

Winter Storm Elliott Coverage

By the Co-op Currents Editorial Committee

On December 23, 2022, Winter Storm Elliott reached Vermont with extremely high winds coming from an unusual direction, and a thaw followed by a temperature plunge that created icy conditions so fast, state officials warned drivers to get to wherever they planned to spend the night by 3 p.m.

It was a historic storm for WEC, almost doubling the Co-op's record for broken poles caused by a single storm (40) and costing, at latest count, just under a million dollars. How much of that will be covered by FEMA funding is still to be determined.

Approximately half of WEC's members lost power; some for six days. In past storms, more members have lost power and for longer durations. However, this storm occurred during winter and the convergence of several major holidays, causing profound concern and inconvenience to members. Compounding this were communications issues caused by damage to WEC's system and overload at the Cooperative Response Center, the overflow call center used by electric co-ops around the country.

Back in 1997, during Game 5 of the NBA finals, Michael Jordan famously scored 38 points with a 103-degree fever to help the Chicago Bulls secure a win. We were reminded of this as WEC operations staff with Covid worked long hours in isolation to support their colleagues in the field. The general manager worked through a case of the flu.

Restoration crews worked 18-hour days for six days straight. Support staff put in similar time. This kind of legendary effort is something to appreciate, if not exactly something to celebrate. Work-life balance does not apply when it comes to getting every last member's power back on in the aftermath of a storm.

This issue of *Co-op Currents* presents a few different perspectives from WEC leadership and membership about the outage, restoration, and lessons for the future. 



John Lazenby

WEC's Donnie Singleton prepares to splice a cable, East Montpelier. On Dec. 29, 2022, John Lazenby captured photos of WEC's storm restoration work. Lazenby is a Montpelier-based photojournalist and Co-op member. More photos at lazenbyphoto.com/blog and @lazenbyphoto on Instagram, and on pages 5 and 7 of this issue.

ANNUAL MEETING DINNER RESERVATION WEC'S 84th Annual Meeting • Thursday, May 4, 2023

WEC's Operations Center at 230 Fassett Road, East Montpelier, VT

4:30 pm registration • 5 pm buffet opens

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Return this reservation form by April 21 to receive dinner at no charge. Dinner at no charge is by RESERVATION ONLY.

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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CVFiber breaks ground: Central Vermont Communications Union District launches construction of broadband fiber network. P. 8



David Young

18-hour shifts start and end in the dark. Lineworkers working on power restoration after Winter Storm Elliott gather for a meal at WEC's East Montpelier office.

President's and General Manager's Message

Why This Was WEC's Most Expensive Storm Ever, and What's Next

*40 broken poles, \$900,000+ in damages.
How WEC plans to respond to members' needs for the next one*

Storm recap

Steve: As a WEC member and Board member, I want to start by expressing my appreciation for the efforts of all WEC employees in restoring power during this outage. It was a record-breaking storm in many respects, and staff had to battle against some unprecedented situations: key personnel were ill, a crew member was injured on the job, our nationally-based call center we use to back up our communications was overwhelmed, to name a few. But our crew and support personnel worked until they got the job done. While I was out of power for nearly six days, I was certainly inconvenienced but not concerned. I knew that no matter what happens,

the power is going to come back on. From my experience in watching outage responses over the years I've served on the Board, I've seen that WEC crews and support staff at the office work hard and steadily to restore power in some trying situations with a professionalism we should all be proud of.

Louis: Some background: this was a big one. We had roughly half our membership out of power after the storm. It wasn't the largest number of members we've ever had out, but it was a large number. And, this was probably the most expensive storm in WEC's history. The count now is 40 broken poles, which is a record, and the most ever outside crews working on WEC's system. In all those ways it was

unusual.

I'm very grateful to the line crews and tree crews who came through to help us. We certainly would have had members out for longer than we did if not for those outside crews, some from Vermont utilities and some from out of state as well.

It was not the longest outage WEC has had by any means, but the timing was extraordinarily bad. It was cold, and many people had family visiting for the holidays. The timing was a challenge both for members out of power and also for WEC line crews and outside line crews who worked over the holidays.

As Steve mentioned, we had a couple things that further complicated our efforts. Three key WEC staffers came down with Covid. I'm grateful to them for continuing to work from home to assist with the outage, but that challenged our restoration efforts. In addition, we use a metering system that alerts us when members meters' are out, and it broke down in the East Montpelier substation during the storm. That meant that feeder lines from East Montpelier were giving us incomplete or no information about who was out. We had to do it all on paper, and we relied on members alerting us through the automated system and telephone calls.

