NWP Op Session Orientation

Welcome to my rendition of the Northwestern Pacific.

This layout is the third incarnation of this concept; construction started in 2003 and the beginnings of operation began in 2008, although things were fairly primitive until 2009.

Briefly, the layout runs best with about ten operators. There are three "executive" positions, two yardmasters and a dispatcher, three switching jobs (Petaluma & Santa Rosa, San Rafael Local, Gravel Train), up to two passenger trains, and an assortment of second class and eastbound extra freights. Operations are TT&TO, with the orders preprinted to ensure the layout doesn't get jammed up. Dispatchers are free to improvise, however.

The Railroad

The layout is based on the NWP during the era 1958-1960, when it was a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific. Most of its business is moving lumber, including redwood, from the North Coast of California to the interchange with its parent road at Schellville, near Sonoma, California. Much of the traffic the other way is empty boxcars and flatcars. Although it runs from Schellville to Eureka, only Petaluma, Santa Rosa, and Willits, basically the Santa Rosa subdivision, are depicted. The rest of the line is represented by staging. There are two levels, connected by a helix, and staging is accessed through another helix. The layout is approximately 13 x 17 feet. It runs on a Lenz DCC system.

The Petaluma & Santa Rosa, a local shortline, interchanges with the NWP at Petaluma and at Santa Rosa, with a stop in Sebastopol on the way. Its business includes moving apples and apple products. There is a dummy interchange with the California Western at Willits, connecting with Union Lumber in Fort Bragg. Here is is a crude schematic of the layout (Helix represented by dotted line, P&SR and CW by red lines):
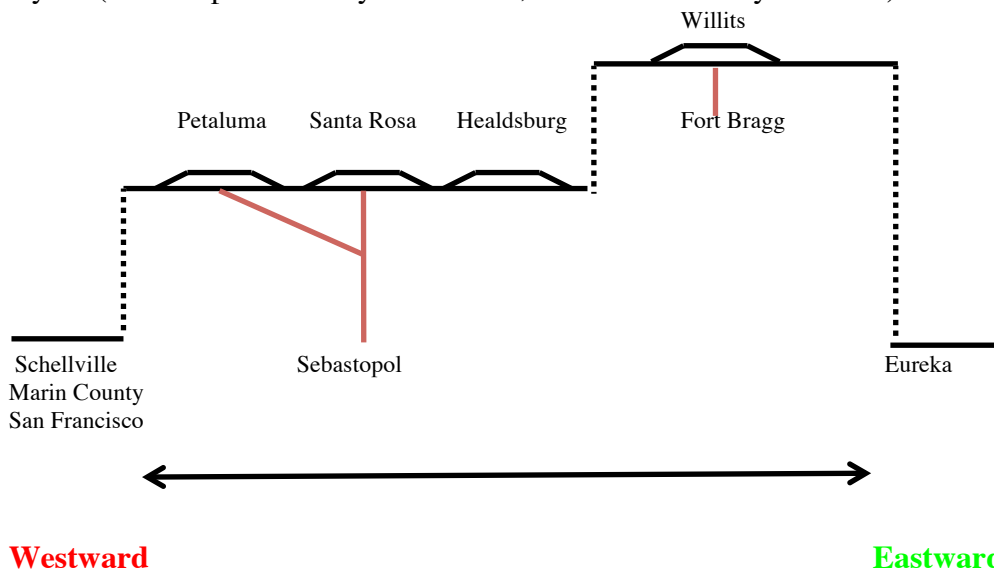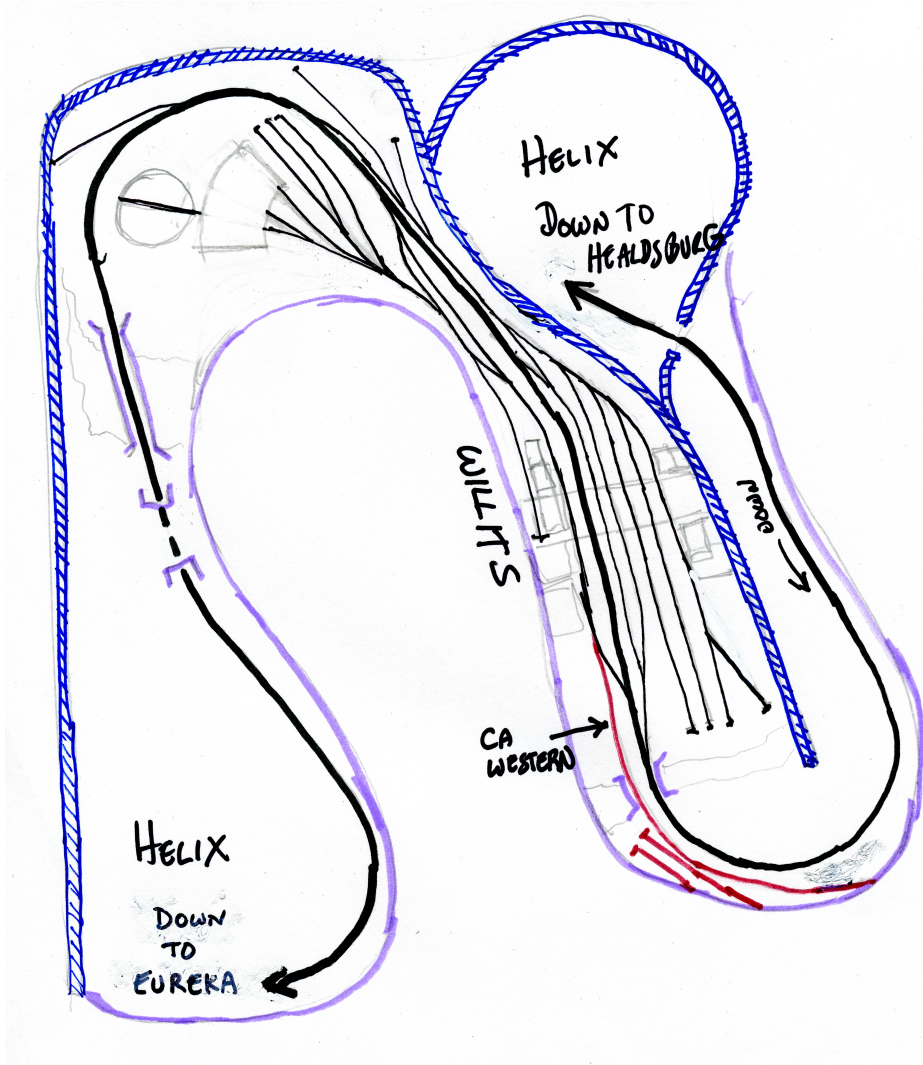
Here's a crude track plan:

Lower level (Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Healdsburg)

Upper Level:

