Amtrak, with some industrial locomotives, transit/light rail, and a few surprises thrown into the mix.

The meeting takes place at the North Shore Congregational Church, 7330 North Santa Monica Boulevard, Fox Point, Wisconsin. Arrive early to socialize with your fellow members. Doors open at 7pm on Friday, November 7 2025. Announcements and the presentation at 7:30 pm CST. The presentation will be available remotely on Zoom. For those participating remotely: This event requires advance registration. To register please contact membership@nrhswis.org to receive the meeting link.



Chicago South Shore Train #509 Beverly Shores IN



Georgia Northern #2000 northbound at Holly Springs GA

2026 Wisconsin Chapter Officers and Board Members

On Friday February 6 2026 the annual election of chapter officers and board members was held as part of the annual meeting. Congratulations to the 2026 chapter officers and board members.

President Keith Schmidt
Vice President Ward Wells
Treasurer Tara Grudzielanek
Secretary Tom Marcussen

Board of Directors
Dan Grudzielanek
Mike Yugas
Neal Wegner
Ralph McClure
Brian Hechel

Congratulations and Thank You for Brian Hechel on his election to the board. This fills vacancy on the board from 2025. Brian brings his knowledge of railroading and other skills to the organization. Brian is hoping to start editing and posting some of the chapter meetings from the past few years onto the chapter YouTube webpage.

More Tom Hoffmann Look Back Photos



Soo #4428 at Burnham Yard Milwaukee WI



NS #8436 in Atlanta GA

How to get Coal into the Locomotive

With an article below on how coal gets to the firebox in a steam locomotive how does the coal get into the tender of the steam locomotive. In the past coal was loaded into the tender using coaling towers. These towers were located all over the railroads. As time went on the coaling towers disappeared and the hydraulic coaling tower appeared. Below is the coaling tower in Dekalb IL on the UP mainline. Also the backhoe used to add coal to the tender of the Soo #1003.



Do You Know

by Dave Nelson

An enduring image of steam-era railroading is that of the locomotive fireman furiously shoveling coal into the firebox to keep steam up, perhaps tons of coal before a new crew would take over. And this image is no myth; as trains became heavier, longer, and faster, locomotive design kept pace as steam pressure increased and fireboxes became larger, both needing ever more coal to feed the fire. If steam pressure started to drop, from time to time even the engineer (who almost always had been a fireman himself before being promoted) would have to step in and help shovel coal, which of course pulled him away from his important duties of driving the train.

