

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for December 3, 2017. Polar Express is in full swing and so is your MOW Team. So, let's get this update started before we all drown in hot chocolate!

A surprise was waiting for Pat Scholzen, Chris Howard, Cliff Hayes, Alan Hardy, Heather Kearns, Kyle Blackburn, Joe Margucci, Dave Worlf, Anthony Filamor, Frank Werry, Gene Peck, Matt McCracken, and Mike Harris when they arrived at the Shops on Tuesday: a visit from the drug-testing people. According to a new federal directive in 49 CFR Part 219, maintenance of way workers nationwide are now subject to random drug testing. This was our week for testing. The "random selection" process was lengthy as none of the names of the people they pre-selected were present. They wouldn't let us just tell them who was there. Names had to be chosen at random through a number system. Finally, the names were chosen and they headed off to be tested. Meanwhile, Cliff, Pat, and Gene are building a dedicated flatcar for our new panoply of hydraulic tools and power units. Mike H., Matt, and Frank got to work removing the "kicker" cylinder on the tie-shear so that it can be sent out for repair. Mike H. descended into the pit under the machine to take apart this very inconveniently located hydraulic cylinder. Matt climbed on the forklift which was used to support the cylinder as the holding-pins were removed. Joe, Anthony, and Chris H. took on the removal of several hydraulic hoses on the scarifier that were leaking or looked ready to burst. Kyle is welding up a mounting bracket system for stowing the Nolan track-carts on the side of the rail-mounted air-compressor. Chris H. helped with this project, as well. Dave painted the Nolan track-cart that is being mounted to the side of the compressor. It was an evening of lots of noise and progress by your dedicated MOW Team.

Thursday, the mighty Weed Team headed down to Hood to service the spray units down there in preparation of pre-emergent weed spraying season. Mike Taylor, Heather, Dave Megeath, and Ed Kottal took their trusty tools and deployed the units for inspection and servicing. They engaged in other activities for which the Weedies are so well known, such as mowing the right-of-way and pruning back bushes. All in all a successful day for this intrepid Team which plants the SSRR flag week in and week out on that once and future rail line.

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, a fairly small crew showed up on Thursday as most of the MOW regulars had been coopted for Polar Express duty. But, Mike H., Heather, Joe, Dave, and Eric Baugher were on hand as the drug testing folks returned for round two. Once that process was complete, the Team headed to Old Sacramento to replace the existing switch targets with brand new, highly reflective, and anti-graffiti targets that will improve the overall safety of our line. Plus, they look so much better than the old, aluminum, faded, spray-painted, switch targets with reflective tape strewn across them. Of the 11 active switches in Old Sac., Dave, Joe, Mike H. and Heather managed change-out eight of them on Thursday evening. By the end of the year, 21 of the 22 active switches on our line will receive new targets. The Team returned to the Shops and made some preparation for Saturday's work before calling it a night.

