

President's Report
September 9, 2021

The end of the operating season has come to a close. We had a smoky season and many days of high heat. The picture I included was taken the last weekend of operations. While the smoke cleared out, we did have some more fire issues north and east of the museum. Highway 70 was open from Portola to the junction at 395 on to Reno, but 395 north from Hallelujah Jct. was closed periodically due to the Dixie fire. West on Highway 70 from Quincy to Oroville was closed several times for extended periods of time due to the Dixie fire.

With the fires ever present, we watched with baited breath and so far we have dodged a bullet. The problem is, the fire season is just mid-way through and we'll have to continue to be vigilant till mid-November if the last two years are anything to judge by.

With the danger of fire in mind, we have been working on two things. First, with the help from Phil Schmierer, David Roth and Ethan Doty, fuel for fires has been addressed. Trees were trimmed and others removed. Some fire breaks were cut into the balloon area, but with the crowning of the fires I'm afraid that won't be of much help. This seems to be a summer of wind, as well as no summer thunder storms. So it is drier than normal and really susceptible to wildfires. Last summer Steve orchestrated a wholesale switching of cars, so our wooden problem child cars are for the most part in an area where there is little fuel for a fire to consume. Ethan and Phil did a big effort on grass and brush removal also. Unfortunately our rare spring thunderstorm was timed perfectly to get the horsetails growing again.

Second, our 1917 tank cars were brought out for inspection with the idea of using them to make our own fire train. At the moment the preliminary prognoses is they will work but need a lot of work to be ready. Also WP abused them something terrible in their later years, so if they do get pressed into service it has been suggested that we never fill them more than 3/4's full. Also there is a friend of the society that wants to donate a tank car from the mid-west that might be useful for extra water capacity. That car maybe a year away from arriving at Portola however.

I'd like to say a few words about the RAL program. We had just two engines running, the QRR 1100 and WP 1503. The SP 7823 is still out of the program until a few items are fixed. Also there have been requests for WP 707 and 917D pending repairs and being put back into the program. We probably would have had a few more RALs if they were running. But we did provide RALs this year and will do so until the weather and conditions make it unrealistic to offer them. I want to thank the RAL engineers for stepping up to the plate and giving the customers a great experience.

Greg Elems