Those were challenges on the operational side of things. On the communication side of things, the national CRC [Cooperative Response Center] call center we use serves a lot of cooperative utilities, and a lot of those utilities around the country sustained damage from the storm and had members calling in. Those systems were strained as well.

Even late last week, crews were still finding trees on the line. There's still work to be done related to the outage. We're working on getting the total cost estimates and figuring out what the FEMA resolution will be. It looks quite likely it will be a FEMA-eligible event for at least one or two of our counties; the final determination on that hasn't been made yet. Our current estimate is that we spent roughly \$900,000 on restoration. When you bring crews in from outside, it speeds up your restoration effort, and it also costs money.

We can certainly provide estimates of restoration. The questions are, how accurate are those estimates, and what are those providers of estimates not doing instead?

— Louis Porter

Considerations for the future

Louis: We haven't done our internal reviews yet. But I will say: there are, in my mind, two things that WEC does that I think bear consideration and review.

One is: unlike GMP [Green Mountain Power], we don't stage crews,

meaning hire outside crews ahead of time, because it's very expensive to do that. We don't bring in contract crews to wait and be prepared to work on our system because they have to be paid for that waiting time. In the past we have chosen to not incur that expense because there's the possibility the storm won't be as severe, or as severe in our territory. This may change, but it may remain my recommendation to not do that in the future. Instead, we should reach out and secure help as soon as we know the extent of the damage, as we did during the Christmas storm.

But several members called me to point out that their GMP neighbors were restored far more rapidly than WEC, and that's a fair criticism. The expense to stage crews would be considerable, and in cases when storms don't materialize as we fear they might, we'd be paying crews to not ultimately have a lot of work to do.

The other decision we're reevaluating is: typically, WEC doesn't provide restoration estimates to particular areas or members. We don't do that in case the outage is more complicated or difficult to fix than we thought and the estimate turns out to be bad. That's a rational position, but we may need to change it in the future. People expect to have more immediate information than our current approach takes into account. We'll need to reevaluate whether we offer restoration estimates in the future, with caveats that they're not always accurate.

Steve: The issue of getting storm crews in ahead of time is a gamble. As it turned out, WEC did not have the need for much outside help in the storm a few days before Winter Storm Elliott. It would have had to use its members' money to hire crews to stand by until the detailed consequences of the new storm became known. So it comes

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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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, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero, at 224-2322, or visit wec.coop/board.

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Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: *Co-op Currents*.



down to a judgment of how and when to proactively spend WEC members' money in the face of uncertainty of how destructive an outage will turn out to be.

Another issue is communicating with our members during the storm and during the recovery. We've already mentioned that in this storm, key personnel who would normally be passing info from the field to the office and vice versa were jammed, and several other communication systems we typically rely on were stressed. We will review our methods for outage communications nonetheless. In doing so, we need to be careful not to raise expectations that can't readily be met, as Louis said. We can establish reasonable priorities on the useful and essential information that can be delivered with sufficient speed and accuracy, and try to match what we think members would probably like to

know with what we have the capability of accurately providing while our staff is managing a restoration effort. This recent experience has given us targets for how to improve in specific ways.

Louis: We can certainly provide estimates of restoration. The questions are, how accurate are those estimates, and what are those providers of estimates not doing instead? We had two dispatchers working the entire storm, and one was working from home with Covid. That's two dispatchers, working 18 hour shifts for six days supporting the 70 or more people in the field. If those folks stop doing that to provide updates, restoration may be slower as a result. That's a consideration.

For me, what warrants the conversation inside WEC is: do those estimates provide more harm or good? For someone running low on fuel for their generator, who's making an assessment about the resources they have and what action to take, does an estimate that is almost certain to be inaccurate help or harm them? I think we may need to offer restoration estimates, but combined with education around why and when they might be inaccurate, so people can take that into account as well.



Members can expect that WEC will take reasonable practical measures to ensure reliability and speedy restoration while not resulting in unreasonable rate increases. What I expect members to do is to be prepared for the possibility of power outages that can last a significant length of time.

— Louis Porter

Steve: That sounds like an issue of scale. In this last storm, staff and outside crews were just swamped. Everyone was working flat out and there was little guarantee that estimates could be given that would stand up.

Louis: I've talked to a lot of members during the outage and restoration and since then. When you really boil it down to what they want, they want to know when their power's going back on. I think we ought to endeavor to do that and we will. Vermont Electric Co-op and GMP both do that, so it is possible.

Steve: Sure. I think it's something we could target in the future. When new tech makes it more feasible, we can do a better job. There are already efforts underway at WEC to streamline the flow of information through the office and crews for outage management. This is also a path to improve communi-

cations through electronic means.

