

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for November 16, 2014. Some famous philosopher once said something philosophical about "living in interesting times." Well, it was an interesting week for your MOW Team. So, before we lose any interest, let's get this update rolling.

Tuesday afternoon started with more fireworks from Cliff Hayes's cutting torch. He, Pat Scholzen, Gene Peck, and Alan Hardy were putting the final touches on our big new ballast hopper car. As it will be filled by the back-hoe, the height of walls had to be cut down a bit in order for it to reach. Harry Voss brought in the back-hoe for measurement purposes and the height-line was marked. Cliff made quick work of it and by the end of the evening the new ballast hopper was done and ready to be deployed. Meanwhile, Scott Morrison, our hydraulics expert, along with Frederick Carr, Frank Werry, and Heather Kearns, began the interesting process of flushing out the tie-shear's hydraulic system. It's mucky work but, somebody has to do it and your MOW Team isn't afraid of getting a little dirty.

On Thursday, the mighty Weed Team set off for its final adventure at Hood this year. Mike Taylor and Dave Megeath headed for the south end of the Hood Line, where they loaded up a motorcar and flatcars with necessary implements for attacking vegetation encroaching on the line. Their destination was Mile Post 12.1 where overgrown tree limbs were impeding movement through the area. Dave with the powered pole saw and Mike a chainsaw began systematically pruning back these limbs to restore free access. Despite being volunteers, these guys are true professionals at this job. They know what they're doing and how to accomplish the task without endangering the survival of trees or hindering the wildlife in the area. It's very interesting down there. The Hood Line and its surroundings are simply beautiful. Someday, when the railroad is operating from Freeport to Hood, thus giving the public access, we'll have Weedies to thank for keeping the dream alive. After all, every day is one day closer to Hood...

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, Alan, Cliff, and Fred just about completed the flushing out of the tie-shear's hydraulic system. Over in Old Sacramento, staging for Polar Express is ramping-up. Lots of equipment was being moved around including our fire truck, which has been on display in the Museum for several months. Conductor Frank W., Heather, and Matt Blackburn headed over to bring the fire truck back to the Shops. It made for an interesting evening as there was a great deal of railroad activity going on in Old Sac. including the SP 291 being brought over from the Shops. Although it took a little time, Team Fire Truck successfully transited the double-diamonds and stowed it safely in the Erecting Shop.

On Friday, Heather and Alan spent the afternoon getting all of the equipment we would need for Saturday into position as we continue our tie change-out project. Their efforts put us great shape for a quick departure post doughnuts. So, before doughnuts arrived on Saturday morning, our early team was on hand to move the pre-arranged equipment out onto the line. The plan was to bring the big pink ballast regulator (a.k.a. "*USS Sea Tiger*") along with us to clean up the area we worked over the previous weeks. So, we got it out of the building and onto the transfer table. That's when things got interesting. At that moment, the transfer table suddenly shut down and would not move. It was dead. Without the transfer table, we were stuck. We'd be unable to move any of our equipment. In the meantime, Clem Meier, Heather, Steve Nemeth, Harry, Mike T., Mike Harris, Michael Florentine, John Rexroth, Frank Squire, and Alan all arrived ready for the day's work. To make a long story short, it took about 45 minutes to diagnose the problem as a burned-out fuse, which we replaced. Unfortunately, we lost our prime window of opportunity to move over the UP Main as Amtrak traffic and UP freight trains were all heading in and out of Sacramento. By the time we got to Old Sac., we were already an hour behind schedule.

Fortunately, Harry had headed down to the work-site with the back-hoe along with John, Frank S., Mike T., and Clem to start prepping the ties we were going to pull. Once the rest of the equipment arrived, for the most part, things went pretty well. Steve, Heather, Mike H., Mike F., and Frank W. made a point of digging around all sides of the ties in order to relieve the grip of the ground so that they might slide out more easily. The section-gang machine was able to pull about half the ties intact. For the rest, the chain method was employed, which requires at least 20 minutes per tie to pull. Our Signals Department friend and colleague, Jim Coviello, was on hand to deactivate the Broadway grade-crossing warning system and to keep an eye on our work around the shunts and bond-wires. Jim's help was invaluable and we greatly appreciated his presence on the scene. Of course, we had our requisite mechanical failures but, thanks to the mechanical acumen of Mike H., everything was put right relatively quickly. By the end of the day, we managed to remove 13 ties from the ground which will be replaced next Saturday. Although it may not sound like a lot, getting those 13 ties out of the ground took a tremendous amount hard labor. This team of volunteers deserves tremendous credit for the work they did, their ability to adjust on the fly, and roll with the punches on a challenging, sometimes frustrating, but nonetheless, interesting day.

For the week ahead, the Weed Team will be deploying forces on both Tuesday and Thursday. Tuesday, the Weedies are headed south of the I-5 Bridge. Thursday, they're finishing up in Miller Park to guarantee no clearance issues for when Santa's Village is sent south to the North Pole. Also on Tuesday and Thursday, the Shops crews will be hard at it keeping our machines up and running. On Saturday, we'll replace the 13 ties we pulled this week. 8 o'clock a.m. is the doughnut hour. I promise, it will be fun and interesting day.

