

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

Vol. 62, No. 7

The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

October 2001

Getting Ready

Co-op Gears Up For The Winter Ahead

In the woods the bears, chipmunks and squirrels have been scouting out crevices and hollow trees, on the lookout for a cozy hideaway for the winter. They're stashing stores of food because they know that when the snow comes food won't be easy to find. The woodchucks and voles are digging in for the season, too, and the mice are seeking shelter (and finding it, often as not, in folks' houses).

The deer have a different way of sniffing the air these autumn days. Not long ago they were grazing languidly among the rich, soft colors of summer, in plain sight of farmsteads and housing developments. But they're growing wary now, as if they can sense that there's more on the line as the days grow crisp. High overhead, chevrons of Canada geese bark like distant dogs as they soar past us journeying south. On the ground, people stop what they're doing to watch them go by.

The critters are getting ready for winter. It's best we do, too.

Squirreling away

The annual, pre-winter activities have picked up steam at Washington Electric

Co-op. Mechanic Brad Nutbrown has been rotating the trucks and other vehicles in and out of his service bay, changing the crankcase oil and mounting them with heavy, studded snow tread. He's got the two Skidoo worksleds tuned up and ready to go. These are special "industrial-strength" sleds, geared lower than recreational snowmobiles; the line crews use them primarily to blaze trail and transport equipment when they've got to reach remote sections of power line. After the Skidoos have gone in and packed down the snow the linemen follow on snowshoes, carrying additional gear.

"Last winter the snow was so deep and wet that the sleds weren't very effective," recalled line crew Foreman Bob Fair. "Mainly all we did was manage to get them stuck."

He's hoping for more favorable working conditions this winter.

Meanwhile, the line workers have been readying their equipment – heavy yellow rain/snow gear, thick gloves and flashlights for those cold nights repairing outages in the dark, snowshoes for tromping through the woods to get to power lines

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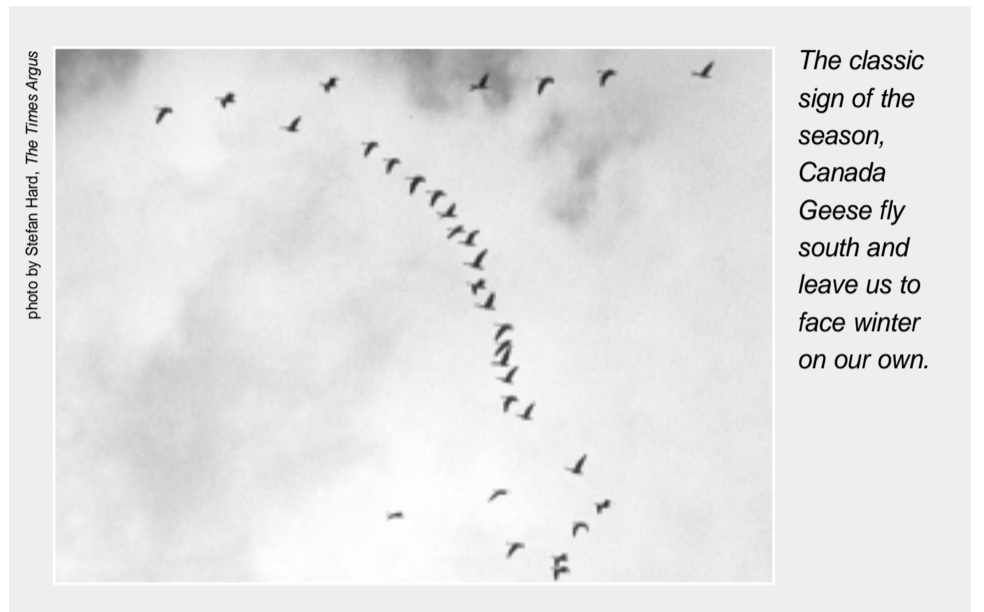


photo by Stefan Hard, The Times Argus

The classic sign of the season, Canada Geese fly south and leave us to face winter on our own.

Winter Power Outages A Fact Of Life

But Together We Can Minimize The Misery

Let's call a spade a spade. Winter is coming, and there are going to be power outages.

People don't like outages and your Co-op's goal in life is to avoid them by maintaining the electric lines and rights-of-way diligently. But as sure as there will be snow, ice and high winds fouling up the power lines and the exposed electrical equipment, and broken trees that come crashing down across the wires, there are going to be outages.

There can be other causes of power outages, such as faulty equipment. And outages also happen in the summer,

though most of those are planned, short-term shutdowns related to construction and maintenance projects on the lines. However, history proves that by far the greatest cause of power outages, and the cause of the longest-lasting outages, is storms. And the most damaging storms usually occur in the fall and winter.

WEC works hard at this time of year to get ready for storms and outages (see "Getting Ready," this page). Individuals can prepare for wintertime outages, too. Here are some things your Co-op urges you to do and to keep in mind.

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Inside

October is National Cooperative Month, and WEC and VSECU are cooperating. Washington Electric Co-op members can join the credit union and apply for an affordable, cost-reducing Energy Improvement Loan. See page 8.