Louis: It's not just communication among people, but among substations. This year, with the aid of VELCO [Vermont Electric Power Company, the state's utility-owned transmission service], we'll complete the process of having fiber to all of our substations, which will greatly improve our ability to see remotely what's going on at our substations, and bring far more robust internet coverage to WEC's office and warehouse. WEC is moving away from paper and toward electronic work. As Steve says, it'll help with outages as well as our day-to-day operations.

All those things are important. We need to work on and improve all of them. And all that said, the level of service people count on are different in rural areas than in dense urban areas. Public safety, road service, telecommunications, and utilities, including electrical service: these are different in places with widely spread out populations. That will remain true. And it's more expensive, at least in the case of electrical service, a service that needs to be physically connected between wires and poles that are vulnerable.

Steve: As we often say, we have only nine customers per mile of line to pay for upkeep of the infrastructure. When you look at WEC's service area, it's almost all rural. We serve very few village areas or towns. Our lines go cross country. Many are inaccessible by road.

We can be a challenging area to serve sometimes even on a sunny, clear day. After this winter storm, with multiple added challenges, I am proud of everybody on WEC staff who pulled together and did what they could when the chips were down.

Louis: I am too. And I want to give special thanks to several former WEC employees who came back to help us out. At a time when we had a lot of outside crews, the greatest need was for people who knew our system. They helped outside crews know where to go and navigate our system. Without their help, we might have had crews unable to work all the time or as efficiently as they did.

Reasonable expectations, paradoxical trends

Louis: There are two opposite and related trends happening. While no particular storm or particular weather event can be laid at the feet of climate change, trends can be, and what we see of the trend is: more damage from storms, more severe storms happening periodically in Vermont and in our territory, warmer weather resulting in more moisture and ice forming, ground thaws resulting in more trees likely to fall over, higher winds causing more trees to come down. We saw trees that stood for 100 or more years of storms fall due to the direction and severity of the wind.

Keeping the power on will be more difficult as we face impacts from more severe storms. At the same time, we are, for all good reasons, encouraging beneficial electrification, and encouraging more people to move to our rural territory. That leads to increased expectations for reliability, and decreased willingness to deal with outages. Totally legitimate. But weather trends are making it more difficult to maintain reliability at the same time that expectations for reliability are growing.

Steve: If indeed the environment of Vermont is gradually but steadily shifting, then our ecosystem will have to adapt to the new climate. As Louis says, our forests here aren't ideally suited to the weather changes they're seeing. I assume well in the future there'll be a different mix of trees here. In the meantime, it's tougher for them.



You can invest a lot of resources to reduce risk, but this is a cooperative, and it is our members' resources we're investing. So, we need to be careful about what WEC can reasonably do and what members can do for themselves.

— Stephen Knowlton

Louis: Members can expect that WEC will take reasonable practical measures to ensure reliability and speedy restoration while not resulting in unreasonable rate increases. That's what members should expect from us. What I expect members to do is to be prepared for the possibility of power outages that can last a significant length of time.

Living here, we all need to be prepared for that. Even with all the investment and hard work and goodwill in the world, rural parts of Vermont, served by any of the utilities, have the possibility of days-long outages, and people who live in those rural areas need to be prepared for that possibility.

That means different things to different people

depending on what your circumstances are. That means medical necessities, water, food. It means a generator if you absolutely can't go a certain amount of time without electrical service, and having friends and neighbors who are willing to help you out and make sure you have what you need — as many did during this storm. But the fact is, no matter what WEC or VEC or GMP do, rural parts of the state are going to have outages that last more than a day or two in some cases.

Steve: Louis has it right. There are lessons in this for all of us. Knowing the storm was coming, I should have tested my generator before the outage when we learned that the gas line between the gas tank and carburetor was blocked by crud, and had to do repairs after the power was out. Preparation is the key.

You can invest a lot of resources to reduce risk, but this is a cooperative, and it is our members' resources we're investing. So, we need to be careful about what WEC can reasonably do and what members can do for themselves.

Louis: The last thing I want to share is my very sincere and deep appreciation for our members. We had many instances of members calling us to offer assistance and providing assistance to their neighbors. We had many supportive messages of thanks from members in person and through various social communications of all kinds. At least half a dozen people brought in food for our crews. And those who were very upset about the length of the outage, with good reason, were also understanding of what WEC is and the challenges and difficulties of providing electrical service in this territory. Living here most of my life I

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Winter Storm Elliott: How Does It Compare to Previous Storms?

By Barry Bernstein

Winter Storm Elliott, or the Christmas 2022 storm, will prove to be the most expensive storm in WEC’s history, but not the longest one in terms of days out. It was part of a storm front that put 200 million Americans on a winter alert: that’s two thirds of the US population. It was preceded by a heavy wet snow storm the weekend before, which weakened tree roots, making them more susceptible to coming down during Winter Storm Elliott’s high winds. There were only three days between when WEC crews finished restoring power from the earlier storm and the weeks spent restoring power after Winter Storm Elliott.