We'll see you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Cliff using his mighty torch to cut down walls of the new ballast hopper



Frank W., Fred, and Scott start flushing the tir-shear's hydraulic system



Mike T. and Dave assemble the harness for using the gas-powered pole-saw



Dave slicing and dicing away



Mike T. with the chainsaw cutting the debris down to size



The picturesque Hood Line at Mile Post 12.1



Heather and Steve digging out the sides of the ties



Clem testing the strength of the mattock's handle...



Harry brings in the back-hoe to pull a particularly stubborn tie



Steve powers up the section-gang machine



Batman is on the scene!



Mike H. fixes the faulty fitting on the lift-cylinder of the section-gang machine



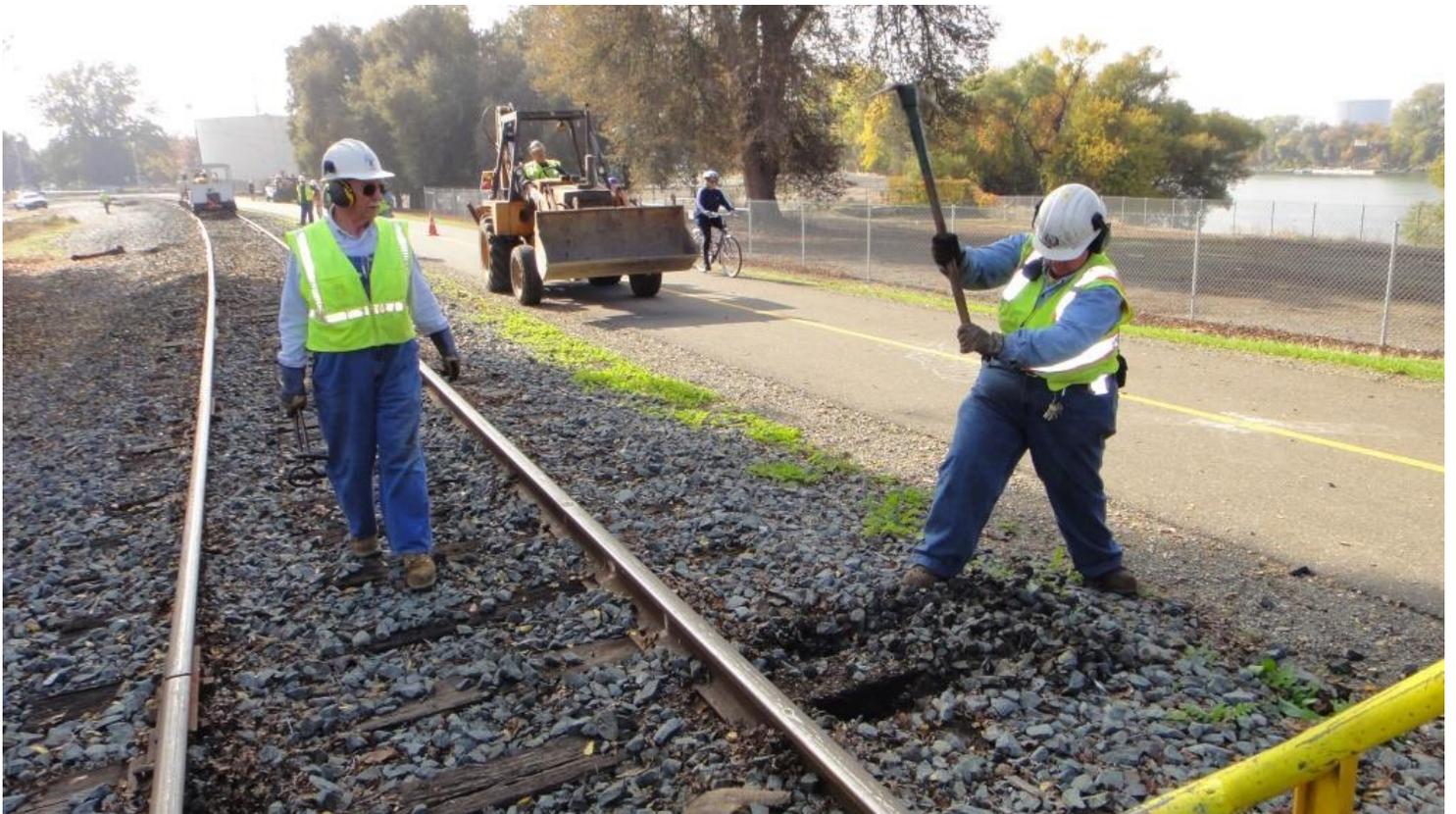
Signal Jim watches carefully as Mike F. and Clem pull a tie that runs right along the shunt



Alan adzes the top of a plate-cut tie



Your MOW Team at work!



Clem carrying the tie-tongs while Heather digs out the end of a tie with the mattocks



Heather and Steve take away the offending tie



Day is done... The *USS Sea Tiger* returns to its home port on the transfer table – this time without incident...