

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for December 15, 2013. Hot chocolate is flowing at record rates on the Polar Express and your MOW Team is well represented on the train crews of every operating day. As *here we only have one rule: never ever let it cool* (FRA mandate), let's get started with this update before we are cited for any violations...

Tuesday, the mighty MOW Weed Team spent the day in the Shops performing heavy maintenance on its equipment. Mike Taylor, Heather Kearns, Joe Galipeau, and Dave Megeath worked the wrenches installing a new engine on the DR field- and-brush mower—a vital component of their arsenal. Our master welder, Cliff Hayes, helped out on this project by fabricating a new bracket to fit the new engine being installed. Furthermore, the Weedies got their equipment cabinet reorganized. It was a very productive day that will pay great dividends into the future.

Meanwhile, also in the Shops, Pat Scholzen, Cliff, Frederick Carr, Mike Harris, Alan Hardy, Heather, and Gene Peck made for a memorable MOW evening. The “new-old” tamper continues to be the focus of our mechanical work. Cliff and Alan made tremendous progress on the surfacing system that they are building for it. Fred tackled the installation of filters in the hydraulic tank (a bigger challenge than any of us anticipated). Mike H., Gene, and Pat rebuilt and reinstalled one of the lift-cylinder for the work-heads. Heather changed the fuel filters on that *old bucket o' bolts* regulator which we brought over to the Shops side last week. We ended the evening with yummy homemade date cookies that Cliff kindly brought in. It was an excellent and productive evening for your MOW Team.

We decided to cancel MOW on Thursday night due to a bit of a crew shortage. However, as Polar Express is one of the biggest fundraisers of the year for the Foundation, its success is crucial to the Track Department's bottom line. We are proud of the significant contribution that members of the MOW Team are making on the Polar Express and know that our department, as well as the whole railroad and Museum, will benefit from all our efforts.

Saturday, we began building the toe-paths along the 560 track over in the Rail Yards as required by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). Clem Meier, Harry Voss, Heather, Steve “SSRRMW 001” Mathais, Steve Nemeth, Fred, Frank Werry, Michael Florentine, Pam Tatro, Alan, and Chris Carlson dug into two pink boxes of doughnuts before starting to dig out on the line. The CPUC is requiring us to extend by four feet the area of level walking space (“toe-paths”) along both sides of the track. Our equipment roster consisted of two side-dump ballast hoppers, the A-6 motorcar, the Green Machine with the dump-bucket accessory, the front-end loader, and the *old bucket o' bolts* ballast regulator. Conductor Frank conducted engineer Mike F. on the A-6 over the UP Main while Steve N. on Big Green and Alan in the loader filled the hoppers with rock. Our biggest challenge was working with the regulator. It's so old that it could qualify for artifact status. We had this crazy idea that we might be able to coax it into action for this project to reduce the amount of manual labor and hand-digging of ballast rock by using its wings to cut down the height of the existing slope next to the track so that small rock for walking paths could be added. With ample use of sledge-hammers, we managed to get the wings lowered to the level needed to start work. More beatings were necessary to adjust the plows. The regulator's broom doesn't work at all. But the turntable descends all by itself at the most inconvenient times and doesn't want to retract. Literally, we were beating the proverbial dead-horse. But, once beaten into submission, we did manage to get some productive work out of it – although, it required several subsequent thrashings throughout the day. Fortunately for us, Chris is an expert operator and is solely responsible for cajoling the near-dead horse into action. We sure are looking forward to the arrival of the new regulator that we're acquiring from Western Railway Museum.

Pam, Steve M., Clem, and Fred were amazing. They dug-out and shaped, by hand, the rock around the interchange switch. Digging rock is no easy task. By the end of the day, we made significant progress on the project. The additional rock we need for completing the project supposedly arrives this week. So, guess what we're doing next Saturday?

For the week ahead, Tuesday, the crew will meet as usual in the afternoon and evening for our final Tuesday meeting 2013. Thursday evening, we'll be open for business (if anyone shows up). Meet at the Shops at 5 o'clock. On Saturday, after the obligatory doughnuts, the Great CPUC Toe-path Project of 2013 continues. Meet at the Shops at 8 o'clock a.m.

Thanks to all, happy hot chocolate, and we'll see you out on the line!

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Dave and Mike T. proudly stand by their great organizational accomplishment



Cliff welds the support bracket for the light receiving stanchion for the surfacing system on the new-old tamper



The beast emerges...