'Short Circuits,' a new feature, debuts in this issue of Co-op Currents. The column will provide news capsules pertaining to state, national and international energy-related stories. Short Circuits premieres this month on page 2.

Maintaining the right-of-way is a constant challenge for WEC, and one in which Co-op members can assist – in their own best interest. WEC Board member Monique Hayden provides insights on page 4.



'Brontosaurus Loose In Tunbridge!' No, it's not Jurassic Park. It's a faster, safer, labor-saving device WEC is using to clear overgrown ROW. Story on page 5.

Security is the watchword these days, and no less in the electric utility industry. For concerns about security in Vermont see Avram Patt's 'Manager's Report,' page 3.

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Board of Directors			
President	BARRY BERNSTEIN	1237 Bliss Road, Marshfield, Vt. 05658	456-8843
		bbearvt@aol.com	
Vice President	ROGER FOX	2067 Bayley-Hazen Rd., East Hardwick, Vt. 05836-9873	563-2321
		rfox@vtlink.net	
Treasurer	DONALD DOUGLAS	21 Douglas Rd., East Orange, Vt. 05086	439-5364
		Runasimi2@aol.com	
Clerk	JAY O'REAR	P.O. Box 5, Calais, Vt. 05648	223-2218
		Orear@sover.net	
	WENDELL CILLEY	5 Warsley Road, West Topsham, Vt. 05086	439-6138
		Cilley@sover.net	
	MONIQUE HAYDEN	407 Weir Road; Williamstown, Vt. 05679	433-6170
		mkrvt@aol.com	
	CORNELIA D. SWAYZE	RR 1, Box 158; Tunbridge, Vt. 05077	889-5556
		corneliaswayze@innevi.com	
	CARLA R. PAYNE	1554 US Rt. 2; West Danville, Vt. 05873	563-2390
		cpayne@together.net	
	RICHARD RUBIN	3496 East Hill Rd., Plainfield, Vt. 05667	454-8542
		richardrubin@hotmail.com	
	AVRAM PATT	WILL LINDNER	TIM NEWCOMB
	General Manager	Editor	Layout
	Avram@Washingtonco-op.com	Willind@aol.com	
Editorial Committee			
	Avram Patt	Donald Douglas	Wendell Cilley
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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, contact Management and Programs Administrator Denise Jacques, 802-223-5245.



The California Public Utilities Commission voted 3-2 on Sept. 20 to immediately suspend consumers' right to choose their power providers, one of the cornerstones of the state's 1996 deregulation plan. Large industrial power customers unsuccessfully lobbied the PUC to maintain retail choice, saying they had saved millions of dollars by switching electricity providers. However, deregulation has been controversial because California has experienced price fluctuations and power shortages since the inception of the plan. The PUC decision was expected after the state Department of Water Resources purchased power for strapped customers of the state's largest investor-owned electric utilities. Maintaining consumer choice would mean allowing those customers to switch providers, which then would have hurt the DWR's ability to pay for the power purchases.

New York Gov. George Pataki said on Sept. 25 that he had directed the New York Power

Authority to provide 80 megawatts of low-cost electricity to businesses dislocated as a result of the destruction of the World Trade Center. The power "will play a key role in helping these businesses get back on their feet," Pataki said. The electricity is priced about 25 percent lower than commercial rates.

Drought-like conditions extending through September resulted in the shutdown of several Vermont hydro-electric plants. Lyndonville Electric Department's two dams on the Passumpsic River were idled on July 28, and the Barton municipal electric company reported there was no water flowing through its hydro station. Hardwick Electric Department's generating plant on the Lamoille River in Wolcott shut down for two months. "I can turn it on but it shuts itself down in an hour because of the low flow," said Operations Manager Bill Pickens. At Green Mountain Power Corp.'s eight hydro plants production is about 50 percent of what it was last year. WEC's Wrightsville facility is similarly affected.

Santee Cooper, South Carolina's state-owned electric

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Manager's Report

Security Now On Everyone's Mind; Also, WEC And The '7 Co-op Principles'

by Avram Patt

Each of us in our own way continues to try to comprehend the meaning and the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, even as we ponder the possibility of further threats. As we all know, the nation and Vermont are on alert, and that certainly includes the energy industry.

If you had asked me even a short while ago about "security threats" to Washington Electric Co-op's system from people with malicious intent, I would probably have smiled. I would have told you that on rare occasions some fools have taken potshots at equipment on our poles (a problem not unique to WEC). A few years ago during a major storm, an irate member whose power had been out for a while but who could see neighbors' lights on, threatened to do some violence to one of our substations, so that the neighbors would be in the dark too. (We notified the police, but he apparently thought better of it and nothing happened.)

And some of our employees who have the unpleasant job of disconnecting people for nonpayment occasionally have threats directed at them when they arrive on the premises.

In some ways, those are still the kind of small-town "security threats" we worry about. We serve only a little over 9,000 members, almost all of them residential. If someone wanted to do a lot of damage, it's easy to assume that they would go elsewhere.