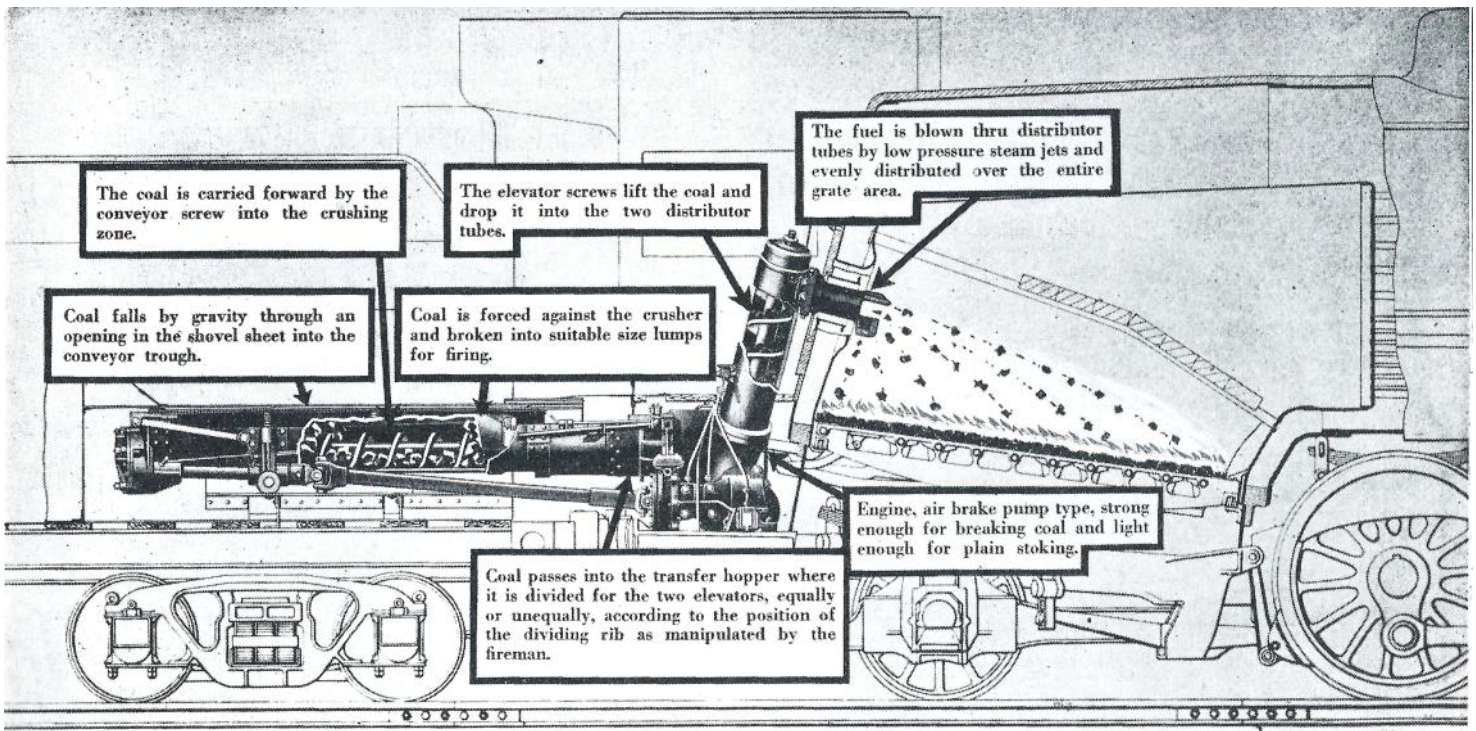
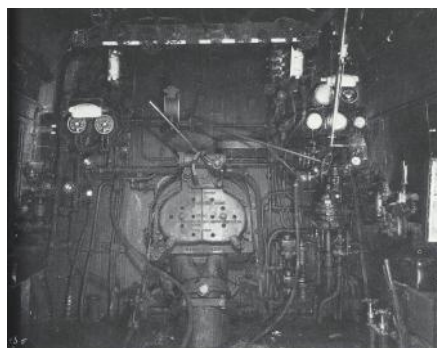


Fig. 750—Illustrative Description of Operative Parts of the Duplex Stoker

By the beginning of the 20th century, it was not unheard of for the fastest passenger trains and the longest freight trains to need two firemen in the cab; the Virginian Railway's 2-6-6-0 of 1909 always needed two firemen on every run. American locomotive builders had created locomotives so large that for all their theoretical power, they struggled to keep up team up no matter how much coal could be hand-shoveled into the firebox. Necessity being the mother of invention, the automatic coal stoker was devised and quickly took hold. An open trough in the bottom of the tender's coal pile contained a screw-like auger, powered by a small steam engine, to convey coal in a large tube beneath the cab and then up into the firebox itself. The stoker was strong enough to break up large chunks of coal, and if got jammed, the fireman could reverse the auger and free up the jam. Simplex stokers conveyed a single stream of coal into the center of the firebox; for really large locomotives a duplex stoker would convey two streams of coal to both sides of the firebox.



CAB INTERIOR of the Louisville & Nashville Berkshire type locomotive. Stoker feed conveyor underneath the butterfly type fire door can be seen protruding from the floor. Grapevine type throttle was used on these engines. (Collection of Frederick Westing)

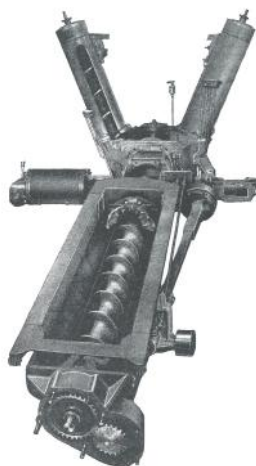
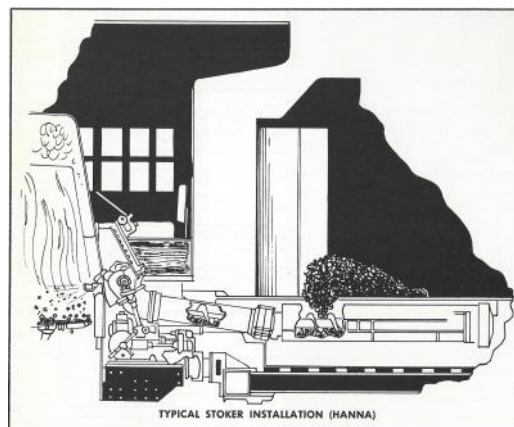


Fig. 755—General Rear View of Type D-1 Duplex Stoker with Covers Removed, Showing Interior Mechanism.