At this point, the price tag for the cost of this storm is nearly a million dollars. It set a WEC record for the number of broken poles at 40, far higher than the previous record of 23 broken poles. The high winds, ranging 50-85 miles per hour, took service out for 75,000 homes and businesses across the state. WEC had 5,300 member households out at one time, some out for up to six days. WEC sustained over 12,000 member hours out between the two consecutive storms.

I was curious how this storm, compounding the heavy wet snow outages the week before, compares with previous storms, so I looked back a dozen years.

Year	Event	Statewide Outages	WEC Outages	Incidents	Broken Poles	Cost	Outage Days
2022	Winter Storm Elliott: high winds following mid-December storm	75,000	5,300	257	40	\$900,000	6 days
2019	Halloween storm: high winds and rain	100,000	5,865	131	23	\$456,000	5 days
2017	October 30 storm: 1.4 million out in Northeast. High winds and rain	70,000	7,930		19	\$482,000	8 days
2014	Winter Storm Damon: 29,886 meters out due to recurring outages. Deep, heavy snow with freeze	250,000	5,940			\$641,000	4-10 days

A few notes:

- WEC has the most rural, hilly, wooded territory in the state. Close to 1,000 miles of our 1,350 miles of distribution line are located off the road – about the same number of miles as the distance between Montpelier and Chicago.
- During some storms, WEC can not start restoration work until Green Mountain Power fixes outages on their transmission lines. Those lines feed power to WEC’s eight substations and one metering point and our crews need that information to know where our outages are.
- “High winds” generally means winds above 40 miles per hour. Winds as high as 50-80 miles per hour do the most damage.
- The scope of the storm impact, both nationally and locally, strained the response capability of Cooperative Response Center, the national call

- center used by WEC and other public power electric utilities, and damaged WEC’s meter reading system.
- If the whole state, region, or northeast is affected by a storm, WEC can not receive mutual aid support from other electric utilities until those other utilities repair their own systems.
- Living in rural areas, versus urban or suburban areas, has benefits – but during weather events, the reality is, it has its challenges too.

There were other major outage events in these years caused by storms and transmission and generation failures. The years between 2010 and 2013 also saw some historic storm damage:

- WEC saw five major storms during wet and stormy 2013. Three storms each caused thousands of outages. During June 2013, WEC’s phone

system was damaged when it was hit by lightning.

- On July 4, 2012, storm remnants of Hurricane Sandy caused more than 300 trees to fall on WEC lines.
- On August 28, 2011, Tropical Storm Irene was the most damaging weather event in modern Vermont history.
- Earlier in 2011, on May 26 and 27, severe flooding caused not only outages but damaged WEC’s main office in East Montpelier, requiring staff to move into trailers while the office was completely rebuilt.
- On July 10, 2010, a microburst in Brookfield completely wiped out a mile of line, causing outages for four to five days.

Barry Bernstein served on WEC’s Board from 1998-2022, and was Board President for many of those years. He lives in Calais.



David Young

During the storm’s week-long restoration effort, WEC crews met in the warehouse early every morning to go over the day’s plan.

An Appreciation to WEC Lineworkers

By Don Douglas

We experienced the first widespread outage on Friday, December 16, 2022 with most everyone back on by Saturday, December 17. The next storm wasn’t so easy. It started in the early morning hours on Friday, Dec. 23. That’s when Board President Steve Knowlton lost power, along with many members in East Montpelier.

Despite all the things that went wrong during the six days of restoration, watching employees work together to get the power restored always makes me proud of WEC. My first storm was more than 20 years ago. The line crew back then was mostly 40- to 55-year-old men. Today, the WEC line crew is considerably younger, with men in their 20s and 30s. I saw them return for a meal, and while they looked very tired, I could see that their spirits were high. They all missed celebrating the holiday with their families, and along with borrowed line workers from other utilities and the tree trimming crews, power was restored as quickly and safely as possible. The employees inside the office also missed family celebrations, and also worked long hours into the night to answer phones, dispatch crews, and prepare meals for the restoration crews.

There will be another storm some day. I hope it doesn’t happen during a holiday. But whenever it does happen, we know that we can count on our employees to rise to the challenge and get the job done. Thank you!! Thank you!!

Don Douglas is WEC’s Board Treasurer.





Left: VTrans worker stopped by a downed tree on Route 12 just north of the Wrightsville Reservoir boat launch.