But as we have explained at other times, most recently during the "Y2K" preparations of 1999, our little electric distribution system is connected to the larger North American power grid. Almost all the power we deliver to you comes to WEC from outside our territory, much of it from generating plants in Vermont but a sizable portion from other states and Canada. And of course the fuels we use in our homes, businesses and cars come from much farther away.

The companies that operate nuclear plants, other large generating plants, major electric transmission lines, pipelines and refineries have been paying attention to security concerns for a long time. Although terrorist attacks, accidents or

natural catastrophes can do much damage, the systems are built to assure that they keep operating, or recover quickly even if parts of them are damaged.

After September 11, there is of course much more public focus on this, whether it is Gov. Dean expressing concern about



Avram Patt

airplanes flying over Vermont Yankee, biological or chemical threats, or the general sense of apprehension that we all have. I can tell you that the companies operating generating plants and the large transmission systems have heightened their security measures, as have other industries and government facilities.

And at the Co-op, we are paying attention too. In these difficult times, as we wonder where the country and the world are heading, we of course hope that the precautions that are being taken are sufficient. More than that, we hope that they are never needed.

What Being A Co-op Means

Since October is National Co-op Month, I would like to offer a few thoughts about what being a cooperative business means to us.

Although WEC's poles and wires might look the same as any other utility's, being a co-op does make a real difference. Here on this page you will find the International Cooperative Principles, which cooperatives around the world use to guide them. At Washington Electric Co-op, we are guided by these principles when the management and your Board of Directors are faced with major decisions. Can we replace our Vermont Yankee power with green energy? Should we offer new products and services to our members? How we can improve the information we provide and our communication with our members?

We are also guided by the Cooperative Principles in our daily interaction with our customers, because those customers are our members and owners.

As we look to improve or expand service to our members, we often find ourselves doing so in cooperation with other co-ops. Whether it is the new Energy Efficiency Loan program now available to you through the Vermont State Employees Credit Union, the ski discount at Mad River Glen, or some of

the new products we are offering such as surge suppressors and uninterruptible power supply (UPS) units, we are following one of those seven cooperative principles. We work with other co-ops, not just

for the principle's sake; we do it because we are working with partners we can trust, whose interests are the same as

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The Cooperative Principles

Cooperatives worldwide generally operate using the same principles as adopted in 1995 by the International Cooperative Alliance. The principles are part of a cooperative statement of identity which also includes the definition of a cooperative and a list of cooperative values.

Definition

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles

- **Voluntary and Open Membership** — Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.
- **Democratic Member Control** — Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), and cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.
- **Member Economic Participation** — Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of

their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

- **Autonomy and Independence** — Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.
- **Education, Training and Information** — Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of cooperation.
- **Cooperation among Cooperatives** — Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.
- **Concern for Community** — While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

What You Can Do To Protect WEC's Rights-Of-Way

A Board Member Passes Along Her Learning

By Monique Hayden

As a member of the Power and Operations Committee of Washington Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors, I am frequently involved in detailed discussions about power and operations issues. Power issues usually focus on individual power contracts and WEC's total power-supply portfolio. Operations issues encompass a much broader scope of subjects, from safety to efficiency to equipment. All issues come down to dollars – specifically, how to be as frugal as possible with our members' money while providing safe, reliable power for everyone.

One operations issue that is frequently discussed is right-of-way (ROW) maintenance. In simple terms, ROW maintenance involves trimming, removing and reducing the growth of trees and other vegetation underneath and next to power lines. This maintenance must be done on a regular basis to keep up with the reforestation of the territory. The ideal frequency of ROW maintenance varies widely throughout the territory.

There are many ways to address ROW maintenance. When I spent time with the line crews this summer I learned about some of those methods, and why it takes a combination of methods to properly maintain the diverse territory served by our Co-op. While some of the things I observed were obvious, much of what I learned made sense only after traveling through different towns served by WEC and seeing how the work was done.

There are several things members can do to help the Co-op with ROW maintenance, and I believe many of the members would gladly lend a hand if they were aware of some of the simple things that can be done. Much of the Co-op's territory is rural, and many of the power lines are not found along roadsides but have been run up the sides of mountains and across fields. When our Co-op first began the lines were installed on the most direct route possible, which frequently meant that they were erected across pasture and open areas. Our predecessors had no way of anticipating



the decline of farming in rural Vermont and the resulting changes to the landscape as open farmland has slowly reforested itself. Those direct routes that seemed like a good idea at the time now present the Co-op with power lines in heavily wooded areas that are difficult to reach and repair in storms, difficult to routinely examine for damage, and difficult for controlling tree growth under and around the lines.

A delicate balance

Clearing trees presents several challenges. It has been the policy of the Co-op to clear vegetation without the use of herbicides. When areas are flat-cut with chain saws the stumps that remain send out not one, but many new shoots. Over time, this can mean that the more we cut, the more we need to cut.

Plants naturally try to regenerate themselves. Our challenge is to prevent or limit the plant's ability to send out new regenerating shoots. The Co-op has recently begun using a Brontosaurus™ in some places to clear young trees. The Brontosaurus™ shreds the tree and pulverizes the stumps, inhibiting the unwanted re-growth. In areas where the Brontosaurus™ has been used the re-growth of trees has been reduced dramatically and low-growing berry bushes are beginning to fill in the cleared areas.