TYPICAL STOKER INSTALLATION (HANNA)

The fireman still had the task of maintaining an even spread of coal in the firebox, and hand-firing the locomotive was still the better choice when a train was first starting to move. Some stoker designs used a sort of conveyer belt rather than an auger, but the essential concept was retained. The photos show examples of stoker design, illustrations of how they worked, and what the back-head (the portion of the boiler that extends back into the cab) would look like in a stoker-equipped locomotive. The photo of the open trough on the floor of a tender is the CB&Q 4-6-4 on display in La Crosse, WI. I photographed Soo Line 1003 in its storage track within the Hartford (WI) auto museum building. Tender and locomotive had been separated for maintenance, exposing the stoker auger.



Left CB&Q in La Crosse WI

Above and right Soo #1003 in Hartford



From the Archives

March 1951—75 Years Ago

The R. H. Flath Camera Shop has offered to display photographs by Chapter members in their store. We will have a contest to determine which photos will be displayed.

March 1956—70 Years Ago

"Any member who didn't make the streetcar party on February 24 really missed something. This time the Milwaukee Chapter really did something different. Thirty people attended including a four-piece band from West Division High School. Besides the band, the Transport Co. supervisor, and the motorman, 13 members and 8 non-members attended. Streetcar No. 958, decorated with streamers, started from 27th and National and proceeded to 27th and Wells. From there we went to West Allis and doubled back to Wauwatosa, then to the Broadway Loop and out to Howell Ave. From there, back to 27th and National via National. The party, which lasted from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m., included soft drinks, potato chips, and popcorn. A Milwaukee Journal photographer and reporter joined us at 35th and Wells and a picture appeared in the Journal on February 25. A feature of the trip included a stop on the Wells St. trestle where the band and all aboard the car sang "I've Been Workin' On The Railroad" to the Milwaukee Road operator in the Grand Ave. tower."

March 1961 - 65 Years Ago

(From the Madison Capital Times) Lone Rock, January 25, 1961. — The Milwaukee Road-branch freight line between Lone Rock and Richland Center was to make its last run to-day. The shutting down of the line will end more than 100 years of passenger and freight service between the two communities. The branch has been operated as a freight only line for the past several years. Early passenger and freight trains ran on wooden rails and were pulled with wood-burning engines. Officials said there had been no Public Service Commission hearing on the shutdown. (Chuck Porter notes: Somehow there was a reversal of the decision to discontinue service. I have slides of the Richland Center depot I shot in April, 1970, which show boxcars on tracks. Also, I remember chatting with the agent that day. According to a publication of the California-Nevada Railroad Historical Society, the Milwaukee Road has asked the Brotherhoods for permission to operate Flexi-Vans on the Olympian Hiawatha. If the Brotherhoods agree, it may be possible for service to continue)

March 1966 - 60 Years Ago

Notes from the February Meeting: "The Social Committee reported that this year's banquet will be held on Saturday, April 23, at Nino's on Plankinton Ave. north of Wisconsin Ave. — steak at \$3.50 — Paul Larson will speak relative to Circus Train operation. The program preceding (the business meeting) saw very exemplary attention on the part of the audience, which, it is hoped, will continue at forthcoming programs.

March 1971—55 Years Ago

According to the CERA, the 1968 Bulletin No. 112 on the TMER&L should be completed soon....The C&NW received permission January 19 to close more than 30 freight stations in Wisconsin, including West Allis, Chippewa Falls, De Pere, Plymouth, Oostburg, Fort Atkinson, and Milton Jct....The Milwaukee Road Shops were recently closed for a month with 800 employees being laid off....Railfans are bracing for the beginning of Railpax (Amtrak) operation on May 1. Editor Bob Adams noted that in the 1920s there were 20,000 passenger trains operating in the US, in 1969 about 500, and currently (1971) there are 366....UP No. 8444 will operate from Denver to Laramie on March 28.