Saturday was a funky day. No other way to describe it. The early crew arrived at Old Sacramento to move the man-lift and chipper off the 150 Track to provide access the ballast regulator and ballast hopper cars which we planned to use for ballasting the Sutterville/Zoo Line. However, fate had other plans for us. Just as the morning briefing was about to begin for Heather, Joe, Alan, Bev Ratzloff, Michael Florentine, Steve Nemeth, Pam Tatro, Art Fluter, Anthony, and Chris Carlson, in walked the drug testing people, again (and here you thought it was doughnuts!). Once more, we had to go through the cumbersome random selection process in order to select to the only five people present eligible for testing. Folks, this whole process took an hour and a half to complete further delaying the Team from deploying. However, once the testing was done, Steve climbed aboard the front-end loader and Mike F. hopped in the back-hoe and headed to Setzer ready to load rock. Heather, Joe, Bev, and Anthony got the MOW work train out of the container. Chris C. fired up the ballast regulator. The Jackson 125 tie-exchanger had to be moved to access the hoppers. That's when, calamity occurred. A seal on the 125's turntable cylinder blew resulting in a "Bellagio fountain" of hydraulic fluid out the side. The turntable dropped and got caught in the Interchange Track switch. So, Chris C. summoned Green Machine 2 (GM2) and literally picked the 125 up get it unstuck. Alan, Chris, and Joe then jacked-up the turntable and strapped it into the retracted position. This adversity, combined with the drug testing ordeal, killed our morning. Steve and Mike F. were recalled from Setzer. As we were under a mandated early afternoon return from working on the line because of Polar Express, trying to commence the ballasting project in the afternoon was a no-go. So, emergency Plan B was put into effect. Switch work. Steve, Mike F., and Art did triage on the Stub Switch (No. 3) while Joe and Heather headed to Baths to install the new reflective switch targets. In Old Sac., Steve, Art, and Mike F. installed new targets on Switches 5 and 6. Then, we decided to clean up some track material (we paid for) left near the south end of the MOW container by the contractor working on the J Street crossing project. Once the first run of Polar Express left town, Steve brought in the front-end loader and Art, Joe, and Chris C. moved casks of new spikes and piles of tie-plates into its bucket. Mike F. brought in GM2 to remove the pile of ties. This proved a bit tricky getting GM2 in place while having to cross over several tracks. SSRR DSLE Jeremy Levish joined the MOW Team for this activity and provided a tremendous amount of help getting these heavy, hard-wood, nine-foot ties onto GM2's forks. Considering our day, of course it wouldn't be easy. As GM2 backed out and over South Turntable Lead rails, it bounced and the ties fell off the forks onto the track. Joe, Chris C., Steve, Art and Jeremy lifted all those ties again and placed them on GM2's forks. This time, they got away safely. Once the ties were stowed, we called it a day and headed back to the Shops. With machines put away, the Team said "good night." Despite the day's problems, some good work got done which is a testament to the resilience and flexibility of the incredible volunteers of the MOW Team.

This coming week, MOW Time starts at or before 5 o'clock in the Shops on Tuesday and Thursday. The Weed Team will return to Hood on Thursday starting at 8:30 a.m. Doughnuts will be on hand at 8 o'clock Saturday morning for another exciting, never dull, MOW day.

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris C., and Richard.



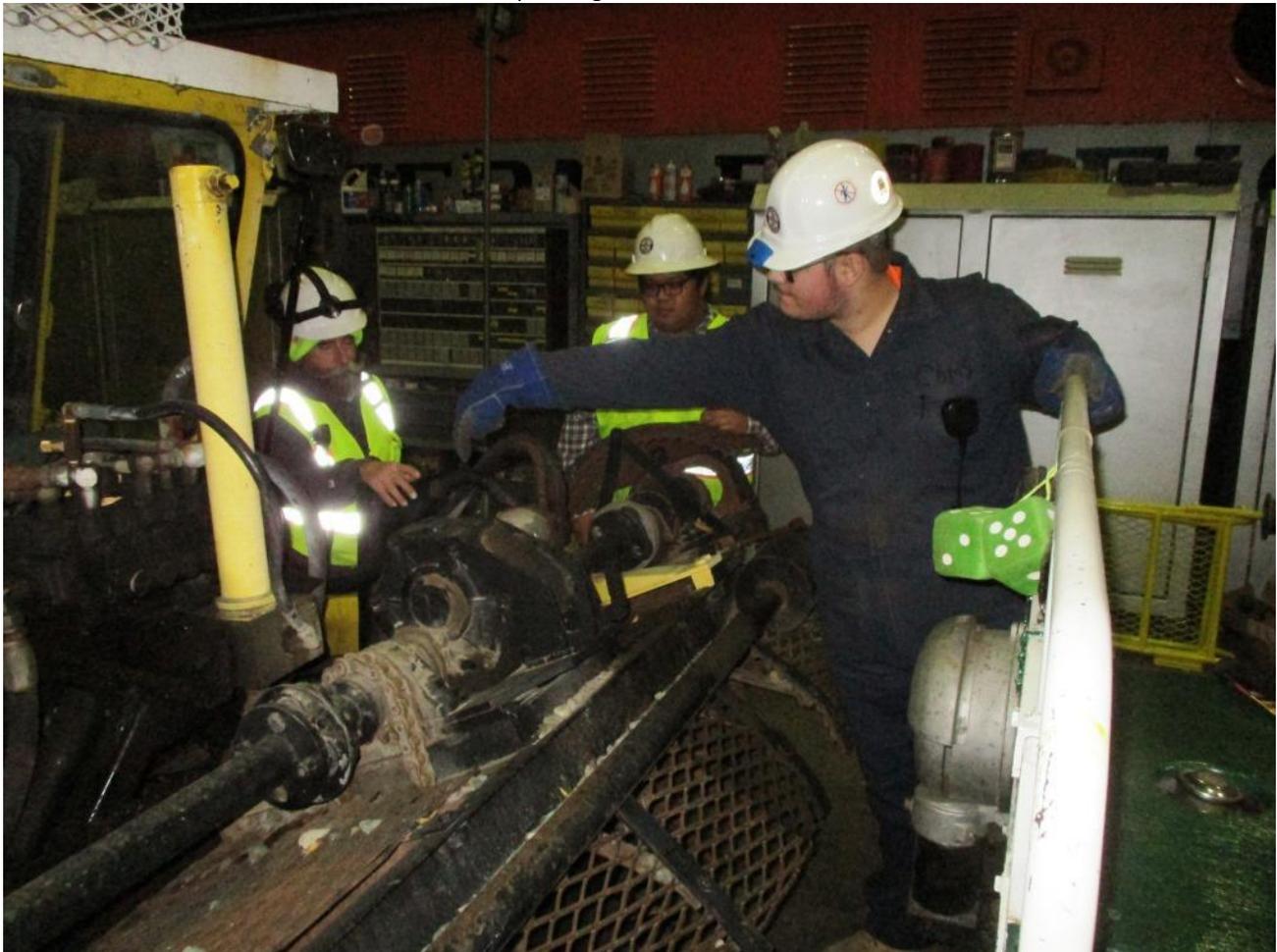
Cliff welding the deck supports for our new dedicated hydraulic-tool car