The Co-op tries to limit the amount of clear-cutting that must be done. Efforts are made to remove trees that grow too close to the lines, trees that grow too tall under the lines, and trees with shallow root structures that make them likely candidates to fall on the lines during a storm.

While some tree removal is necessary, equal efforts are made to preserve tree species that do not pose a threat. As you might guess, this requires that ROW crews maintain a balance between removing a sufficient amount of vegetation to assure reliability and crew safety while retaining vegetation that will crowd out less-desirable species and avoid a look of clear-cutting.

Another management method is to take advantage of roadways whenever possible, crisscrossing the lines back and

forth between poles on either side of the road. This limits vegetation growth under the lines.

Think before planting

So what can members do to help the Co-op with ROW management?

The first step is simply being more aware of the power lines and nearby vegetation. The next step would be to consider the impact of any new trees or shrubs before you plant them. The Co-op can identify species that will not grow tall enough to come in contact with the wires, and which can actually be beneficial by limiting the growth of taller and more-troublesome species. Taller species may still be planted, but well-enough away from the power lines so that as they mature they do not grow into the wires.

It is also important to consider the root structure of trees planted near power lines. Trees with shallow root structures can become uprooted and fall on the electric wires lines during a storm. The Co-op can provide distance guidelines for planting, and can recommend various shrubs and trees that are best suited to grow near power lines. Consulting the Co-op before planting can avoid the unpleasant task of removing or trimming trees that, as they mature, interfere with providing reliable power and safe working conditions.

Whenever possible WEC takes advantage of other opportunities to keep short spans of line clear of threatening vegetation. Examples of this type of ROW management include extending grazing pastures to encompass ROW corridors, and working with loggers to remove trees and trim around power lines when they are logging in Co-op territory. Some Co-op members also mow under power lines at the same time an adjacent field is being mowed.

But while these creative methods work well in some areas, WEC serves a diverse territory. It is therefore necessary for the Co-op to continue to utilize a variety of methods to manage the vegetation growth along the rights-of-way.

Prevention

By spending time with the line crews I have become more aware of the impact trees and shrubs have on the power

lines. I am aware of the reliability issues and damage caused by trees growing into the lines. I have also begun to notice young trees that have been planted too close to the lines and that will, in the not-too-distant future, need to be removed. Removing healthy trees is something the Co-op works diligently to avoid. Raising

The Co-op can provide distance guidelines for planting, and recommend shrubs and trees best suited to grow near power lines.

members' awareness of ROW issues can help limit the number of new trees that will become future problems, and may even increase the number of new trees and shrubs that can live harmoniously in close proximity to the power lines.

ity to the power lines.

I hope more Co-op members will consider the location of the power lines before they plant, and will work with the Co-op to select locations and species that meet their needs while helping to preserve safe and reliable power for everyone.

Monique Hayden, of Williamstown, serves on WEC's Board of Directors.

Marketplace

FOR SALE: 1996 Saab 900SE. Five-door, silver, with black leather interior; 6-disk CD player, sunroof, rimmed snow tires. Ext. warrantee. 100,000 miles. Excellent condition. \$12,000 or best offer. Call 244-1565.

FOR SALE: English setter puppies. 26 grand champions, six Hall of Fames in their pedigrees. Excellent family pets, very sweet dispositions and love kids. Once you own an English setter you'll never want a different breed. Call 802-454-7198.

FOR SALE: Parts of late-'60s VW bug. Front and back hoods, seat, motor. Make me an offer. Call 434-3748. Leave a message.

FOR SALE: De Armond 5-string electric bass (with low B string). Model Pilot V. White, a year and a half old. Includes hard-shell case. Excellent condition. \$300 or best offer. Call 476-3740.

'Dr. Dinosaur'

Brontosaurus Treats ROW On A Grand Scale

Clearing right-of-way (ROW) is a labor-intensive and potentially dangerous proposition, but a necessity for electric utilities. Over the past two summers, however, Washington Electric Cooperative has found an alternative to deploying three-man crews with chain saws, cables and other equipment. In some locations where the ROW is wide enough, and not close to roads or residences, a machine called the Brontosaurus™ lives up to its name. With its long neck, bulky body and voracious appetite, this mechanical herbivore can clear about 7,500 feet of ROW (measured along a 50-foot-wide right-of-way) in a week's time – more than three times the ground covered by a human crew – and it can do it more safely and efficiently. These are important considerations for maintaining WEC's 1,200 miles of power line corridor.

The Brontosaurus™ will not replace human labor. In the majority of the service territory conditions are not right for its use. But for certain large jobs, like re-clearing 50-foot-wide ROWs along three-phase power lines that tra-

verse the rugged countryside to settlements scattered through Co-op Country, or for 100-foot-wide transmission-line corridors (Washington Electric owns 20 miles of transmission line), the Brontosaurus™ is the cat's meow.