HELIX
DOWN TO
HEALDSBURG

WILLITS

HELIX
DOWN
TO
EUREKA

CA
WESTERN
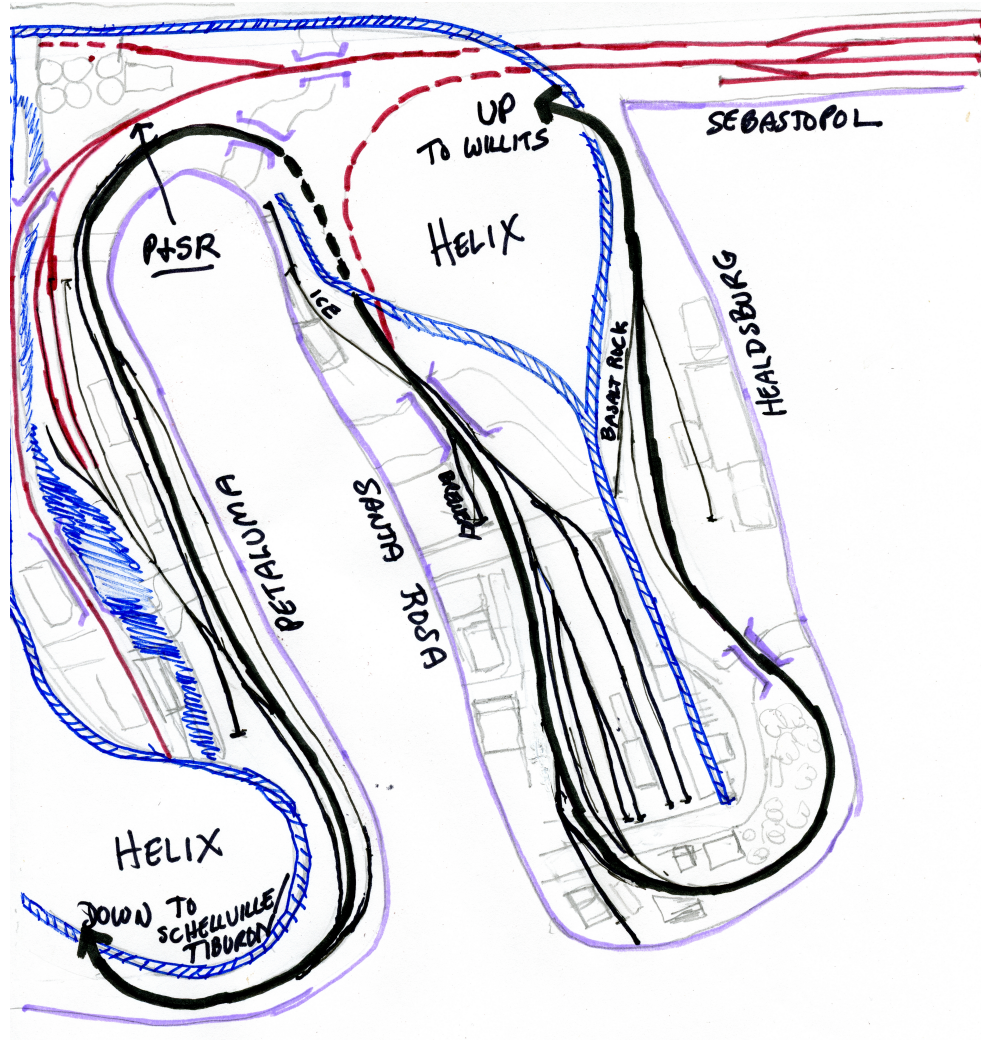
Here are a couple of overview photos from last year, minus some scenery put in since then:

Brief Overview of Operations

The NWP is dark, controlled by train order and timetable (7:1 fast clock). The only signals are in Petaluma, which guard the swing bridge at Haystack Landing. For now they are not operational. There are two clocks on the layout, so that one is always visible to the dispatcher and crews.

Train crews pick up their written orders from the appropriately labeled box at the "office" (see accompanying photo). We are using preprinted or "prefab" patterned after actual NWP flimsies. This makes it easier for new dispatchers to not foul everything up, but additional orders can be written as well to cover unforeseen circumstances.

Because this is in a small room, communications with the dispatcher are spoken, not radioed. However, because there is no railroad clock in the "lounge" there is a walkie-talkie to call crews in to their trains.

Each day, two westward 2nd class freights (#77, #75) depart from Eureka and terminate at Willits (division point) and two more (#81, #85) originate from Willits and terminate in Schellville/Sonoma. Trains # 77 and #85 are actually the same train, using the same motive power. Each day, two eastward extras depart Schellville for Eureka, also with

stops only in Petaluma and Willits. Meets between east and westward freights occur at Willits and Santa Rosa.

The San Rafael Local runs from San Rafael to Santa Rosa and Healdsburg and returns. It carries traffic to Marin County and San Francisco via Tiburon ferry. There is also a gravel train extra that runs between Marin County and Basalt Rock Company in Healdsburg, stopping to service Shamrock in Petaluma.

