

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for September 27, 2015. The saga of the storage track project over in the Rail Yards continues as we push to get it done. So, without being pushy, let's get this update started.

The Mighty Weed Team was active on Tuesday trimming and chopping away at overgrowth daring to invade the SSRR right-of-way. Mike Taylor, Dave Megeath, Heather Kearns, and Frank Werry first headed to the Setzer Lead where they mitigated a Part 213.37 "vegetation defect" that was hindering the visual acuity of train crews. Heather piloted the man-lift while Dave flew above in the bucket slicing away at the offending limbs. Mike T. and Frank fed the debris into the chipper. With the defect corrected, the Weedies set off for Mile Post 2.0 to deal with some overhead clearance issues that might interfere with the journey south of the North Pole. The Weed Team does amazing and vital work for our railroad. It's tough work and the Weedies are deserving of recognition and all our gratitude.

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, the crew got right to work on the track build project. You will recall that the company undertaking the environmental clean-up of the Rail Yards wants to dig-up the area where several boxcars and old locomotives are stored. So, the MOW Team is under a little time pressure to build more than 300 feet of track to the west of the Firing Line onto which these cars can be moved. Pat Scholzen, Gene Peck, Alan Hardy, Mike Harris, Frank, and Heather all headed out to the job-site to continue gauging the track. Using the front-end loader, they repositioned a couple of the panel-track section to make things fit. Then, they began drilling bolt-holes in the rails to join the panels together. Frank, Mike H., Alan, and Heather clamped the rail-drill to the head of the rail then began the delicate task of lining the bit up to drill in the right place. Once the holes were drilled, Mike H., in the loader, lifted the track and moved it into position. Then, while he and Frank bolted the panel to the track that had been laid, Heather and Alan continued drilling bolt-holes in other rails. Darkness finally shut the operation down. But, great progress on the project was made.

Thursday, Chris Carson, Alan, Mike H., and Heather made a day out of it. Chris used vacation from work to spend the day working on the new storage track. Two of the curved track-panels needed to be rotated 180 degrees so that the curve would be going in the right direction. Chris and Alan managed to rotate the track-panels and get them into place and bolt them up all before lunch. Mike H. and Heather joined the fun and continued drilling bolt-holes. Then, to get the track-panels to line-up, they utilized the track-puller/stretcher, a device that attaches to the rails and either pulls them together or pushes them apart. It was fun to deploy this mechanism which rarely gets used.

Saturday morning, Chris brought a big pink box of fuel for your MOW Team: Alan, Heather, a quorum of Mikes – Florentine, Harris, and Taylor – Harry Voss, Pamela Tatro, and Frank. With most everything staged and ready to go on the track project, Harry hopped on the back-hoe, Mike F. on the Big Green Machine, and Frank into the loader. Harry and Frank began filling the ballast cars with rock (and dirt). Alan and Chris sorted joint-bars trying to find the matching sets. The last few remaining un-spiked ties needed to be squared-up and plated. Using the rail-lifter, Mike T., Pam, and Heather took care of that. With the ties lined and plated, Mike H., Pam, and Alan brought out the Super "B" spiker to drive spikes. Pam loaded spikes into the chutes while Alan and Mike H. drove them into the ties. Chris, Harry, and Frank deployed the rail-drill and punched out the remaining bolt holes needed. It's kind of an unwieldy machine to line-up and mount on the rail. But, they got it right every time. Mike F. on Big Green grabbed the stinger with rail tongs and the panel-track lifter attached and, along with Frank in the loader, skillfully maneuvered the necessary inches to join the rail-ends. Then, it was just a matter of bolting everything in place with large and heavy joint-bars. Our supply of 136-pound joint-bars is quite limited and finding matching sets was a bit of a challenge. They are shaped differently for the gauge-side and field-side of the rail. We had plenty of one side and not enough of the other. But, the Team managed to figure it out. The Super "B" started acting-up so, it was sent back to the Shops where Heather and Mike H. worked on it through the afternoon to get it fixed. In the meantime, Mike T. and Alan began dropping rock to ballast the track. This Team was working like a well-oiled machine. The professionalism and skill of these fine folks is quite impressive. It is hard work but, it's a great group of people who enjoy working together and appreciating the real accomplishment they achieve at the end of every day.

We had hoped to finish the project on Saturday and, we were "on track" to do so. However, on Friday, we received a "change order" from the Shops. Initially, they had requested we build 300-feet of storage track for them. We ended up building 330 feet. Now they're requesting that we build an additional 50 feet of track. So, late in the day on Saturday, Frank and Mike F. brought another track panel over to the work-site. This is not something your average monkey can do. It takes highly skilled machine operators in a coordinated effort from in the cabs and on the ground to move these panels over rough terrain which taxes the capacity of the machines. The rails alone weigh 3,600 pounds. So, this means, that next Saturday, the Team will extend the track in the Rail Yards. Unfortunately, we have to sacrifice the opportunity to work out on the SSRR Mainline on a weekend with no trains running on top of us – something we'd been planning on for months.