"It's comparatively safe," says ROW Management Coordinator Mike Myers, "because you don't have men cutting with chain saws around power lines. You have one operator, and a ground man who flags obstacles like fence lines, and points out young trees, like low-growing apple trees, that we don't want to harm."

Because the whirring metal teeth in the head assembly churn stalks, leaves, branches and trunks alike, what's left is a ground covering of biodegradable mulch (chips and sticks); no piles of branches lining the ROW, and a safer surface for line crews performing repairs and maintenance later on. Chipping the stumps slows re-growth of many tree species, although Myers concedes, "You get some roots that will survive and eventually grow up into the conductors (power lines) overhead, so periodically you have to revisit the area."

But on the right terrain the



Brontosaurus™ is impressive. Essentially a rotary mower built onto an Excavator, the machine can track safely across soft, steep or uneven ground. WEC contracts for this service with New England Right-of-Way, of Weare, New Hampshire. In addition to electric utilities, the company also works for railroads, ski areas and airports.

Before he sends the Brontosaurus™ to work in an area Myers posts a letter to local Co-op members explaining the purpose of the machine and inviting people to call with questions or concerns. These photos were taken at a re-clearing project in Tunbridge in September.

Above and below, the Brontosaurus™ tackles a length of transmission line ROW on a steep hillside in Tunbridge where much of the growth was well over 10 feet tall. At left, company owner Jim Foote (left) and operator Bob Barnard pose next to their pride and joy.



Manager's Report

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ours: to provide benefits to our members.

And finally, as we reported in the last issue of *Co-op Currents*, we are once again preparing to issue approximately \$200,000 in capital credit refunds. Every WEC member who bought power from us in 2000 will receive a refund based on the amount of your patronage during that year. Amounts under \$20 will be credited on your November bill. If the amount is

larger than \$20, you will receive a check in December. In addition, we will be completing the refunds owed to members from the year 1982, which we began last year.

There is no more tangible benefit of cooperative ownership than the patronage refund. Every successful business distributes revenues received in excess of expenses to its owners. The difference is that cooperative businesses are owned by the people they serve.

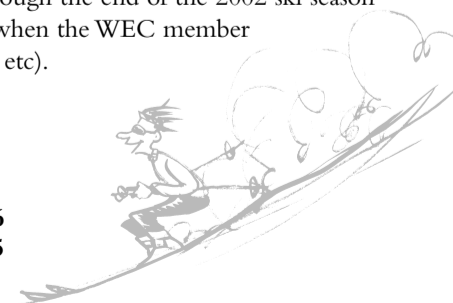
And so at Washington Electric Co-op, we return those funds to you.

Mad River Glen Renews Discount Offer to WEC Members

Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) is proud to offer a member discount at the nation's only cooperatively-owned ski area, Mad River Glen in Waitsfield, Vermont. This discount is valid for WEC members through the end of the 2002 ski season (or April 2002). This discount is valid only when the WEC member provides sufficient photo ID (driver's license, etc). Call the Co-op to get your coupon.

**MAD RIVER GLEN'S
2001 - 2002 SPECIAL TICKET PRICING:**

**Weekday Co-op Member price . . . \$26
Weekend Co-op Member price . . . \$35**



Power Outages

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Readiness

New Co-op members who move into our service territory receive a membership packet, which includes an insert titled "Current Interruptus." It contains useful information that can help people keep safe, live temporarily without electricity if need be, and communicate effectively with the Co-op to help us find your problem and fix it as quickly as possible.

Copies of this useful, four-page pamphlet are available at no charge from WEC. It can also be found on the Co-op's website, www.washingtonco-op.com. (click on Outage Report, on the home page).

"Current Interruptus" contains some information that may seem obvious to many longtime Co-op members, but is less so to newcomers to Vermont or people who are new to rural living. There is a list of things that all rural households should have on hand in case of a winter emergency, such as a First Aid kit, battery-powered radio, flashlights and spare batteries, sleeping bags, freezer ice packs and a cooler for storing foods (your refrigerator won't be running). Plus, good-old duct tape.

The pamphlet also points out that most water pumps won't work during an outage. If you know a storm is approach-

ing, WEC suggests you fill containers with water, and perhaps even fill your bathtub.

Members who want to provide their own back-up power can buy a generator. Washington Electric helps its members understand their options for generators, and provides important advice about sizing them correctly. Please call Bill Powell at the Co-op for this useful service. (But when it comes to installing generators, WEC urges people to hire a licensed electrician.) Other protective options include UPS units (Uninterruptable Power Supply, a device that protects computers from a sudden loss of power), and surge suppressors to prevent damage to your electronic equipment from fluctuations in current that may occur when a storm is in the area. WEC sells these devices through a cooperative network. Call us, or check our website.

Reporting outages

Once last winter a problem developed on the main power line that connects WEC's Jackson Corners substation in Williamstown to residential areas near Northfield. More than 100 homes and buildings lost their power, but no one called the Co-op to report the outage. So it went on, needlessly, for some time.