The P&SR runs on its own track with the exception of shared trackage in Santa Rosa and Petaluma (where there is an interchange). There is no timetable or dispatcher, but it has to request entry into Santa Rosa from the dispatcher; it runs daily from Petaluma, through Sebastopol to Santa Rosa, and back again.

Unlike the prototype, the Redwood (passenger) runs daily and in both directions, which makes things interesting by requiring a meet in Santa Rosa.

Job Assignments

Dispatcher – Issues train orders and controls traffic in and out of staging, remotely throwing turnout routes. Controls all movements on main, and acts as agent for Santa Rosa (P&SR requires dispatcher clearance to enter Santa Rosa).

Stagingmaster – When numbers permit, it is useful to have someone oversee and assist with staging rather than counting on everything to work perfectly.

Willits Yardmaster – The real NWP had station agents but no yardmasters. Train crews did their own switching. However, in the model version that would be inviting chaos. The Willits yardmaster assists westward and eastward freights in dropoffs and pickups, switches local industries, the freight station, and the CalWestern interchange.

Petaluma Yardmaster – Assists westward and eastward freights in dropoffs and pickups, switches local industries, freight station, and the P&SR interchange. Builds and breaks down San Rafael and Petaluma locals. This yardmaster has to become familiar with traffic that diverges to either Schellville or Tiburon.

Road crews (one person):

> Through freights: Westward 2nd class trains 81, 77, 85, 75; two eastward Extras
> San Rafael Local
> Gravel Train
> P&SR

Mechanical stuff

This is a Lenz controlled layout, but there are two different types of throttles. Many are unfamiliar with how the tethered Lenz LH90s and the CVP T9000 wireless throttles work, so I will be helping with that. The LH90s are used by yardmasters and through trains, the wireless by switching jobs (P&SR, locals, gravel) and passenger trains. If you have Withrottle you can use that instead, which also give you the option of throwing switches in staging by yourself.

Clipboards

Each train has a clipboard located on a hook or Velcro corresponding to the staging track or layout location where it originates. It includes a train description, key to routing colors, system map, and car cards/waybills. There are places to hang them on the fascia as you operate. When you have finished the job, hang the clipboard at the location it has arrived at.

Card and Card Boxes

We use old-fashioned car cards and waybills that are color coded to help with routing. The key to the colors is posted on each clipboard and at each yard.

Most card boxes have three slots. Those in the "Pull" box are to be picked up, those on the "Spot" slot need to be spotted at their industry. After a car is spotted, put its card in the "Hold" slot. If there is no room in the spur, leave the car on a nearby track and place its card in the "Spot" box.

In Petaluma and Santa Rosa there are separate card boxes for NWP and P&SR. Make sure to use the right one, identifiable by the RR logo. There is also a separate box for the NWP/P&SR interchange in Petaluma; the P&SR crew and the Petaluma yardmaster have to work together to swap cars back and forth.

Miscellaneous Details

In a number of places there is important information on the fascia:

Directional signs identify East or Westward direction (SP terminology).

Map diagrams in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, & Willits to locate industries and tracks.

For yardmasters there are instructions, lineups of A&D, and other guides.

Most turnouts are controlled by toggle switches, usually located near the turnout on the fascia. For ergonomic reasons some turnouts are controlled at two separate loctions. In those cases the direction the switch is thrown is indicated by LEDs on the fascia. Crossovers are controlled by toggles identified with a white "X." Because of benchwork

obstructions and other issues, a few are controlled by slide switches on the layout surface. Two in Willits are controlled by finger.

There are magnetic uncouplers in several hard to reach areas in Petaluma and Santa Rosa.

When Disaster Strikes

Loose parts – If you find any, please put in Loose Parts container on windowsill.

Malfunctioning Equipment – If possible, shunt to a nearby track or siding and place a bad order slip, located in Loose Parts container, on or beside it.

Derailments and other similar problems – Please alert me so I can make a note of it.

Hope you have a good time!