This coming week, Tuesday, the Weed Team will continue grooming the green stuff along the Setzer Lead. Meet at the Shops at 8:30 a.m. The afternoon and evening crews on Tuesday and Thursday will gather for more track building fun at or before 5 o'clock. Saturday, pink boxes and panel track will dominate the day starting at 8 o'clock sharp. We hope to get the track extension lined-up, drilled, bolted, ballasted, and tamped on Saturday so that we can head out on the line the following week. Many thanks, indeed, to the members of the MOW Team for your perseverance and patience, and for sharing your skills and wonderful attitudes for the benefit of the entire railroad!

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Heather captures a photo of Dave flying overhead chopping away at offending branches



Frank, Alan, and Mike H. attach the rail-drill to the rail-head of one of the panel-track rails



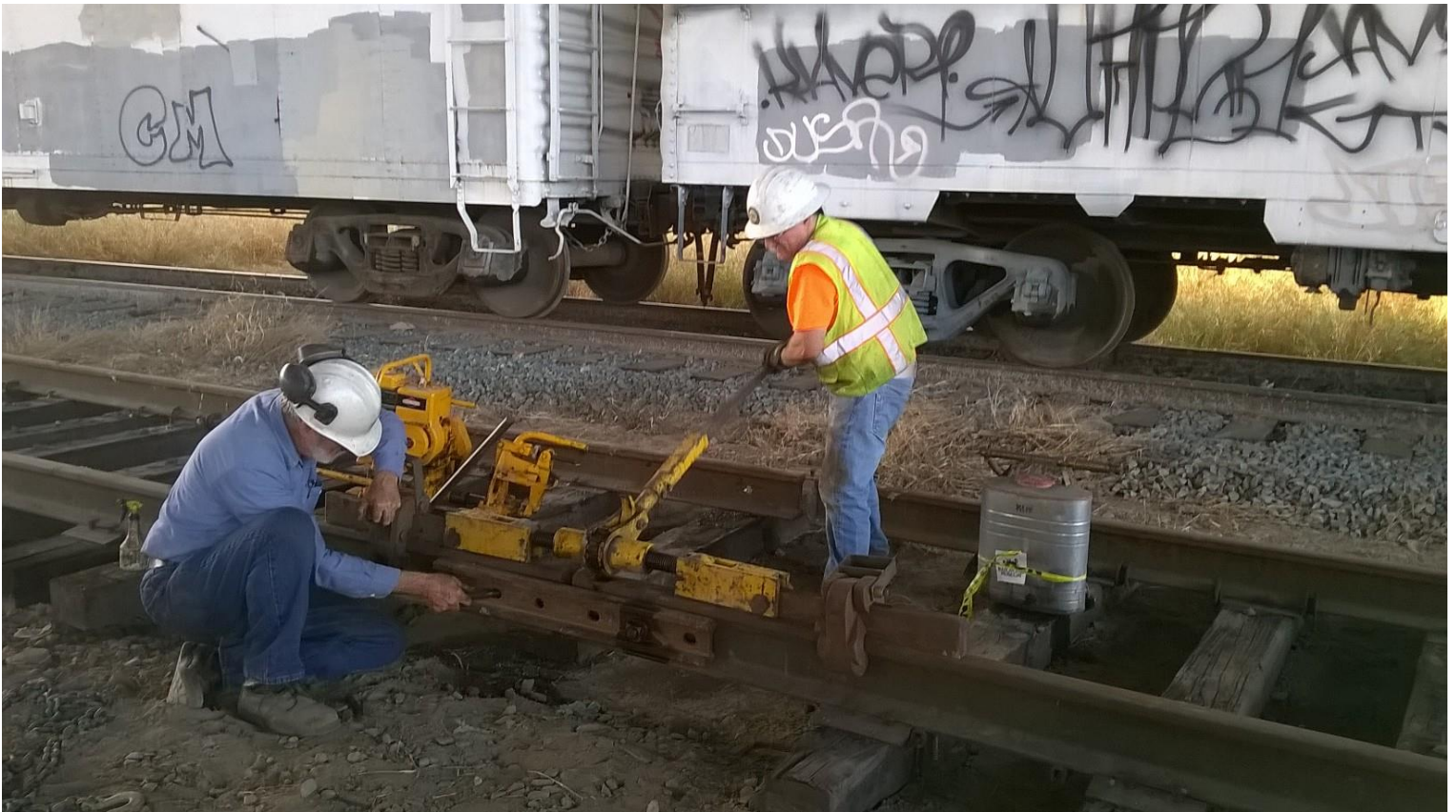
Mike starts-up the rail-drill while Frank sprays water to cool the drill-bit as it cuts through the web of the rail



Mike H. in the loader lifts the panel-track section as Frank and Alan guide it into position