"If people don't call, we simply do not know (about outages)," says Dan Weston, director of engineering and operations. "The most important thing mem-

When you call, be prepared to provide three essential pieces of information:

- the name of the Co-op member who has lost power. (Sometimes the call is made from another house and it is not clear to WEC which residence is without power.)
- the address of the home without power. (You may know your road by a traditional local name, but WEC's mapping system conforms to the official 911 system.)
- your map location number. (It appears on your electric bill. We suggest you copy it down and keep it near your phone.)

bers can do when they've experienced an outage is to call the Co-op. They should never rely on their neighbor to call unless they've checked with that person and know for sure that they have called."

Even then, people should be watchful. They may see their neighbor's lights go back on but continue not to have power themselves. Sometimes people who live within sight of each other actually get their power from different "feeders" – lines that come from different directions – or there could be isolated electrical problems that affect only their own home,

business or farm. If they haven't called the Co-op, WEC may not know about it.

"Quite often we'll go into an area, put all the main lines back on and move on, and there will still be people left behind without power," says Weston. "That's why it's imperative that they keep us informed. We're experimenting with technology that may allow us to know when an outage occurs on a particular feeder, but we're not done testing yet. At the present time, the ones we know for sure are without power are the folks who tell us."

When you call, be prepared to provide three essential pieces of information.

First, the name of the Co-op member who has lost power.

Sometimes a relative or neighbor makes the call, or the member might go to someone else's home to use the phone, and in the transfer of information it is not clear to WEC's telephone receptionist whose house has lost power.


Second, the address of the home or building without power.

The implementation of 911 services has resulted in many rural road names being changed. You may know your road by a traditional local name, but WEC's mapping system conforms to the official 911 addresses. WEC's Dan Weston says this confusion causes more problems than you'd expect.

And third, **know your map location number.** It's the best identification

WEC CO-OP STORE

FEATURED PRODUCT




Nighthawk Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detector

Call for details. Retail \$61. Member discount price: \$48.15, plus s/h, VT tax.

MEMBER SKI DISCOUNT
Mad River Glen Co-Op

Co-op Members ski cheap at Mad River.
Contact Co-op for details and discount coupon.

Lighting Products
Contact the Co-op for high-quality efficient products at member discount prices.



Home and Appliance Protection Products
Prevent damage to appliances from storm and other damage.

Call the Co-op at 800-932-5245
or visit us on the web at www.washingtonco-op.com

you can give. It pinpoints you right down to the nearest power pole. Your map location number appears on your electric bill. We suggest you copy it down and keep it near your phone, along with fire, police and other emergency numbers.

How WEC responds

In a storm that causes widespread outages, WEC restores power to the largest number of people first and works down from there.

That means our crews' first priority is to check out the substations and fix any problems they encounter there. The next priority is the main lines that carry power, perhaps for miles, from the substations to neighborhoods, settlements or groups of homes. If they can restore power to 1,000 home connections by repairing a broken

three-phase feeder, or to 20 by working on a side tap, or to one or two homes serviced by a spur off of the nearest circuit, the crew will work from the largest number of affected members down to the smallest.

A benefit of the storm-response system instituted in the central office last year (again, see "Getting Ready") is that WEC's member services representatives can now give callers better information about ongoing repair efforts in their areas. People can know more about the progress of work that, sooner or later, will lead to their reconnection.

(A side point: In some cases the transmission lines that carry power to the substation are owned by another company. If the transmission lines are damaged WEC coordinates repairs with that company.)

Ounces of prevention

For WEC, an important concern when a storm hits is to contact members who have medical needs, like support equipment, that relies on electricity. If that's you, make sure you're on our list. If you know of someone in that situation, ask that person whether he or she is on the medical list of the utility (the Co-op or some other company) that serves them.

An important way people can help avoid outages is by letting us know about dying or rotten trees that are leaning toward the power lines.

"If we can take care of a situation like that ahead of time, by removing the tree or at least trimming back the dangerous part, we can avoid an extended outage," says Weston.

"Prevention is a whole lot easier than cure."

Members are encouraged to use our website – www.washingtonco-op.com – where WEC posts general information about larger outages and repair efforts. Washington Electric also keeps radio stations informed of real or potential problems so that they can help alert our members. Tune in to station WDEV, WNCS, WSKI, WORK and WCVR for these updates.

A winter without storm-related power outages is rare in central Vermont. But being prepared for outages, and helping your Co-op make outages as brief as possible, is within our grasp if we work together.

Getting Ready

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that in many places run crosslots up, down and over the Vermont countryside. Warehouse man Scott Martino has been inventorying the supplies that will be needed – ropes, wire splices, spare fuses, insulators and transformers – and laying in extra stock to be on hand when the first winter storms arrive.

And Dan Weston has been dialing away on the telephone.

"We have to make sure our mutual assistance arrangements with other electric utilities are up-to-date, and share information with everyone," said Weston.

"Through the Northeast Public Power Association (an organization of co-ops and municipal utilities) we have formal, written agreements about sharing our resources during emergencies, so we know what size crews we each have and what equipment is available. I know, for example, what New Hampshire Electric Cooperative could supply in the event of a major storm. We know each other's pagers and emergency contact numbers."

