

Greetings!

This is your very first Maintenance of Way Team update for 2016. After a week off for Christmas, a little MOW “therapy” was in order to fend off the “cabin-fever” blues. So, let’s this this first-of-the-year updates started before 2016 fades into a memory.

The Weed Team – or should I say Mike Taylor – headed to Hood on Tuesday for some post-Christmas quality time with the gas-powered chainsaw on a stick. As Mike T. put it, a fair amount of progress was made. Back at the Shops, he and Cliff Hayes, the MOW Team’s master welder, got together to discuss mounting the new engine and pump on the 65-gallon spray rig. The old pump has been removed and Cliff has a plan for mounting the new pump and engine. A satisfying day all around. The first 2016 excursion of the Mighty Weed Team will be to Hood on Thursday, January 7. Come on out and join the Weed Team fun. It’s a great opportunity to see the Hood Line up close.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Shops, another present from Santa arrived to enhance the MOW Team’s Lounge area. Frederick Carr, one of Santa’s special helpers, said that Santa left a new microwave oven for the MOW Team at his house on Christmas. Many thanks to Santa and Fred for making the MOW Lounge in the Erecting Shop more hospitable. Speaking of hospitable, Pat Scholzen, Gene Peck, Frank Werry, Alan Hardy, and Harry Voss joined Fred, Cliff, and Mike T. for the final meeting of the MOW Team in 2015. Cliff worked on the Weed Team’s great big 500-gallon spray rig getting it ready for the 2016 spray-season on the SSRR Mainline. The rest of the Team worked on fixing the MOW Lounge picnic table (which was about to fall apart). Alan found some remnants of red vinyl that had been gathering dust in a corner of the Erecting Shop. Pat, Gene, Fred, Frank, and Cliff stripped the old vinyl off the table and benches. Then, they re-covered the surfaces with the new red vinyl. Pat re-secured all the table’s cross-brackets to stiffen and strengthen it. Without doubt, with the table fixed and new microwave – as well as the new heater unit – the MOW Lounge is the most hospitable corner of the entire Shops complex!

The Team had Thursday night off for New Year’s Eve. But, most were anxious to get right back to it on Saturday. So, Chris Carlson promised the first doughnuts of the New Year – and he delivered. Taking him up on the doughnut offer were Alan, Clem Meier, Steve Wilson, Michael Florentine, Steve Nemeth, and Harry. Also, it was a pleasure to welcome back Mike Willis who came off “injured reserve” following knee surgery. The plan for the day was to remove all the organic debris that had buried the track over the past couple months. Especially bad were “Oleander Alley” (between Broadway and Front Street), and south of Switch 16, the south Miller Park switch. Also on tap was some ballast work through Miller Park. We’d deploy the BEB-17 ballast regulator to “broom” the track as well as cut down some of the mounds that had accumulated. The tamper would be spotted Old Sacramento in order to clear space in the Erecting Shop for another machine. The Team loaded the MOW Truck with two huff-and-puff machines, rakes and other accouterments for the job. Steve W. and Mike W. headed directly for Oleander Alley with the huff-and-puff machines. Steve N. and Chris piloted the regulator and Alan the Tamper over the UP Mainline. Meanwhile, the rest of the Team set-up the MOW motorcar work train. At Oleander Alley, Mike W. and Steve W. had already cleared a good portion of the line. They did incredible work unburying the track. With MOW work train on site, the track-mounted air compressor would be employed with air-wands to assist Steve W. and Mike W. blowing leaf material from the line. Alas, it is winter and cold weather plays havoc with our machines’ batteries. The compressor’s battery was dead. The truck was brought in to “jump” it. Even still, there was not enough juice to turn it over. So the battery in the A-5 motorcar – our secondary motorcar – was redeployed to the compressor. With the A-5’s fresher battery, the compressor started right up. Clem attached the air-wand to the hose and started stirring up leaves. Mike F. piloted the A-6 motorcar which was shoving the compressor as Harry guided the air-hose. Steve W. and Mike W. moved to Front Street and started working north as the Clem, Harry, and Mike F. worked south. Meanwhile, Steve N. and Chris were working away with the ballast regulator through Miller Park. They started off by “brooming” the entire line. The regulator has a giant spinning broom that clears excess rock from between the rails while filling in any holes that may exist. Then, they used the plow and the side-wings to cut down the “windrows” that had formed along the rails from previous passes by the regulator. Both crews were at a good place to break for lunch.

Progress in the afternoon, however, was stalled. A mechanical issue arose with the ballast regulator rendering it motionless. Although the problem was quickly identified, fixing it out in the field became quite a challenge. For a couple hours, the Team’s attention was focused on regulator’s problem which included trips back to the Shops for tools and materials. Fortunately, Chris was able to figure out the necessary repair to make the machine move again. Hallelujah! Everyone was greatly relieved. Unfortunately, it was getting late so, the decision was made to cut our losses and head back to town to put everything away. The regulator had to go back to the Shops as well as the track-mounted air compressor for servicing. By just after 5 o’clock, the Team was able to shut off the lights and head home. Yes, it was a day of mixed results but demonstrated, without doubt, the ability of this remarkable Team to adjust and handle out of normal situations.

Speaking of this remarkable Team, Manager of Track Programs, Alan, keeps “track” of all MOW Team volunteer hours. He reports that MOW Team members volunteered over 10,300 hours in 2015. There were 44 volunteers who worked MOW at least one day, of which 25 are “regulars.” Now that’s dedication. What a tremendous service these volunteers have given to build a better Railroad!