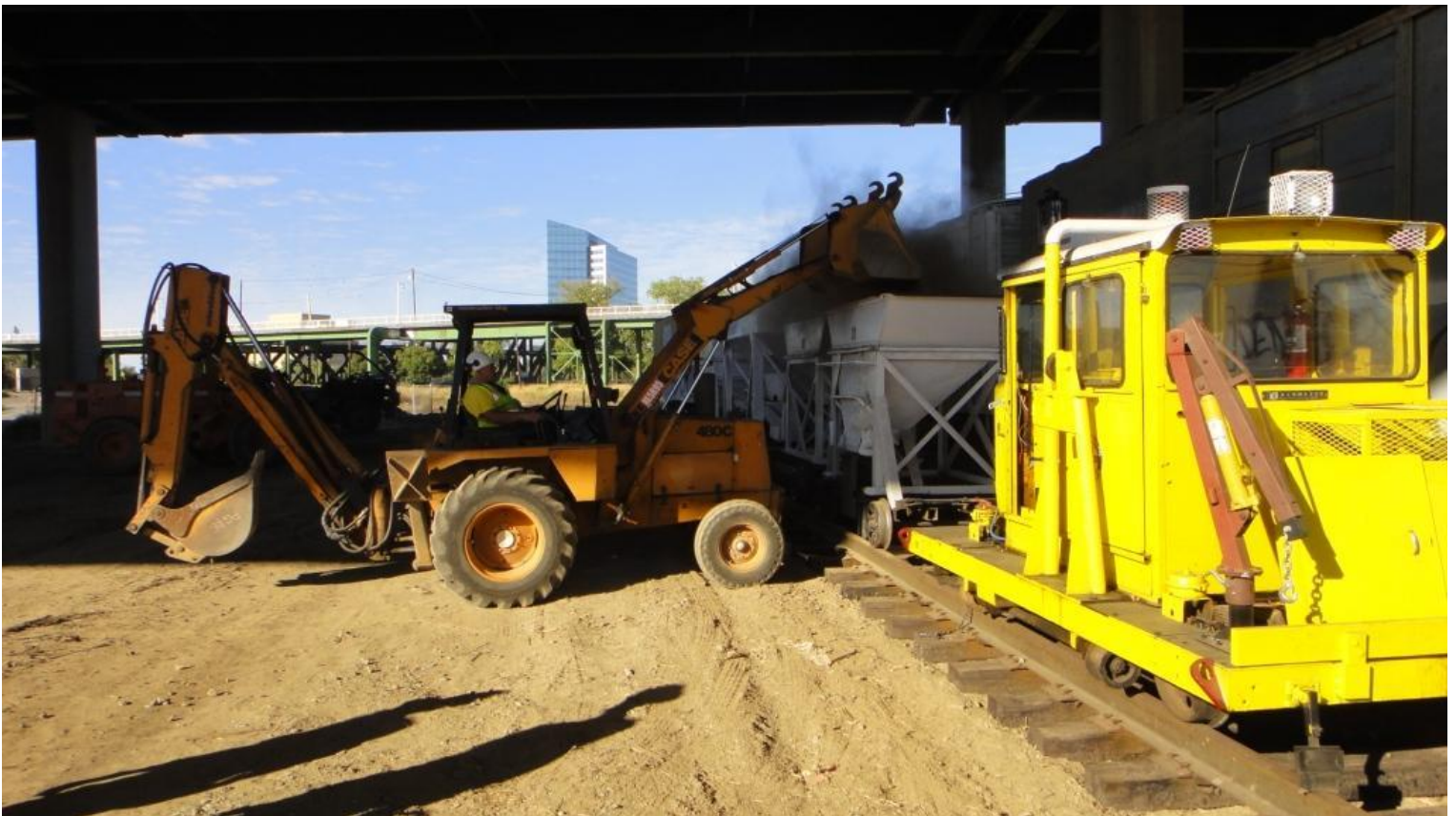
One final push from Mike H. in the loader lines up the rails perfectly



Alan and Mike H. use the rail-puller/stretcher to get the bolt-holes to line up



Alan and Chris try to match up 136-pound joint-bar sets



Harry on the back-hoe loads rock (and dirt) into the side-dump ballast hopper



With the rail-lifter lifting the rails, Mike T., Heather, and Pam square-up a tie as Mike F. looks on



Bring in the Super "B"! Alan and Mike H. operate the spiking guns as Pam loads spikes



Pam loading spikes into the chutes



Harry, Chris, and Frank line the rail-drill to the proper position for drilling a bolt hole



Frank shoots a stream of water onto the drill-bit to keep it cool as it cuts through the web of the rail



Now it's time to get the track-panels into place. Mike F. brings in Big Green with the stinger, rail tongs, and panel-track lifter attachments





Alan guides Mike F. on Big Green and Frank in the front-end loader in maneuvering the track-panel into the perfect position



Chris surveys the situation as Frank jacks-up the east rail to line up with the west. Mike F. brings in a joint-bar



Chris and Mike F. install joint-bars



Chris signals, "thumbs-up" to Harry on the back-how as he gives the track a little shove into perfect alignment



Time for some rock



Mike T. and Alan drop rock as Mike H. pilots the Kalamazoo



Frank in the loader and Mike F. on Big Green move yet another segment of panel-track to the job-site



As any monkey can do track work, your MOW Team monkeys around. Bananas for all good monkeys!