Some of the preparations are less formal. Weston has touched base with the municipal electric utilities in Swanton, Morrisville and Hardwick, agreeing that they and Washington Electric will try to be there for each other if – no, when – the necessity arises.

"Often, though," said Weston, "Hardwick experiences the same weather systems that we do, so if we're struggling they're struggling. The utilities that are a little farther away might be a better bet for getting help."

It's not just the calendar that tells WEC's workers that it's time to gear up for winter. Squirrels, field mice and geese don't need calendars, and neither did Dan



WEC mechanic Brad Nutbrown prepares a truck for winter service, while in the pit the studded snow tires await mounting. Left, two pairs of snowshoes, the Vermont lineman's friend.



Weston. "The first frost reminded me I'd better get going on this," he said. "It was a reminder of what's coming."

On-call

What's coming, of course, is snow. And sleet. And wind. And downed power lines.

"Some utilities don't like talking about this, because they think it sounds like their systems are in bad shape," said Weston. "Our system is not in bad shape. It's simply a matter of exposure. We've got 1,200 miles of power line out there, and this is Vermont. We know what's coming, and we prepare for it."

One important means of preparation was the improved technology that was installed late last fall, which enables the Co-op to receive a higher volume of simultaneous phone calls from members reporting outages. The new, computerized system also enables staff to provide more accurate information to the callers, more quickly, by adding their information to information WEC may already have

received from neighbors, line workers or other sources. The member-services representatives running the phone system can then explain the status of local outages.

"We found last winter that providing people with better information was helpful to them," said General Manager Avram Patt. "It doesn't mean we can tell people exactly when their power will be restored; during a storm we can't make promises, in case things don't go according to plan. But people generally take some comfort from understanding the local situation and how it's affecting them."

WEC also keeps vigilant watch on weather forecasts. This information comes from a variety of sources, including Worcester weatherman Roger Hill, the Vermont Emergency Management Agency (VEMA), and the federal National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"Usually, it's common knowledge when a storm is approaching," said Weston. "But we have to stay attuned to the



details. A change of just a few degrees in temperature can cause icing on the lines, and we might go from having no outages to having lots of them in a

hurry. We monitor storm conditions continuously. Any time, the crews can turn on NOAA from their truck radios and get an update."

To ensure a quick response when a member reports an outage during off hours (nights and weekends), WEC designates an "on-call" man, rotating the duty weekly among the nine Class A line workers on WEC's 12-person crew.

"If you're on-call you take home the Trouble Truck, which is outfitted with everything you need to make repairs. You carry a beeper and a cell phone for round-the-clock connections with central dispatch, which, after hours, is Rinkers Communications. Rinkers has our map information and can identify where the caller is located. They'll then get the on-call man out of bed, and in many cases he will phone the member first to try to troubleshoot the problem. But if that doesn't get results, he'll take the Trouble Truck, pick up one of the other linemen and get out there to fix it."

Somehow, Weston said with a laugh, it always seems that storms and off-hour outages happen on Friday nights and weekends. Or, even worse, on the first day of deer season.

"But we post a schedule during hunting so I know who's going to be home and available on which nights. If somebody's off at deer camp, we even know where deer camp is, and they have their cell phones with them."

"No Vermonter likes to give up deer camp," he said. "And even though I know it's their job, I still I think it's a great gesture on their part to always be available."

Let's just hope it's a quiet hunting season this year. There may be plenty of action later on.

VSECU 'Energy Loan' Apt For Co-op Month

Every year in October, U.S. co-ops celebrate National Cooperative Month in recognition of the important role that co-ops play in the economic life of our country and the lives of American citizens and families.

This year brings a new example of one of the primary advantages of cooperative membership, which is the teamwork and partnership frequently displayed among co-ops. Such partnerships can enable the members of one kind of cooperative to enjoy the benefits extended by another kind of co-op.

The example at hand is a new low-cost, fixed-rate loan program from the Vermont State Employees Credit Union (VSECU) that helps people make energy-efficiency improvements in their homes and businesses. The program can also help people purchase new Energy Star-rated electric appliances.

VSECU's "Energy Improvement Loan" arose out of the credit union's year-old partnership with Washington Electric Cooperative, which was formalized in the summer of 2000. Because of that association, the owner/members of Washington Electric can become members of the credit union even if they are not state employees, and participate in programs of the VSECU.

The new Energy Improvement Loan program was strongly influenced by Washington Electric. For several years WEC has extended programs to its membership designed to help them reduce their electricity

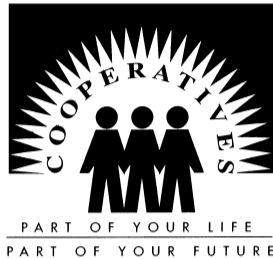
consumption, or, if they are building new homes, incorporate design features to achieve both conservation and comfort.

But while WEC has been able to help arrange financing for some projects, it is not a lending institution. That's where VSECU comes in. Credit unions are member-owned and -controlled financial institutions. As such, their lending rates are primarily designed to be affordable for the membership.