Below: Crew from Vance Line Construction of West Danville with a new pole ready to go up to replace a broken one off Cummings Road, East Montpelier.

Lower left: Crew from Littleton, MA, Electric Light Department working just off Cummings Road, East Montpelier.



John Lazenby

John Lazenby

John Lazenby

Letter to WEC Members from GM Louis Porter

Dear Fellow Members of Washington Electric Cooperative,

I want to thank you for your patience during the recent outage, for caring for your neighbors, and for the encouragement and kindness you showed WEC staff.

WEC has recovered from experiencing one of its most destructive storms in recent history. At the start of our restoration efforts, 5,700 members were without power – in the midst of winter and during the Christmas holiday. While there have been major storms that left more WEC members without power, we can not remember one that cost more money (just under \$1 million at current estimates) or that resulted in more broken poles (40).

Our lineworkers did extraordinary work, over many days of 18 hour shifts, to restore power to members. They were helped by many crews from other utilities, for which we are grateful.

WEC confronted a number of unprecedented issues in this storm. Several employees instrumental to overseeing the storm response were down with Covid, and several lineworkers experienced injury and accident in the course of service. (All have fully recovered and are in good health.) The national call center that helps us manage our members' phone calls and our outage messaging became overwhelmed due to the storm's national impact. Partly because of this, our regular communication updates to our members suffered as the lines were getting restored.

By the end of Thursday, just shy of a week after the storm, all members had their power restored. Clean up and post-storm repairs continue. We will be working through the impacts to WEC finances and supply inventory for even longer.

The challenges thrust on us by this storm gave us plenty to learn from and improve on before the next storms, which we know will come. I am proud of the dedication of all WEC employees and those helping us, and appreciative of the sensibleness and generosity of most WEC members, who prepared for the storm and persevered through it while helping others.

Thank you again,

Louis Porter, General Manager, Washington Electric Co-op

This letter was originally sent to members in a January 12, 2023 email along with links to media coverage of WEC's response to Winter Storm Elliott. It has been edited to reflect updated information. Subscribe to digital news and updates from WEC on wec.coop under Co-op News.

Honoring The Employees of Washington Electric Cooperative for exemplary service to our members

As member-customers of the cooperative, the Board of Directors of Washington Electric Cooperative is grateful for the competent services provided by all employees of the cooperative throughout the year to provide WEC's members with reliable electric power.

During this recent Christmas week outage, you were called upon to engage in a major struggle. WEC faced an exceptional situation in recovering from widespread and unusually destructive outages throughout its service territory. WEC employees admirably met these challenges despite setbacks from injuries and illnesses and loss of essential resources at times. Many sacrificed time with their own families over the holidays.

The Board of Directors sincerely commends the steadfastness and professionalism of the field crews, dispatchers, support staff, and management who toiled for many long days to bring this difficult recovery to a successful conclusion. It is a mark of the quality of an organization how well it performs its mission when the chips are down, and WEC's employees have again proven your competence and commitment to the members you serve. All members of the Board recognize this superlative effort in the face of hardship, and wholeheartedly express their gratitude to you.

Susan Alexander
Betsy Allen
Donald Douglas
Steven Farnham
Roger Fox

Jean Hamilton
Stephen Knowlton
Richard Rubin
Mary Just Skinner



Three Incumbents Run for Re-election to Board of Directors

Every year, WEC's membership elects three fellow members to serve on the Co-op's nine-seat Board of Directors. The members who serve in these critical roles oversee management and staff and make policy and leadership decisions for the member-owned electric utility. Three incumbent Directors are running for re-election in 2023: Don Douglas of Orange, Treasurer; Jean Hamilton of Plainfield; and Mary Just Skinner of Middlesex, Secretary. Candidates may continue to enter the race until the March 5 final deadline.

In this issue of *Co-op Currents*, all known candidates introduce themselves to members. In the following Annual Meeting-themed issue, candidates may expand on their introductory statement in answers to policy questions.

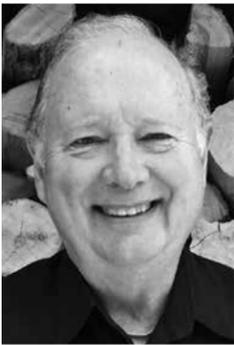
Don Douglas

I live in East Orange at 21 Douglas Road. I have lived here since 1980. I have been a Co-op member since 1978. I retired a

few years ago after working for the Postal Service as a rural letter carrier for 37 years. I delivered mail in parts of Topsham, Corinth, Orange, Washington, Newbury, and Bradford. I can be reached at home at 439-5364 or by email at dondougl@ gmail.com. I am always happy to talk about WEC and energy issues in general.