Pat grinding down the weld on the new hydraulic-tool car



Dave painting the Nolan track-cart



Joe, Anthony, and Chris H. remove wonky hydraulic hoses on the scarifier



Kyle welds together the new mounting bracket for the Nolan track-cart to be placed on the air-compressor



Chris H. uses the wire-brush on the area to be welded



Anthony caps the hydraulic receptacle on the scarifier



Mike H. in the pit under the tie-shear



Under the tie-shear, Mike H. works to remove the kickers' cylinder



Kyle with the new mounting bracket for the Nolan track-cart that he built



Mike T. works on the Weed Team's spray-rig at Hood



Mike T. and Dave make adjustments to the spray-rig



The lovely view from the Hood Line



Is it Christmas at the Shops? Or are those new switch-targets that Joe sees?



Mike H. and Dave install a new target at Switch 2



Mike H. and Dave remove the old target at Switch 8



Art moves the flatcar which still has a few ties on it out of the way



Following the 125's hydraulic cylinder calamity, Joe and Pam use the long draw-bar to connect the regulator to the 125 for towing



Chris C. in the regulator shoves the 125 while Alan watches closely to make sure its descended turntable doesn't hang-up on anything else



Alan and Chris C. work with Joe to strap the turntable in the retracted position



While all the excitement is going on with the 125, Mike F. and Steve clear debris away from the control rod of the Stub Switch



With the concurrence of DSLE Jeremy, because Polar Express has coopted so many MOW Team members, Alan coopted the Polar Express for Maintenance of Way!



At Baths, Joe replaces the old, faded, ugly target on Switch 18 with a fresh, new, highly reflective target



Back in Old Sac., when a Santa Parade marched by, suddenly Joe felt at home!



Steve installs the new target at Switch 5



Chris, Art, and Jeremy load tie-plates into the bucket of the front-end loader



Steve in the front-end loader removes casks of spikes and tie-plates from the scene



First things first: Jeremy, Joe, and Art bring order to chaos



Joe, Chris, and Jeremy get the pile of heavy, hard-wood ties orderly for GM2 to pick up



Mike F. brings in GM2



Yikes! This is going to end in tears...



Yeah, kind of a mess...