March 1976—50 Years Ago

It was reported that Milwaukee Road F-M H16-66 No. 524 was used on the Waukesha Patrol on February 9th and 19th, the first time in several years one of these units has been used on the run. They were common in the 1960s on the Patrol....The American Freedom Train will be traveling in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana between February 26 and May 6. T&P 2-10-4 No. 610 is scheduled to power the AFT from Austin to Houston to Fort Worth to Dallas and return to Fort Worth. SP Daylight No. 4449 will power the train on the remainder of the schedule.

March 1981 - 45 Years Ago

It was reported that UP Challenger No. 3985 moved under its own steam at Cheyenne on January 17 after extensive renovation. Milwaukee Road Trustee Richard B. Ogilvie announced the Milwaukee Land Company closed the sale of 92,972 acres of land and 4,510 acres of mineral rights in Idaho to the Potlatch Corp. for \$134 million

March 1986 - 40 Years Ago

It is reported that the Soo Line is forming a subsidiary called the "Lake States Transportation Co." which will consist of all Soo Milwaukee lines in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula except the Chicago-Milwaukee-La Crosse main line....It is reported that the Mid Continent Museum at North Freedom had a very successful Snow Train™ although it was hampered somewhat by heavy ice on the rails. At one time or another the snow plow, No. 1385, and Alco diesel No. 988 all derailed.... The Soo Line is planning to install radio repeaters from Sabula to Muscatine and will begin using track warrants for operations. This move is welcomed by railfans as radio activity will increase.

March 1991 —35 Years Ago

Richard Schriener of WisARP reported that Milwaukee is pursuing a light rail study; that the Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha Service did extremely well in 1990; that passenger service to Green Bay is not considered likely in the near future but Chicago-Madison service is a possibility.

March 2001— 25 Years Ago

On January 27, Wisconsin Central ended 114 years of street running on Division St. in Oshkosh....The -20° temperature on February 3 resulted in four broken rails on the WC between Fond du Lac and Schiller Park....The State of Illinois has announced plans to cut service and raise fares on the Milwaukee-Chicago Hiawatha Service. Gov. Tommy Thompson indicated he would resist efforts to implement the plan.

March 2006 — 20 Years Ago

Noted rail photographer O. Winston Link passed away on January 30. He was known for his dramatic night photos of steam railroading....It was announced on January 30 that CN will purchase Wisconsin Central for \$1.2 billion....Ex-Soo Line No. 1003 and two Algoma Central F-units will power the Chocolatefest trains between Burlington and DuPlainville on May 19 and 20.

March 2011 — 15 Years Ago

Amtrak's Hiawatha Service ridership was a record 544,330 in 2005, up 16 per cent from 470,149 in 2004....The American public would like to see more freight and passenger traffic going by rail, according to a nation-wide Harris Poll released the week of February 6. The poll showed that 63 per cent of those surveyed believe that a greater portion of freight should move by rail, a higher total than was reported for any other mode.

March 2016 — 10 Years Ago

Wisconsin & Southern Railroad plans to reopen its locomotive and car paint shop in Horicon by mid-March. The shop is well known for its contract paint work; its works include Union Pacific's "Heritage" SD70ACes. The shop closed as the recession dried up contract business. Now there is pent up demand for paint services, and the railroad's car department personnel are preparing for the opening.

March 2021 — 5 Years Ago

Union Pacific has virtually frozen its entire intermodal network in the face of harsh winter weather. UP notified customers Monday night that, effective at 8 a.m. local time today, it would not accept loads at its intermodal terminals. The railroad expects the closures to last for 72 hours. Exceptions include international shipments to and from on-dock facilities at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif.; and westbound domestic interline shipments from Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, CSX Transportation, and Norfolk Southern. BNSF Railway said it, too, was struggling. But BNSF, while warning of "extended delays" in a service advisory on Monday, did not say it would be barring inbound loads at its terminals. BNSF last week warned of weather-related processing delays at its Chicago-area terminals that were hit by a snowstorm,

The Big Picture



CN #8952 leads a southbound freight at Duplainville on Saturday February 14th as a northbound CN train waits in the siding Photo by Keith Schmidt