I was recently appointed the Vermont representative to the national board of the NRECA [National Rural Electric Cooperative Association] which represents more than 900 electric cooperatives in 48 states. It is an honor to represent Vermont on the national level and it's quite an education hearing about the issues and solutions from all across the country. I have served on the WEC board since 1999 and have served as Board Treasurer since 2000.

I have been involved in co-ops nearly my entire life. My hometown in East Tennessee was served by the TVA and got its electricity from hydroelectric, coal, wind, nuclear and solar. In college I joined and helped start food co-ops and even a garbage co-op that was making compost in Austin, Texas. Here in Vermont we started the Sugar Maple Cooperative Nursery School in 1984. Co-ops exist to serve a need. More than 50% of the United States did not have electricity before the creation of the REA in 1937. WEC serves the most rural, the most difficult terrain in Vermont because there is less money to be made serving us. Despite the challenges of weather and geography, WEC supplies reliable renewable energy to our more than 11,000 members.



Jean Hamilton

I have been a WEC member from Plainfield since 2014 and a member of the WEC Board since 2017. Members are welcome to contact me by phone 802-777-6546 or by email jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com.

Since moving to Vermont in 2000, I have worked in sustainable agriculture and the local food system. My career in farming and food systems has helped me hone the skills and perspectives that I bring to the WEC Board. Food and energy are similar in that they are essential resources with large environmental impacts moving through highly complex market systems. I am a nuanced and strategic thinker and am committed to designing community solutions that prioritize healthy communities. Within the energy sector, my vision is 100% aligned with WEC's values: Provide energy from clean reliable sources, help members meet their energy needs as efficiently as possible, operate safely and reliably, and cultivate community in all that we do.

I am running for the Board because I love this organization, I love this community, and I want to use my skills to make it easier for you to affordably and renewably meet your energy needs. Climate and market instability is pushing and pulling our Cooperative in different conflicting directions. Now is time for all of us members to lean in, engage in honest dialogue, and courageously imagine the energy future we want to build together.

I hope I have a chance to keep working with the Board, staff, and member-owners to advance weatherization initiatives, innovative distributed energy programs, and a community culture of care.

Go WEC!



How to vote

In 2023, voting will take place by mail and in person. In April, members will receive a packet containing your ballot for the Board of Directors election and the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents*. Check the deadline to post your votes by mail. WEC members may write in names of unofficial candidates. All candidates run at-large.

WEC will hold its Annual Meeting on Thursday, May 4, and members will be able to submit their ballots in person.

Mary Just Skinner

I have lived in Middlesex since 1977. I have been a WEC member for 46

years, and before then I was a Vermont Electric Co-op member for 7 years. I was married for 49 years when my husband Scott passed away in 2018. We have two sons and daughters-in-law with three grandchildren. I can be reached at 223-7123, 636-7592 (cell), and by email at maryjust-skinner@gmail.com.

I graduated from Barnard College and earned my law degree at Columbia University. I was a practicing attorney in Montpelier from 1972 until recently. I worked for Vermont Legal Aid for four years and then opened my own law practice in 1978. My practice primarily involved family law, real estate, and probate, but earlier I was involved in a number of utility cases. I represented a group of low-income Vermonters in

what was known as the "purchased power" case in 1974 which went to the Vermont Supreme Court. We won. That meant utilities could not automatically increase rates without the then-Public Service Board's approval.

I have been a member of the WEC Board for 11 years. I'm a WEC officer, Secretary. I serve on three committees: Chair of Power and Operations, Finance, and Policy. I served on the Community Fund committee until recently. I was a member of the Middlesex Select Board for 24 years until March 2022, the last thirteen as Vice Chair. I also served seven terms in the Vermont State Senate, including a period as Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, which handles utility legislation. I am a member of the Vermont Human Services Board, having been appointed by two governors. The Board hears appeals from Agency of Human Services decisions.

I've enjoyed serving on the WEC board. I would be honored to serve another term. If re-elected, I will bring the expertise I have acquired to the important decisions WEC faces in this rapidly changing world. 



Barry Bernstein honored by Vermont Legislature for WEC leadership

On January 27, 2023, Vermont's legislature adopted a resolution honoring former WEC President Barry Bernstein of Calais for his innovative leadership as president of the Washington Electric Cooperative Inc.

S.C.R.4's lead sponsor was Sen. Andrew Perchlik with additional sponsors Sen. Ann Cummings and Sen. Anne Watson.

Bernstein stepped down from WEC's Board in 2022 after decades of leadership with the Co-op.

Pres. and GM's Msg

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already had a deep appreciation for the people who make up the towns of WEC territory, but it was heightened and deepened by what I saw in people caring for our crews.