The Team returns to a normal schedule this coming week. Tuesday and Thursday, come rain or shine, the Shops Team will gather in the Erecting Shop at or before 5 o’clock. Also, Mike T. will lead the Weed Team to Hood on Thursday. Meet at the Shops at 8:30 a.m. 2016 promises to be a great and challenging year. Of course, the volunteers of the MOW Team are up for it. Happy New Year one and all!

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



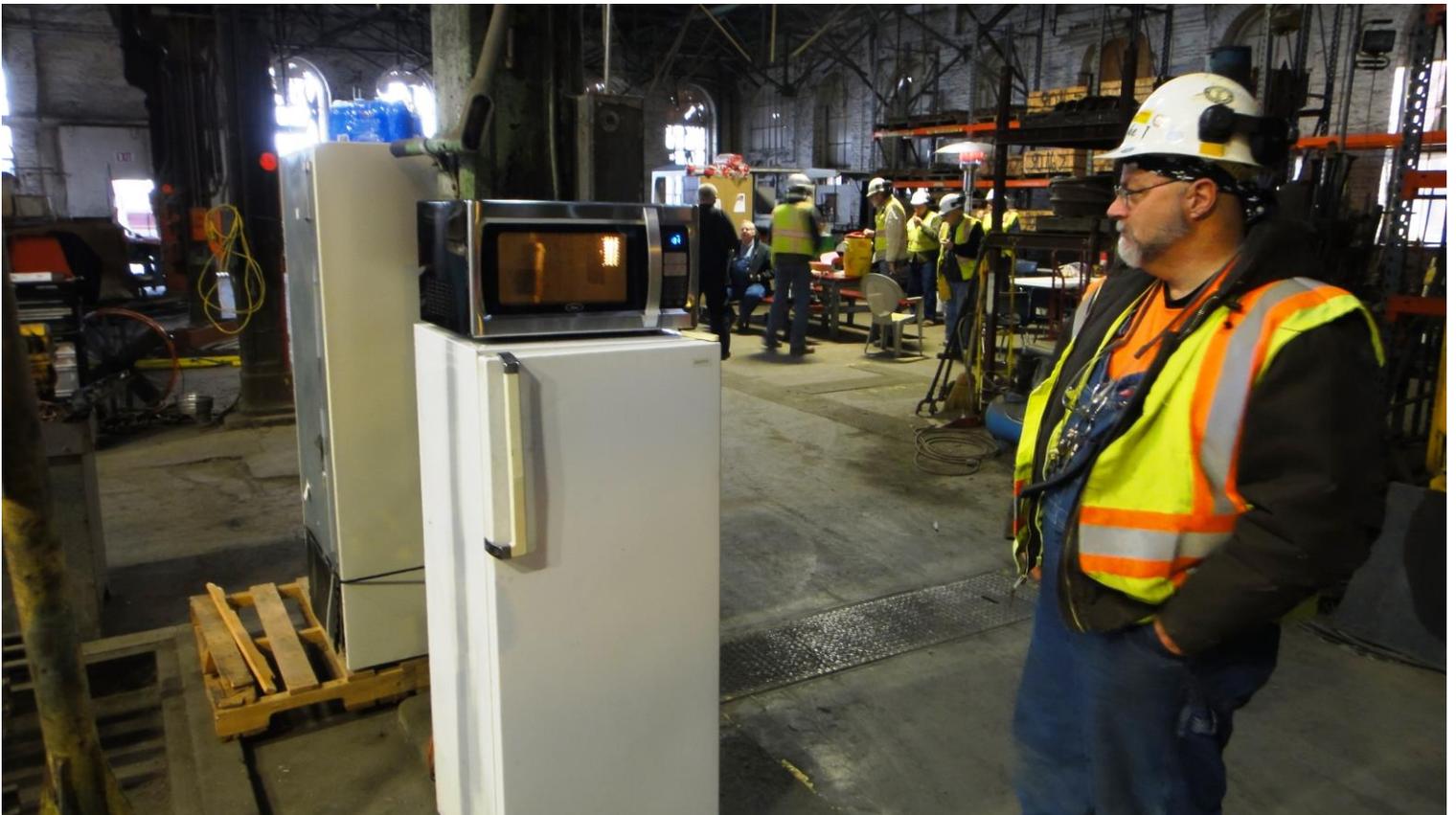
Cliff making modifications to the Weed Team's 500-gallon spray-rig getting it ready for the 2016 season



Pat and Fred strip the ancient vinyl on the MOW Lounge picnic for a long overdue replacement.



Cliff, Fred, Pat, and Gene install the new festive-red vinyl on our Lounge table



Mike F. tests out the new MOW Lounge microwave that Santa's helper Fred brought for us



The mighty MOW tamper and ballast regulator crossing over the Union Pacific Mainline at RV-988



Mike W. and Steve W. don the huff-and-puff machines for the removal of organic debris from the SSRR Mainline at Oleander Alley



Steve W. and Mike W. did an amazing job clearing away mulch from the track



Once the compressor was working again, Clem took the air-wand out to spin-up some leaves



A bit of before and after: Mike W. and Steve W. keep those leaves moving on down the line...



Harry guides the air hose as Clem wands away dead debris. Mike F. operates the A-6 motorcar



Mike F. keeps a close eye on Harry's signals



Chris guides the regulator as it plows and brooms the track



Steve N. at the helm of the regulator



My oh my. That's a mighty fine looking stretch of track...