Steve N., Steve M., and Pam cut away at the slope by hand at the switch



Mike F. and Frank chain the scoop bucket to the Big Green Machine



Steve N., EIC of Big Green, scooping up rock with the scoop bucket



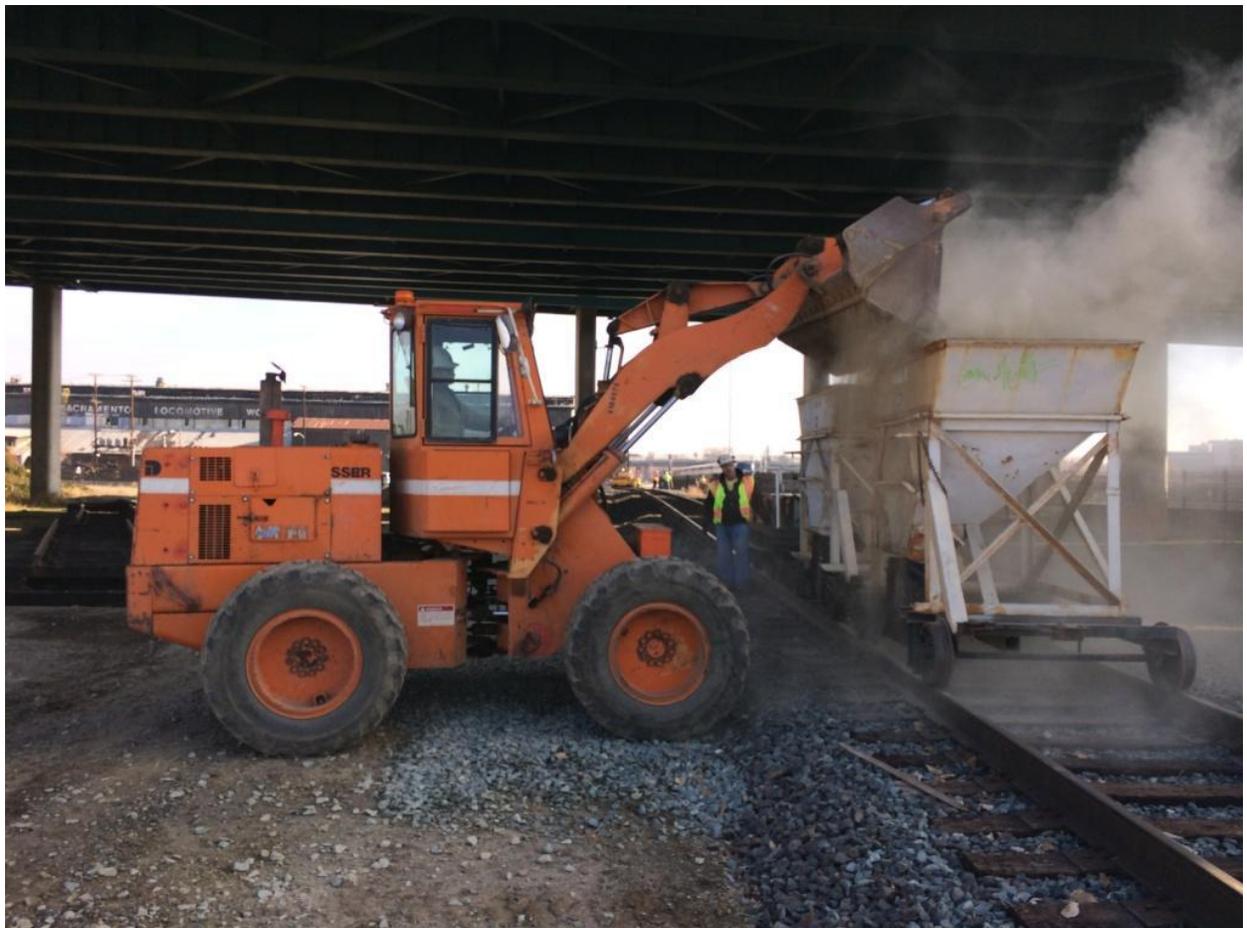
It won't go down! Push, Alan, push!



Shifting rock by hand is a team effort – especially while trying to make emergency repairs to the regulator...



Clem and Fred were tireless in their efforts to shovel rock around the switch



Mike F. directs Alan in the loader into position to dump rock into the hopper car



Choreography with big machines



Steve M. and Alan "ballast" the track