Steve: As Louis says, WEC members were pretty understanding. For the most part they know what they're facing in large storms, and they

know the lights will be coming back on. It's not a question of if; it's a question of when. I appreciate our members' fortitude, their grace, and their patience in the face of difficulties. 





Left: Crew from Vance Line Construction of West Danville puts up a new pole off Cummings Road, East Montpelier.

Right: WEC's Donnie Singleton walks amid downed trees off Cummings Road, East Montpelier.



John Lazenby

John Lazenby

ASK THE ENERGY COACH

Ask the Energy Coach: Why does my bill show power use during an outage?

Q: My power was out for five days. Why does my SmartHub bill show I was using power on those days?

A: WEC's Member Services Representatives report that after storm restoration, members' most-asked question is how SmartHub displays kilowatt hour use data. As we all know: when the electricity is out, you're not consuming kilowatt hours.

For most members, WEC's system reads your meter daily. During a widespread outage, we suspend daily readings. After restoration is complete, the meter advances until the next good reading: typically within 24 to 72 hours. SmartHub takes that reading and averages it out over the outage period – it needs to fill in the blanks, essentially. It's concerning to see a bar chart showing the same daily use for five days when you know you weren't using power. But what you're seeing is an average. Don't worry: you're not getting charged for power you didn't use.

A side note: As tech improves, WEC's system is able to read meters more frequently. Better data leads to better reporting, and that is our goal.

Have an energy question? Ask the Energy Coach: energycoach@wec.coop



Efficiency Vermont

Energy savings can start with small changes

This year, make a commitment to reduce your carbon footprint at home. Start with a free energy savings kit full of efficient lighting and water-saving devices:

- 10 LED bulbs
- 1 low-flow showerhead
- 2 faucet aerators
- plus a bonus smart bulb while supplies last!

Visit efficiencyvermont.com/kits to sign up for your free energy savings kit while supplies last! Some restrictions apply.



Members Write

To *Co-op Currents*:

As a 30 year industrial and commercial IBEW journeyman electrician, I recently became aware of a dangerous situation with trees that had fallen and brought powerlines into the street. Trees had been coming down in this specific spot on a semi regular basis, nearly hitting a moving vehicle and regularly bringing down powerlines into the street.

When my neighbors began climbing over the 70 foot tree wrapped with powerlines in the dark rain to get to their end of the cul de sac, I became concerned for everyone's safety. A down power line can never be trusted to be safe.

When I called WEC, Larry [Gilbert, Right-of-way Manager] quickly came out to assess the situation. He is a respectful, kind, and intelligent man who not only took my concerns seriously, but he pointed out some other trees that were dangerous. He sent out a professional, respectful, safety-conscious, and hard-working crew in the icy snow at dawn, and they

removed the dangerous trees quite impressively. They far exceeded my expectations.

Working around electrical lines 24/7 in all weather conditions is hard enough, but add cutting down precarious huge trees to that equation, and you all have my undying respect.

I know that your jobs are physically demanding, keeping us warm, safe and comfortable with our electrical conveniences through all types of weather, and often in the dark rain while the rest of us are sleeping soundly. I want you to know that you are truly appreciated.

— Janet Sing, Plainfield

Dear Men and Women of Washington Electric Cooperative who go out in all weathers to repair our power lines:

I want to tell you how much I admire you personally and feel indebted to you for restoring our service twice already this month, in the foulest and most hurtful weather. And for our sake turning your backs on your own Christmases at

home, when it came to that.

My wife and I live on Hollister Hill Road in Marshfield, and have, exceptionally, already twice this month, and in the foulest weather, experienced total power outages lasting for days, that you duly repaired.

We're old people, my wife and I; she 82 and lame, and me 98. We're able people and manage very well in normal circumstances, but we were hard pressed by those two awful, extended outages, and the extreme weather that landed them on us.

I grumbled to my wife about how long it was taking for our power to be restored and made one scene on the telephone — to an answering service hired by our power company that was located, bewilderingly, in Tennessee, I think. A second time, my wife's turn, it was Texas who took our call.

But through it all I was aware of a body of men and, I think, some women, struggling in the woods that predominate around here, and exposed to the freak gale winds of the first outage, and the bitter cold of the second one, and the cold and

dark ... stuck to their jobs ... which was to return light and heat and water circulation to all the households who get your services.

We shivered at home, my wife and I, and felt miserable as our little circle of civilization crumbled away. But that was in the security of four known walls, and without fear of electrocution from dangling wires out in the field, or being knocked hard by a falling tree limb.

I don't know any of your faces, but I feel brightened by the knowledge that we share a common humanity that sometimes entails painful service (yours) to a total stranger (me).