In the case of the VSECU's Energy Improvement Loan, the goals and values of the two cooperatives worked hand-in-glove.

"The credit union provides excellent financial services," said WEC Products and Services Director Bill Powell, "but it didn't have an efficiency-driven loan product. This new program was a year in the

making. We encouraged VSECU to consider the financial benefits of energy efficiency for its members, as well as the conservation benefits for the environment. The boards of both organizations were supportive of that goal.



PART OF YOUR LIFE
PART OF YOUR FUTURE

"We then helped to design the program – to identify what aspects of energy efficiency would be most applicable and beneficial to Vermonters in their homes and businesses. We're very pleased with the results," Powell said, and added, "We want to encour-

age our members to consider this opportunity. If they've been contemplating making home improvements, and want to do so with the idea of lowering their energy costs, here is a good way to pay for it."

What's covered?

Examples of qualifying energy improvements include installing efficient central heating and cooling systems and retrofitting windows, doors, siding and roofs with superior products that promote conservation. Loans can also help pay for energy-efficient lighting systems, and the ventilation systems recommended for a tightly constructed home or office.

WEC and VSECU members can also use the Energy Improvement Loan to purchase Energy Star-rated appliances, such as refrigerators, stoves, air conditioning units and dehumidifiers. Energy Star also rates electronic business equipment and consumer electronics. The

Energy Star label identifies highly efficient products and designates both superior performance and energy savings.

"Through our partnership with VSECU, we are widening the net of services we can provide for our members," said Powell. "We want our Co-op members to think of WEC as more than an electric utility. Between the expertise and resources we can provide or that we can tap into, WEC can serve as a whole-house energy consultant, and we're encouraging our members to use us in this way."

With another winter looming, this is a good time for people to take steps toward reducing energy consumption and simultaneously improving the technology in their homes and offices.

"People often put off improvements

like these even when they know they would benefit from them," Powell said. "There's a certain inertia about undertaking these steps. But I would say to people that there's no time like the present. Not doing it now could mean spending more money later on."

The Energy Improvement Loan is extended at fixed rates through an unsecured note. Rates are determined by the

applicant's credit history. Use of the loan for products that meet efficiency standards can earn the borrower a rate of 1 percent below VSECU's standard loan rate.

For more information, call VSECU at 802-371-5162, or email the credit union at www.vsecu.com. You can also call Bill Powell at WEC (223-5245). Making the process more convenient is that you can apply for the loan online.

October is National Cooperative Month, and signals the approach of cold weather. There couldn't be a better time to take advantage of your co-op membership to reduce your electricity costs this winter.

For more information about the Energy Star program and label, see www.energystar.gov.

Uncertain About Your Bill? WEC Automated Service Provides Latest Details

Washington Electric Cooperative wants its members to know about an information service, available over the telephone, that they might not be aware of. By calling a new Co-op telephone number members can access an automated operator and get the latest information about their Washington Electric accounts.

Because the system is automated, the exchange of information is private.

For local calls to the East Montpelier area, where WEC's office is located, the new number is **223-4958**. The toll-free number for callers outside that area is **888-343-9402**.

The automated service is part of a package of system improvements that also enhance members' ability to report outages. Although members wishing to report outages should continue to use the numbers at the bottom of this page, calls are directed to the automated system when all staff answering the phones during an outage are busy.

For accessing account information, however, the new numbers are the ones to use, 24 hours a day.

"It comes in handy for people who, for any of a number of reasons, might be unsure how much they owe on their electric bills, or whether or not a payment actually reached us," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. "This is a convenient and cost-free way for them to find out."

After dialing the number, the caller is offered a small number of alternatives. For a billing inquiry, the caller is instructed to press 2. The recording then asks the caller to enter his or her account number using the telephone number pad (your account number can be found on your WEC bill stub), followed by the pound sign. The automated voice then reports the date of the last payment received and the current balance on the account.

"We put the system in around the end

of 2000, at the same time we were enhancing our telephone services for outage reporting," said Patt. "It hasn't really gotten a high volume of calls, partly because people don't know about it. And maybe it's a system that's only going to be used occasionally by our members."

"But having these updates available about your account can help clear up confusion and avoid problems later on. Our members are encouraged to use the system any time, night or day. We hope they will find it helpful."

Short Circuits

continued from page 1

and water utility, powered up the first commercial "green power" generating station in the Palmetto State in September. The utility uses methane gas

from waste to run generators at its 2.2-megawatt facility, which is located at a landfill. The power then enters the grid through Horry Electric Co-op lines. "We're doing something that will make a positive impact on our environment," said the executive vice president and CEO of the Conway, S.C., co-op.

The City Club of New York, the city's oldest civic organization, honored 1st Rochdale Co-op in August with its Environmental Business Award for offering green power

to its members. "We've built 1st Rochdale on the solid principle of efficiency in all manner of energy use," said the urban cooperative's chairman and CEO Allen Thurgood. First Rochdale's energy strategy includes sustainable and renewable resources, such as solar power systems and fuel cells. An energy cooperative, 1st Rochdale was founded by New York City's housing co-ops, which serve more than 500,000 households.