

Greetings!

This is your Maintenance of Way Team update for November 17, 2013. We had a good week. High ranking government inspectors were out on the line with us. The State Parks' biologist joined the Weed Team on Tuesday and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Track Inspector surveyed our line on Friday. In the end, we received kudos for our hard labor maintaining this railroad's infrastructure by these state's regulators. Yes, it was a good week so, let's get right to it.

Tuesday, Mike Taylor and the Vegetation Vigilantes, Dave Megeath and Heather Kearns, were on guard defending our line from the likes of the *equisetum* invasion. The State Parks' biologist accompanied the Weedies this week to observe, first hand, their vegetation mitigation methodology. Needless to say, Mike's methods met with approval from the Parks' Department official. Congratulations to Mike, Heather, and Dave. Without their dedicated service, we'd have to shut down our railroad. Federal regulations have hard and fast rules regarding proximity of vegetation around the track. So, the next time you're out on the line, give a nod to the dedicated volunteers who tame the trees. We're all in their debt.

Meanwhile, back at the Shops, Pat Scholzen, Gene Peck, Cliff Hayes, Frank Werry, Alan Hardy, Heather, Harry Voss, and Chris Carlson were on hand striving to keep the MOW Team's mechanical operations on line. The A-6 motorcar is being restored to operation by Pat, Gene, Cliff, and Mike Harris. This is necessary as the A-4, the workhorse of our operation out on the line, is in desperate need of servicing. Yet, it cannot rest until the A-6 is restored and ready to take its place.

Thursday, Gene, Mike H., Cliff, Heather, and Frank kept up the team-spirit. Gene and Mike H. finished up work on the A-6. The mechanical work is now done. All that's left is to refit the signal triggering system. Cliff worked on our mobile lighting platform to light us up for outdoor work after dark. Frank led a crew over to Old Sacramento to get the A-4 set up for its big role escorting the CPUC inspector on Friday. Then, Frank and Heather loaded the section-gang machine into our trusty Chevy Truck, staging for Saturday's activities out on the line.

Friday, we were visited by the CPUC inspector. Frank and Alan joined the CPUC inspector on a *three-hour tour* of our line. After lengthy and positive discussions with the CPUC inspector, we were very pleased with his findings. According to the inspector, our line is in, "Very good shape," and is, "In much better shape than many lines," he inspects. He commended our efforts at keeping the line maintained. Everyone on our railroad crew should be pleased with the results of the state inspection. The track on which we run is safe and affirmed as such by an independent inspector. That should make everyone feel good. The hard work of the MOW Team and the "eagle eyes" of our trusty track inspectors have paid off.

Two pink boxes welcomed the crew on Saturday. Mike Miller, Steve Nemeth, Frank, Chris, Alan, Harry Voss, and Heather fueled up for a day of MOW fun. The goal was to change out switch ties from beneath Switch 16, the south Miller Park/Setzer Spur switch. Alas, we were plagued by a variety of issues that impeded our progress and delayed the deployment of our machines out on the line. But, *as our cause is just and our hearts are pure*, we persevered and were able to make our way down the line by noon. Replacing switch ties is more challenging than replacing standard ties because of the intricate components of the switch mechanism they support. Plus, the replacement ties are much heavier than standard ties. As we worked to remove the old switch ties, the hydraulic power of the section-gang machine tended to crush them, reducing them to splinters. In the end, we resulted to digging them out by hand – a slow and arduous task. After some strenuous effort, we managed to replace the offending ties with heavy-weight, hard-wood oak ties. Alan in the scarifer used the inserter mechanism to pull the new ties in place. Frank and Mike pulled spikes, removed and replaced plates, dug around, and nipped the ties. Steve, as EIC of the pneumatic spiker, spiked them down. In the end, we were pleased with our progress but know there is more to do. Which brings me to this coming week...

The Weed Team will meet on Tuesday at 8:30 a.m. at the Shops. They'll head down the line taming nature to railroad specifications. The Shops crew will meet as usual in the afternoon and evening. Rain conditions will be taken into account. Thursday, we'll meet again at 5 o'clock. Saturday, doughnuts will be served at 8 o'clock a.m. sharp. Then, we'll head out on the line to continue our noble efforts. After this Saturday, Polar Express begins its annual migration south to the North Pole! Hot Chocolate! Again, many thanks to our fantastic crews for all your hard work keeping our track safe and reliable.

We'll see you out on the line,

Alan, Chris, and Richard.



Mike seems to have the right idea. Let Steve do all the work...



Alan, Chris, and Frank work with the section-gang machine as it crushes the rotten tie they're trying to pull...





Alan surveys the splintering tie beneath Switch 16



Mike, Chris, Frank, and Steve use a chain to pull the rotten tie out with the section-gang machine





Action shot: the tie “explodes” into splinters as we work to remove it



The tie disintegrated into splinters. The only solution is to dig it out by hand.





With the offending tie removed, Steve guides the insertion of a new hard-wood oak tie with Alan on the Scarifer



The new tie being pulled into place





Harry at the helm of the A-4 as Steve uses the pneumatic spiker while Frank nips the tie



Chris guides Alan in the scarifer to line up with the now empty crib of the removed tie