

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for August 23, 2015. Shifting more rock is again the theme for the week – and will be for the next several. So, before we're victims of a rock slide, let's get this update started.

Tuesday's activities commenced early with the Weed Team spending the day working on its equipment in the Shops. Mike Taylor, Dave Megeath, and Heather Kearns tuned-up machines and organized their cabinets. The Weedies are getting ready for the opening of tree-trimming season in September when Dave, once again, will be flying over the SSRR Mainline in the man-lift's bucket attacking wayward tree branches that dare to impede the right-of-way.

Meanwhile, later that evening, our Designated Supervisor of Barbecue Engineers (DSBE), Pat Scholzen, sparked-up our "kegger" barbecue – custom made by Cliff Hayes. Mike T. brought a bag-full of bratwurst as a treat for MOW Team. Fortunately, the DSBE's spatulas are always ready. Alan, Heather, Cliff, Frank Squire, Dave, Frank Werry, Scott Morrison, Gene Peck, and special guest Judy Hardy joined in the barbecue fun. In addition, the DSBE cooked up some chicken marinated with his secret recipe of special spices. It was a good old-fashion picnic dinner around the table in the MOW Lounge of the Erecting Shop. Many thanks to all who contributed to make the evening special.

But, barbecue wasn't all that was going on. Scott took on the task of adjusting the pressures on the tamper's hydraulic pumps and new valves. Blocks were placed under the wheels. Dave worked on one side and Scott on the other and directed Frank W. to rev-up the engine in order to place a load on the drive-motor. Scott used gauges to monitor the pressures and adjust the pumps as needed. This has resulted in significantly increased "umph" for the tamper. Cliff welded-up a new extra-long draw-bar to be used with the tie-crane. The crane pulls flat-cars onto which ties are placed. They need to be about 10 feet from the machine in order to work within the reach of the boom. So, it was a good evening of camaraderie, yummy barbecue, and excellent productivity which helps keep the MOW Team's morale high.

The plan for Saturday required use of the tamper. So, on Thursday, Frank W. got it put back together and ready for service by reinstalling the engine cowlings, floor-boards back in the cab, and topping-off the diesel tank. Heather continued working on Weed Team equipment. Alan and Cliff took on one of those nasty but necessary jobs – taking out the trash. It had piled up to the point of overflow so, many thanks to Cliff and Alan. Also, Cliff deserves a round-of-applause and three "hurrahs!" as he arranged the donation of a working refrigerator for the lounge area of the Erecting Shop. Now, we will have cold water (and plenty of storage for future barbecues) thanks to Cliff!

On Saturday, Chris Carlson made sure to secure a big pink box of sugary-goodness on site so that Alan, Scott, Clem Meier, Ed Moriarty, Frank W., Michael Florentine, Heather, Harry Voss, John Rexroth, and Pam Tatro could "doughnut-up" prior to the day's activities. The plan: continue addressing the cross-level issue south of Mile Post 2.5. Last week, we started the project of raising the west-rail where it is lower than the east. It is hoped that leveling the track will reduce the amount of "hunting" or side-to-side rocking motion experienced by the locomotives and coaches through this section of track. So, the Team loaded the tool-caddy and 16 track-jacks into the back of our trusty Chevy Truck which Harry drove to the work-site. Mike F. climbed into the front-end loader and Chris took out the Kalamazoo tug pulling our ballast hopper cars down to Setzer. Conductor Heather arranged passage over the UP Main by tamper, piloted by Frank W. This became a bit of a task as a UP Signal Department crew was working in the area. Not only did she have to deal with a "Form B," but, also, the UP Signal crew had "track-and-time" which had to be suspended in order for the tamper to pass. Despite these difficulties, Conductor Heather handled it with ease and soon the tamper was on its way south. In the vicinity of MP 2.5, track-levels were deployed and low-spots marked. Clem, Heather, John, and Ed began digging beneath the base of the rail to place track-jacks. Alan monitored the level as Clem, Ed, and Heather lifted the rail with the jacks. Frank, then, brought in the tamper which would force rock under the ties to secure the new level. As the tamper approached the adjacent tie, the jack would be removed.

Meanwhile, down at Setzer, Chris, Scott, and Mike F. filled the ballast hoppers with rock. The Kalamazoo has become one of our most important machines. It was Chris's brilliant idea to convert the Kalamazoo from a regulator into a tug. This machine pulled 10 to 12 tons of rock up the Setzer grade in second gear with ease. As one section of leveling was completed up on the Mainline, the Kalamazoo would bring in more rock which was laid on both sides of the west rail and the leveling process would continue. The one challenge we encountered was the extremely hard-pan soil beneath the track. Over several stretches track, the tamper's tines would descend into the ground striking something that seemed as hard as concrete. They would not drop far enough to get the rock under the ties in some locations. The ultimate solution is to do a four-to-six inch track raise in the area. But, that would require a quarry's worth of rock. So, in the meantime, leveling should suffice. By day's end, the Team managed to re-level about 200 feet of the line. This project will continue over the next couple of weeks. It's a bit of a slow project but, we'll get it done and perhaps mitigate the westward lean of the train as we did through Miller Park.

This coming week, there will be lots of opportunities for MOW fun. Tuesday, the Weed Team will be working on equipment in the Shops again starting at 9 o'clock a.m. The Tuesday/Thursday afternoon/evening crews get hopping at or before 5 o'clock. Saturday will be on the level starting at 8 o'clock a.m. Come on out and join the fun! As always, thanks to the tremendously dedicated volunteers who give their time and skills to maintaining the track to standards that keep us all safe. Always remember, no track, no trains.

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Cliff creates a new long draw-bar for the tie-crane



Heather samples the bratwurst while DSBE Pat puts a 10 pound set on the barbecue...



Dave monitors the multifunctional hydraulic valve on the tamper as it's tested under load



Scott signals "rev 'er up!" to Frank W. at the controls of the tamper



Mike F. takes pride in his machines by wiping the windows Windex clean



At MP 3.6, as the track-jacks are set, track-levels are placed on the track to guide the raise of the west rail



Clem jacks the track-jack as Alan monitors the level



Alan and Ed struggle to remove a track-jack as the tamper approaches



Bring in the rock!



Mike F. and Alan drop rock along the west rail



Heather jacks a track-jack as Alan checks the level



John, Heather, and Alan: have track tools, will travel...



Mike F. pulls a track-jack as the tamper approaches



Harry gives Frank in the tamper a "stop" signal as Mike F. removes a jack





In the afternoon, Conductor Heather arranges a quick "green" signal indication for Frank in the tamper on the return trip to the Shops



Home again, home again, jiggety jig. The tamper on the transfer table ready to be put to bed in Bay 5 of the Erecting Shop