That was me, twice, for extended days just this month.

I thank you very much now, from the comfort and security of my restored home.

— Jules Rabin, Marshfield

Jules Rabin's Members Write was first published as a commentary in VT Digger.org on Dec. 28, 2022.



High Speed Internet Reaches Central Vermont

CVFiber groundbreaking echoes rural electrification efforts of 1930s and 1940s

On December 21, 2022 – the peak of holiday season, between two winter storms – several dozen central Vermonters and state officials arrived at the Calais Town Hall to mark the groundbreaking of the communications union district (CUD) CVFiber's network construction. Whether or not the timing was auspicious depends on your perspective: even though attendees discussed preparations for the holiday storm then still in the forecast, the power was on. As Jennille Smith, executive director of CVFiber welcomed attendees, she said knowingly, "Here it is, snowy and December in Vermont. What better time to start?" The conveners were already well aware it takes grit, faith, and a lot of neighbors to launch a major collective infrastructure project – the timing, in some ways, was a metaphor.

The other factor well known to the central Vermonters within CVFiber's service area is that, historically, this is how a lot of essential infrastructure has reached their region. Time and again, organizers reflected on the similarity between the work to bring high-speed, not-for-profit broadband to their communities and the work more than 80 years earlier to bring electricity. In his comments, Jerry Diamantides,

What we're doing will be transformational the same way rural electrification was transformational to central Vermont.

— Jerry Diamantides

governing board chair of CVFiber, said, "What we're doing will be transformational the same way rural electrification was transformational to central Vermont." The long-term importance of reliable high-speed internet can't even be envisioned yet, but "the near-term future internet will be all about erasing geographic distances," he said. "We are closing the rural digital divide today."

Diamantides singled out Barry Bernstein, former WEC Board President, "for having the vision years ago for collaboration between WEC and however broadband was going to get to central Vermont." Bernstein, a longtime resident of Calais, was instrumental in designing an original agreement that would leverage WEC's access to low-interest federal loans to improve its infrastructure, which would have included hanging fiber to lease back to CVFiber. When federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were released with grants specific to rural broadband rollout, it no longer made financial sense for the membership to take out those low-interest loans. The two partner organizations were able to essentially reverse their roles: CVFiber is using federal grants to hang fiber on WEC's poles, and WEC will lease the fiber to improve grid communications.

Rep. Avram Patt (Lamoille-Washington) was WEC's general manager for many years, and is now serving his third term on the

House Committee on Environment and Energy. To illustrate the desperate need for high-speed internet, he described one of many stories he heard from constituents during the pandemic: a family of four with two working parents and two school-children, who had to sit in their car accessing an internet hot spot outside the Worcester Town Hall for hours each day in order to work and attend school, because their home internet was inadequate.

To show how broadband rollout now mirrors rural electrification, Rep. Patt displayed a map of WEC's service area. Two narrow vertical strips cutting through WEC territory represent areas flanking Routes 12 and 14 that are served by Green Mountain Power. Internet followed cable, which followed electricity along the major roads, he explained; for the rest of the population of Central Vermont, the map represents a nearly complete overlap, he said, of WEC membership and people with no or inadequate internet. In other words, in order for rural central Vermont to get electricity and high-speed internet, it takes a cooperative effort, because there is little business proposition for providing service outside the denser



Jennille Smith, executive director of the Communications Union District CVFiber, beams at the construction groundbreaking on December 21, 2022.

travel corridors. Because "no company whose purpose is to make a profit would, in their right mind, serve these areas," he declared, to laughter.

Other comments came from Christine Hallquist, executive director of the Vermont Community Broadband Board (which is chaired by another former WEC GM, Patty Richards). Hallquist, who previously served as Vermont Electric Co-op's general manager, celebrated the mutual support

among CUDs and the social benefits internet access promises rural Vermont.

As construction progresses, fiber will be strung on utility poles, most of which belong to WEC. The purpose is to offer universal broadband access to all within CVFiber's member communities. Individual households will choose whether to join the CUD as members, Diamantides and David Healy, Calais representative to CVFiber, described. Internet speeds will be 100 Mbps (megabits per second) both upload and download, at a cost projected at \$79 per month. The cost of connecting a household to the network is determined by income, with CVFiber paying the cost to connect income-eligible households. More information is available at cvfiber.net. 



Rep. Avram Patt, former WEC general manager, holds a map of WEC's service area to show that the central Vermont region lacking access to high-speed internet is the same region that once lacked access to electricity. In both cases, community members organized to bring the essential service to their neighbors.



Jerry Diamantides, governing board chair, and Jennille Smith, executive director of CVFiber, speak at the groundbreaking ceremony on December 21, 2022.

