

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for August 30, 2015. I was a week punctuated by a hydraulic lift-cylinder on the tamper that suddenly shifted position from vertical to horizontal. So, before we have to "bad-order" anything else, let's get this update rolling.

The mighty Weed Team had an extremely productive day on Tuesday. Mike Taylor and Dave Megeath sprayed their magical potion on the remaining equisetum-plants that somehow survived the previous spraying adventure in June. The June-sprayed equisetum is now flat on the ground – the mark of Weed Team success! To celebrate their victory, the Weedies headed down the line near South Land Park Drive to "prune" a Tree-of-Heaven. The chipper was tested for the first time since its overhaul last month and it performed admirably. They finished the day by modifying the plumbing on the 500 gallon spray rig then testing it for leaks with the help of Frank Squire. It's the volunteers of the Weed Team that keep our line free of 49 CFR Part 213.37 vegetation defects. We all owe them our gratitude and admiration.

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, Alan Hardy, Pat Scholzen, Cliff Hayes, Frank S., Frank Werry, Gene Peck, Matt Blackburn, and Harry Voss worked on lots of important projects. Cliff is building anti-vandalism shields for the ballast regulator. Matt brought the Interpretive Handcar Program's malfunctioning motorcar over to the Erecting Shop and prepped its replacement, the A-5 motorcar which was restored to operation by Frank W. and Mike Harris some months back. Other machines were serviced as well. Keeping these old machines running is nearly a full-time job. Luckily, an incredibly talented group of folks volunteer their valuable skills to the MOW Team.

Thursday, Alan, Heather Kearns, Mike H., Cliff Hayes, and Frank W. kept busy in the Shops. Cliff continued building shields for the ballast regulator. Frank headed over to Old Sac. to fuel the Kalamazoo tug which would be used to pull ballast hopper cars on Saturday. Then, he and Heather loaded the tool-caddie and track-jacks into our trusty Chevy Truck for Saturday's track-leveling project. They also made sure the front-end loader was full of fuel. Everything was set and ready to go for Saturday.

Speaking of Saturday, the pink box was placed on the table in the MOW Lounge area well in time to avoid any threat of doughnut related disruptions. On hand for the day's activities were Pam Tatro, Clem Meier, Dave, Heather, Steve Nemeth, Mike Willis, Mike H., Frank W., Michael Florentine, Harry Voss, and Alan. The plan for the day was to continue with the west-rail raise south of Mile Post 2.5. As you may recall, cross-level measurements between the east and west rail show the west rail was as much as two inches lower than the east. This cross-level disparity is particularly noticeable on the train as it passes over this area at track-speed. To raise the rail, track-jacks are deployed after ballast-rock had been dropped. As the track is jacked-up, the newly laid rock works its way under the ties with the help of the tamper to provide a firm foundation. So, Conductor Heather arranged a quick transit over from the Shops for the tamper, piloted by Harry, across the UP Main. Dave took the Kalamazoo and hoppers to Setzer where Frank in the front-end loader filled them with rock. Steve drove the truck loaded with tools and jacks. It was an amazing team effort at the job site. The Team worked with efficiency and alacrity. Pam, Steve, Heather, Mike F., and Clem began clearing space under the rails for the jacks to be placed. Mike W. jacked the track as Clem checked the level. Harry, guided by Mike F., brought in the tamper and, with the machine working really well, got great compaction under the ties. Steve would remove the jack as the tamper approached and "leap-frogged" it south to start the process all over again. This happened in rapid succession as the Team traded off on the various jobs. By lunch time, we had leveled about 200 feet of track.

That's when the day got interesting. Suddenly, the hydraulic cylinder that lifts and lowers the tamper's work-head popped out of place and shot forward dropping the work-head into the ground like an anchor. The machine was stuck. It couldn't move with the work-head firmly planted in the ground. That coupled with the fact that a train was due to descend on us in 15 minutes lead to a moment or two of panic. After calls to the Crew Center warning the train crew that they might have to stop at our **red-flag**, we managed to figure out how we could use track-jacks to lift the cylinder back up into its travel position where it could latch so that the machine could be moved out of there before the train arrived. But, this incident is a perfect illustration as to why we establish **red-flag** protection. For everyone's safety, especially with machines (subject to unforeseen break-down) operating on an active train line, it's important that the train is prepared to stop. Nonetheless, this incident ended our track-raising operation for the day. Now, there was a new problem: a sudden westward "dip" in the track at the spot where the track leveling had stopped unexpectedly. For safety sake, a 10 mph speed restriction was issued over the "dip" between MP 2.6 and MP 2.65 in order to prevent any unintentional "Dukes of Hazard" action by the train.

Dave and Frank had filled the hoppers with another load of ballast so, before heading back to town, the rock was dispersed along the west rail. Then, we managed to get back to town safely and the tamper back to Erecting Shop without further incident. The MOW Team sends a big shout-out and thank you to the outstanding train crew including Dispatcher Melba Fryer, Engineers Harry Forni and Dick Noonan, and Train Master Norm Lucas who joined us down on the line. It was great team-work between operations and MOW.

The Weed Team will not be working this week. But, the MOW Team certainly will. Tuesday, we'll look forward to Pat and Gene's comments about the tamper incident while making its repair the number one priority. Both Tuesday and Thursday, meet at the Shops at or before 5 o'clock. Saturday, the tamper should be working again so, mitigating train order 105 will be the task for the day. 8 o'clock a.m. is call time. Many thanks to all the great volunteers for their patience and able to adjust to out-of-normal situations in such a professional manner.

See you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Matt cranks the hand-wench to lower the Interpretive Handcar Program's speeder to the floor in the Erecting Shop



Cliff welding-up protective shields for the ballast regulator's lights and horn



Early in Old Sac., the tamper and tug are ready to roll



Steve, Pam, Mike W., Harry, and Clem deploy the jacks



Mike W. jacks the track as Clem checks the level



Pam sets a jack as Steve digs out a space for a jack to be placed



Mike F. sets another track-jack



Mike F. demonstrates to Steve, "We're going to raise the track this high..."



Mike F. lifts the west rail as Mike W. checks the level. Clem and Steve get ready for the next jack



Jacks set, leveling in progress, bring in the tamper



Frank and Clem shift rock into the right place. Steve gets ready to pull a jack as Mike F. guides Harry in the tamper



Harry operates the tamper. Steve shifts rock. Pam ready to pull the next jack and Mike W. maintains the track-level



The tamper was working great. The work-heads were descending deeply and the tines were squeezing



Clem, Frank, and Pam shifting ballast-rock so that there would be plenty for the tamper to shove under the ties



Mike F. offers a helping hand as Steve pulls a jack prior to the tamper tamping that tie



Leap-frogging forward, Mike W. and Pam jack and level the track



SSRR 2030 passes through the MOW Team's work-limits



Something ain't right here. Oh, the lift-cylinder is not lifting. The work head is now an anchor in the ground. And there's a train comin'?



Dave pilots the Kalamazoo as Mike F. drops ballast-rock from the center-dump hopper



Limping home without further incident: the tamper on the transfer table headed to Bay 5 of the Erecting Shop